Principal evaluation: a qualitative study of public school superintendents' perceptions

Author: Jacob A. Conca

Persistent link: http://hdl.handle.net/2345/969

This work is posted on eScholarship@BC, Boston College University Libraries.

Boston College Electronic Thesis or Dissertation, 2009

Copyright is held by the author, with all rights reserved, unless otherwise noted.
Boston College

Lynch School of Education

Department of
Educational Administration and Higher Education
Educational Administration Program

PRINCIPAL EVALUATION: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF PUBLIC SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS’ PERCEPTIONS

Dissertation
by
Jacob A. Conca

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

May 2009
ABSTRACT

PRINCIPAL EVALUATION: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF PUBLIC SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS’ PERCEPTIONS

Dissertation by Jacob A. Conca

Chair: Dr. Diana Pullin

Within the education field evaluation exists on many levels. In a school district it is routine to find superintendents evaluating principals, principals evaluating teachers, teachers evaluating student work and parents evaluating all aspects of the school community. The purpose of this study was to investigate the manner in which public school superintendents perceived that they evaluated principal performance.

The eight participants in the study were Massachusetts public school superintendents. The superintendents originated from districts located in eastern Massachusetts. Participants were interviewed about their principal evaluation activities and asked to provide documents relevant to the ways in which they evaluated principals.

This study was specifically focused on three research questions. The first question dealt with the types of criteria and evidence a superintendent considered when evaluating a principal. The second question dealt with the processes and practices a superintendent employed to determine the degree to which a principal met the aforementioned criteria. The final question dealt with the level of consistency between principal evaluation practices advocated in the literature and the actual practice of evaluating principals as conducted by this study’s participants.
The findings of this study indicated that principal evaluation is an incredibly complex endeavor. The study also identified several areas in which the principal evaluation can be strengthened in order to enhance principal leadership. The identified areas included the articulation of principal evaluation activities that are more cognizant of the local school environment, the need to better assist beginner superintendents as they evaluate principals and the need to provide superintendents with more time to thoroughly evaluate principal performance.
Acknowledgements

It is important to note that many people lent their support and guidance to me as I set out to complete this dissertation. Without the support of these people it is doubtful I would be at this point and therefore it is imperative that I acknowledge their efforts.

First I wish to acknowledge my dissertation team at Boston College. The team was chaired by Dr. Diana Pullin. I am grateful for Dr. Pullin’s guidance and support throughout the entire dissertation process as her suggestions and intellectual viewpoints contributed greatly to this dissertation. I thank her for her patience and editorial expertise as it has certainly made for a more refined and focused study.

Dissertation readers Dr. Blumer and Dr. Patel-Stevens also provided the insights and intellectual guidance that helped ensure this study was successful and applicable to those in the field. I am grateful for their efforts.

It is also important that I acknowledge my cohort from Boston College. Allan Cameron, Lisa Chen, Paul Chung, Kristen Kew, Cort Mathers and Ann Wilson offered tremendous support as I worked through this project. Their support and encouragement was fantastic and I am grateful for their efforts. I could not have asked for a more helpful group of colleagues. Thank you.

I would also like to thank those who agreed to participate in this study. Without the willingness of this group, this study would have gone no where. I am grateful to all the participants for opening their doors and allowing me to view their principal
evaluation practice up close. I have gained nine new friends as a result of this study and I am grateful for your willingness to be apart of my work.

It is also important that I thank and acknowledge the support of the Xaverian Brothers Sponsored Schools network in general, and those at Xaverian Brother’s High School in Westwood, Massachusetts and St. John’s High School in Shrewsbury, Massachusetts in particular. Br. Dan Skala, Mr. Domenic Lalli, Mr. Michael Welch, Br. Raymond Hoyt, Br. Paul Murray and Dr. Keith Crowley were extremely supportive of my work and I am forever indebted to them. This group of fine administrators supported my work in ways too numerous to mention and I offer sincere thanks to all of them for their efforts.

I also wish to thank my parents Anthony and Claudia Conca. Throughout my entire life they, along with my sister Sarah, have been my biggest cheerleaders. At every step of they way their love and support has been palpable and I am truly blessed to have them so close to me. Their constant encouragement, love and support is truly unconditional and I am forever grateful for their efforts. I am a better person because they are in my life.

Lastly, the saying goes that behind every strong man there is an even stronger woman. In my world, that saying is a colossal understatement. My wife Elizabeth and I have been together since our final days of undergraduate study. To put Elizabeth’s support into words would not do justice to the love, support, encouragement, guidance and raw help she has consistently provided. It is safe to say that I would not be at this point in my life were it not for Elizabeth.
Moreover, Elizabeth has continually encouraged me to strive for the very best and has championed the importance of perseverance, determination, dedication and teamwork. I am honored to be her husband. Our daughters, Emma, Chloe and soon to be “baby three” are forever blessed that Elizabeth is their mom. And I am forever blessed that Elizabeth is my wife. Thank you for all you do, I could not have done it without you.

Jacob A. Conca

October, 2008
# Table of Contents

Chapter 1 - Overview of the Study ........................................p. 1

Chapter 2 – Literature Review ........................................p. 28

Chapter 3 – Design of the Study ........................................p. 119

Chapter 4 – Analysis of Data and Findings ...............................p. 133

Chapter 5 – Summary, Discussion and Findings .........................p. 187

Appendix A – Superintendent Interview Questions ..................p. 239

Appendix B – Consent Letter .............................................p. 240

References ........................................................................p. 244
Chapter One: Overview of the Study

Introduction

The concept of evaluation permeates our everyday culture and community. In all aspects of society people are continually evaluated and judged as to the worth of their contributions.

Evaluation of an individual or group is completed to ensure that those being evaluated are accountable to established standards detailing what the individual ought to be doing (Brown & Irby, 1998; MacPhail-Wilcox & Forbes, 1990; John Murphy & Pimental, 1996; Thomas, Holdaway, & Ward, 2000). In this context, corporate boards continually evaluate CEO’s, police officers and courts evaluate the behavior of the citizenry, teachers evaluate the work of students and parents evaluate the behavior of their children. The primary goal behind all of these evaluations is to ensure that individuals are behaving appropriately as determined by existing corporate, public, school, home and/or cultural expectations (Green, 2004a; MacPhail-Wilcox & Forbes, 1990).

In other cases, evaluation may also intend to urge those being evaluated to refine and enhance their performance in order to better meet established goals and expectations. In this type of evaluation the focus is on helping and supporting the individual to improve his/her practice (Gil, 2001; Green, 2004b; Harrison & Peterson, 1988; Lashway, 2003).

In nearly all instances of evaluation, individuals considered to be acting appropriately may find themselves congratulated, rewarded or simply left alone. However, individuals who are not meeting the agreed upon standards likely encounter
some indication that their behavior is unacceptable. These indications are often accompanied by recommendations or directives designed to adjust the behavior in order to better satisfy the standards of evaluation. This feedback is often reported through voiced displeasure, a formally written document, a poor performance rating or some other communication (Green, 2004a; Herman, 1988; Lashway, 1998). By providing feedback to a poorly performing individual the evaluator usually hopes to alter the current behaviors in favor of action(s) more consistent with existing expectations.

More specifically, principal evaluation can be viewed as the judgment a superintendent makes regarding principal performance (Brown & Irby, 1998; Green, 2004a; MacPhail-Wilcox & Forbes, 1990). Rarely are these judgments exclusively good or bad, rather they tend to highlight both acceptable and questionable principal behavior.

An important characteristic of principal evaluation is that it often results in a formulated judgment regarding the quality of the principal’s work. In this context the principal’s evaluation is a judgment that signifies the degree to which a principal is meeting the agreed upon expectations (Green, 2004a; Harrison & Peterson, 1988; Herman, 1988)

Moreover, during the past decade the Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993 (MERA) and the Federal Government’s No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), have heightened the importance of evaluation regarding students, schools, teachers and administrators (See Code of Massachusetts Regulations, chapter 603, section 35.00). In our current climate of ever increasing accountability Massachusetts has attempted to facilitate the development of more detailed and precise evaluations as
indicated by the creation of state regulations designed to meet this purpose (See Code of Massachusetts Regulations, chapter 603, section 35.00).

Locally, Massachusetts public school principals must ensure their school works to provide all students with knowledge of the state sponsored curriculum (see Massachusetts General Law, chapter 69, section 1d). According to the Massachusetts Department of Education (DOE), this knowledge is most easily measured by a student’s score on Massachusetts’ state accountability test, commonly known as the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System or MCAS. Subsequently, Massachusetts law infers that the success of a school and its principal can be reflected in a school’s MCAS scores (MGL c. 69 sec. 1J).

Not surprisingly, the current context under which Massachusetts principals operate is complex and stressful in light of MCAS. MCAS scores are documented annually by the DOE to make sure the school, under the principal’s leadership, is progressing according to state and federal requirements. In Massachusetts, when a school does not satisfy the established benchmarks, the state is entitled to a host of steps designed to boost student MCAS scores to acceptable levels, including the removal of the principal (See Code of Massachusetts Regulations, chapter 603, section 2.00).

At this point it is important to note that in Massachusetts, the superintendent is responsible for the appointment and subsequent evaluation of principal’s within a given school district (MGL c. 71 sec. 59B; MGL c. 71 sec 38; Code of Massachusetts Regulations, Chapter 603, section 35.06). Subsequently it is imperative that the superintendent evaluates a principal in a manner that accurately gauges the performance
of said principal, especially since Massachusetts allows for the removal of a principal if educational goals are not being satisfactorily met. While removal of a principal is a possibility for an underperforming school, it is not the first step in the process of trying to correct an underperforming school.

Initially, if a school fails to satisfy its performance objectives, the Code of Massachusetts Regulations requires that “…the school’s principal and school council, under the guidance and supervision of the district’s superintendent and school committee, shall develop a written plan detailing actions the school will take to promote and support improved performance by students at that school, and a timetable of those actions.” (See Code of Massachusetts Regulations, chapter 603, section 2.03). By constructing the initial written plan, the school and district try to correct those conditions that prevented the school from achieving its previous benchmark goals. The initial plan also works to ensure that the school meets its adequate yearly progress (AYP) targets during the upcoming years (See Code of Massachusetts Regulations, chapter 603, section 2.03).

Massachusetts schools that fail to meet improvement goals after implementing the aforementioned plan may be referred by the Massachusetts Commissioner of Education for review (See Code of Massachusetts Regulations, chapter 603, section 2.03). If a school is designated for review, the school must provide additional data as directed by the DOE to assist the Commissioner-appointed review panel (See Code of Massachusetts Regulations, chapter 603, section 2.03).

The review panel is charged with determining whether the school in question is capable of meeting its revised expectations independently, or if the state must assist the
district and school in meeting its improvement goals. Should the panel determine that the
school in question will likely not meet its performance objectives without state
assistance, the school is labeled *under-performing* and state law dictates that “…an
independent fact-finding team shall be assembled to assess the reasons for the
underperformance and the prospects for improvement and report its findings to the
commissioner and the district…” (MGL c. 69 sec. 1J).

Once a school is labeled underperforming, it must then construct a second,
remedial plan, with help from the state, which includes goals and timetables for
improving the academic performance of its students. The remedial plan must be
successfully implemented within 24 months (MGL c. 69 sec. 1J)

Should the 24-month period pass without the school meeting its improvement
goals, the Massachusetts Board of Education can declare the school *chronically under-
performing*. When a school is declared chronically underperforming the potential exists
where “the principal of the school shall be immediately removed and shall not be
assigned to the school for the following year unless the board finds that the principal did
not play a significant role in the underperformance of the school.” (MGL c. 69 sec. 1J).
For obvious reasons, this threat of removal can produce enormous stress for principals,
especially those who lead low performing schools.

It must be noted that the potential removal of the principal implies that principals
have the power, authority and resources to ensure students within their schools are
effectively learning as documented by MCAS. This implication is crucial for my study
because it signifies the importance of maintaining a properly functioning principal
evaluation protocol within a given school district. If the above inference is in fact true, it becomes in the best interests of the superintendent to effectively evaluate each principal under his/her authority. Not only will the evaluation process satisfy accountability demands, but it will also allow the superintendent to better determine the perceived effectiveness of the principal, specifically in meeting adequate yearly progress (AYP) benchmarks for his/her school.

While a school’s performance on MCAS under the assigned principal is certainly important, it must be noted that satisfactory test scores are not the only characteristics of an effective principal. As my study will point out, the work of the principal is incredibly complex and there are many responsibilities a principal must satisfy to be described as effective. Among these responsibilities is the creation of a safe school environment (Senge et al., 2000; Sergiovanni, 1996), a culture conducive to learning (Goleman, 2000; O’Hanlon & Clifton, 2004; Terry, 1996) and the establishment of noteworthy professional development (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; McEwan, 2003; T. Whitaker, 2003) for faculty and staff.

Not surprisingly, many in the literature contend the principal has significant influence over student achievement (Davis & Hensley, 1999; Fry, Bottoms, O’Neill, & Anderson, 2004) and that the principal can foster student achievement in a variety of ways (Evans, 1995; Fink & Resnick, 2001; Joseph Murphy, 2005; Neuman & Simmons, 2000; Terry, 1996).

Whether it is through the furthering of common core values, focusing teachers’ work on the needs of students, examining relevant student data to inform practice,
providing a safe and educationally conducive learning environment or many other
principal behaviors, the principal’s actions can significantly influence the level of student
achievement within a school (Barth, 1991; Elmore, 2000; Fink & Resnick, 2001; Starratt,
2004). Since the behaviors of the principal carry major influence, it again becomes
vitally important that superintendents examine principal actions to ensure those actions
promote student achievement.

Having the ability to gauge whether a principal’s behaviors are moving the school
and its students towards stated achievement goals serves two additional purposes. First,
the evaluation of a principal and the corresponding findings help the school and school
district ensure that competent, effective, mission focused individuals are in fact leading
the school (Herman, 1988; MacPhail-Wilcox & Forbes, 1990; John Murphy & Pimental,
1996). Secondly, the evaluation of a principal serves a political purpose. The very act of
evaluation and subsequent recommendations signals to the community and other stake
holders that the district is committed to educational excellence and providing a competent
educational leader in each school (Green, 2004a). This commitment is very important
given the accountability concerns present within our current culture.

To adequately examine the work of principals, many authors, researchers, policy
makers, district personnel and others have provided guidance and suggestions intended to
inform principal evaluation (Brown & Irby, 1998; Fontana, 1994; Gil, 2001; Green,
2004a; Herman, 1988; Marcoulides, Larsen, & Heck, 1995; Normore, 2004). It is within
this context that my research intends to investigate how selected Massachusetts
Superintendents evaluate principals within their district.
Through this research I hope to uncover promising policies, practices and procedures superintendents utilize when evaluating principals. Not only do I hope to uncover noteworthy principal evaluative practices, but I also hope to highlight conditions that enable these practices to exist. My hope is that individuals concerned with the evaluation of school principals will be empowered to take my findings and incorporate them into improving the observation, supervision and evaluation of principals within their communities.

Focus of the Study

Many scholars, policy makers and academics believe the principal and his or her actions are crucial to the success of a school (Marzano et al., 2005; McEwan, 2003; B. Whitaker, 1997). If this assertion is true, it then becomes very clear that those who evaluate principals must have access to the tools, skills, resources and practices necessary to conduct an honest and accurate assessment of principal performance. In addition to maintaining the necessary assessment strategies, evaluators must also know how to implement the tools and strategies. It is implied through various works that these two conditions must be met if superintendents and the districts they serve are to effectively evaluate the impact principal performance has on a particular school and its students (Green, 2004a; Lashway, 1998; Thomas et al., 2000).

While my research will certainly help illuminate effective principal evaluation strategies, it will undoubtedly expose existing weaknesses.

Not surprisingly many in the field contend that weaknesses do currently exist but that principal evaluation continues despite these flaws (Davis & Hensley, 1999; Fink &
Resnick, 2001; Harrison & Peterson, 1988; Lashway, 2003). Potential causes of poor principal evaluations include the delivery of vague feedback and time constraints placed on superintendents which prohibit a thorough examination of a principal’s work (Fontana, 1994; Green, 2004a; Lashway, 2003; Normore, 2004).

The consequences of not having an accurate assessment of a principal’s work can be dire. On the one hand, superintendents who do not adequately assess the performance of principals are running the risk that poor principal performance is occurring unabated and is therefore keeping the school from reaching its true potential (Lashway, 2003). Under these circumstances it would be nearly impossible to correct concerns associated with the principalship because the superintendent might not be aware problems exist.

On the other hand, inadequate supervision denies the principal a crucial tool in improving performance; honest and actionable feedback (Goleman, 2000; Green, 2004a; Thomas et al., 2000). If a superintendent cannot adequately gauge the performance of a principal, there is little chance the superintendent will be able to illuminate significant deficiencies in the principal’s work. If deficiencies are not being highlighted and the principal’s own self-awareness fails to detect the problems, there is little chance of improving principal performance (Green, 2004a) and ultimately improving the work of our schools.

Consequently, my study will focus on the tools and strategies currently utilized by superintendents in their evaluation of principals. The hope is that this study will subsequently highlight promising techniques and the accompanying conditions that must exist to ensure that these techniques are properly implemented.
I also hope to compare the actual evaluative practices contained within the selected districts with the recommended strategies and techniques that continually appear within the literature. Through this comparison I hope to identify useful strategies and practices currently employed by superintendents so others may adopt these strategies to address needs within their district.

Research Questions

The questions intended to guide my research are as follows:

1. What types of criteria and evidence does a superintendent consider when evaluating the effectiveness of a principal within his/her school district?

2. When evaluating a principal’s performance, what processes and practices does a superintendent utilize to acquire the aforementioned evidence?

3. What level of consistency exists between the principal evaluation practices advocated in the literature and the principal evaluation practices actually in use?

Theoretical Rationale

Many people have noted the importance of principal behaviors and the subsequent influence these behaviors have on student achievement (Bottoms, 2003; Daresh, Gantner, Dunlap, & Hvizdak, 2000; Davis, 1998; Fink & Resnick, 2001) Among these factors are the personal traits of the principal, his/her employed leadership actions and the resulting school culture (McEwan, 2003; O'Hanlon & Clifton, 2004; Sousa, 2003).

Principal Traits/Characteristics

The literature has identified specific principal characteristics and traits that if present, increase the likelihood of a school becoming a center of sustained student
learning. These traits include, but are certainly not limited to, a principal’s vision, communication skills and expertise regarding teaching and learning. (Lindley, 2003; McEwan, 2003; Joseph Murphy, 2005; Senge et al., 2000)

When principals possess these traits, along with others discussed in chapter two, they are well positioned for promoting, fostering and sustaining high levels of student learning.

**Principal vision.** Vision is normally found on two levels, the principal’s personal vision and the collective vision of the school. (Fullan, 1992; Matthews & Crow, 2003; Senge et al., 2000). The principal’s personal vision is what he or she imagines as the future of the school and is most often influenced by personal values and educational philosophy. It is the principal’s personal vision that will decidedly influence the decisions and actions he/she adopts while leading the school (Chirichello & Richmond, 2007).

The collective vision of the school originates, in part, from the principal’s vision and it works to establish a common identity and common commitment among all school stakeholders (Senge et al., 2000). The collective vision is what guides the work of all school constituents toward satisfying collective, organizational goals. Consequently, the collective vision is most often satisfied when a principal expends all available resources to ensure it becomes a reality (O'Hanlon & Clifton, 2004).

**Excellent communication skills.** Many in the literature believe the effective principal must also maintain excellent communication skills.(Evans, 1995; Hayes, 2004; Rallis & Highsmith, 1986; Terry, 1996) The issue of effective communication is vital;
without it a principal will weaken his/her ability to perform the necessary principal functions and thus compromise the potential gains that could be realized by the school and students. (Lindley, 2003).

To effectively communicate, the principal must be able to speak in language accessible to his/her audience, listen attentively to comments and remarks made by others, write in a manner that clearly and concisely conveys ideas and issues to the others, read critically and be attentive to body language. (McEwan, 2003; Rallis & Highsmith, 1986; Terry, 1996; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2004).

*Expertise regarding teaching and learning.* Another major characteristic of a successful principal is expertise regarding teaching and student learning. (Bottoms, 2003; Fink & Resnick, 2001; Joseph Murphy, 2005; B. Whitaker, 1997) Simply stated, teaching and learning is at the heart of what all schools do and principals must therefore be able to recognize and foster its existence within each classroom.

Sergiovanni (2006) stresses the importance of principals having expert knowledge of teaching and learning when he states, “…whatever else they do, principals must be instructional leaders who are directly involved in the teaching and learning of the school.” (p. 269). Obviously a successfully principal will have a proficient knowledge of teaching and learning.

*Principal Leadership Actions*

Although a principal may possess many of the traits and characteristics necessary to further student educational growth within a school, effectively employing these traits is another task entirely. While the list of effective leadership actions is extensive, there are
three commonly cited actions utilized by effective principals. These actions are the engagement in productive relationships, effective role modeling, and sustaining focused professional development (Chirichello & Richmond, 2007; Marzano et al., 2005; McEwan, 2003).

**Engagement in productive relationships.** Without question a principal must partner with others in order to make certain the school’s work is accomplished on a routine basis. (Chirichello & Richmond, 2007; Davis, 1998; Hayes, 2004; Marzano et al., 2005; T. Whitaker, 2003). By paying careful attention to relationships, a principal will cultivate a necessary ingredient for continued leadership, respect. Hayes (2004) talks about creating respect through relationships when he states:

Despite the demands of paperwork and the need to remain current, a principal must primarily be a ‘people person.’ … A principal who greets everyone with a smile and good word will help set the tone in the building. It is important not just to say hello, but to take the time for conversation. The principal who knows the names of students, faculty, and staff and takes an interest in their lives will more likely earn not only their affection but their respect. (p.151)

Such respect is crucial if a principal intends to collectively work with faculty to improve and sustain the work of the school, especially when tough decisions have to be made and work needs to be done (Busher, 2006; Starratt, 1994).
Effective role modeling. Secondly, successful principals often model the behaviors they wish to see others exhibit, while avoiding behaviors deemed detrimental to the learning process (Elmore, 2000; B. Whitaker, 1997).

By modeling appropriate behaviors, the principal provides a clear example for others to follow. Terry (1996) talks about the importance of role modeling when he states:

> Instructional leaders must model their expectations in all settings of the learning environment. The vision and strategies for achieving them must be manifested in the behavior of the principal. This includes modeling a variety of teaching styles in forums such as staff meetings and development sessions so as to demonstrate to teachers an awareness of the needs of the listeners. (p. 8)

Clearly the more successful principal will effectively model the behaviors and actions necessary for sustained student learning with the hope that others duplicate the demonstrated behaviors.

Focused professional development. A third commonly cited principal action that positively influences principal effectiveness is the establishment of relevant, sustained professional development for the teaching staff (Fink & Resnick, 2001; Fullan, 1992; Matthews & Crow, 2003; Neuman & Simmons, 2000). The benefit of well planned professional development is constant refinement and support of teaching such that student learning is enhanced.
While many principals foster professional development, the use of focused professional development designed to meet the collective needs of the teaching faculty is sometimes missing. Matthews & Crow (2003) illustrates this point when they state that,

… [M]any professional development initiatives take the form of something that is done to teachers rather than for them. Top-down approaches to professional development embody a deficit view of teachers and teaching – something must be wrong, and it needs to be fixed. If professional development is used as a means of fixing something or somebody, then it only adds to the existing problems. Instead, professional development must be related to the needs of school personnel to fulfill the collective vision. (p. 187).

Thus the successful principal will ensure that professional development for teachers is relevant and focused to enhance teaching and subsequent student learning.

School Culture

A school’s culture is also important as it will significantly impact the teaching and ensuing student learning within a given school (Elmore, 1992; Fink & Resnick, 2001; Fullan, 1992; Sergiovanni, 2006). Not surprisingly, perhaps no one has greater influence on school culture than the principal (Neuman & Simmons, 2000; Starratt, 2004; Terry, 1996). To this end the principal must ensure that a successful school cultures exists, one that is marked by collaborative faculties, shared core values and the ability to change and reform when necessary (Evans, 1995; Schwahn & Spady, 1998; Senge et al., 2000).
Collaborative faculties. Collaboration occurs when teachers, principals and support staff work together to address pertinent issues facing the school. (Senge et al., 2000). Collaboration is crucial if schools desire to benefit from its most common by-product, the maximization of each individual’s unique talents and expertise such that school issues and concerns are adequately addressed (Bolman & Deal, 1997; Goleman, 2000; Marzano et al., 2005; Neuman & Simmons, 2000; Sergiovanni, 2006).

Shared core values. Also central to a healthy school culture is the establishment of shared core values designed to guide the behavior and actions of those within a school (Evans, 1995; Green, 2004a). The agreed upon values of a school will shape the behaviors and interactions of those within the school. A sampling of core values can include:

- Mutual respect for all
- All students can learn
- Exceptional teaching and learning

While few would disagree with the sample values provided, for core values to have meaning and permanence throughout a school, the principal must lead the value creation process, not command. A principal who leads such an effort will be well positioned for establishing sound core values within his/her school that further enhance the learning process (McEwan, 2003).

The ability to change and reform. A successful principal must also foster a culture capable of investigating the need for change, and when warranted, produce a
clearly defined plan to improve the current situation (Elmore, 1992; Goleman, 2000; Schwahn & Spady, 1998; Waters et al., 2004).

While change is often a difficult and uncomfortable process for some, Ricken (2007) provides a convincing case for embracing change at the school level:

A school principal who allows an unacceptable practice to remain unchanged is frequently making a destructive decision. The lack of an administrator’s action often causes staff members to believe that the current practice is acceptable. My definition of the principal’s role includes my passionate belief that the leader of the school must maintain a bias for action. When this perspective is accepted by the teaching staff, the innovative energy of the faculty is released. (p. 33).

Moreover, principals are encouraged to make appropriate modifications that will benefit the teaching and student learning taking place within the school (Waters et al., 2004). Waters further stresses this point when he states “Leaders can act like effective leaders, but if they fail to guide their schools toward making the corrective changes, these changes are likely to have a diminished or negative impact on student achievement.” (p. 50).

In light of the considerable impact a principal has on various aspects of a school, my study is designed to investigate the manner in which superintendents evaluate principals. Below are a sampling of common principal evaluation practices designed to measure the effectiveness of a principal in light of the aforementioned traits, leadership actions and resulting school culture produced by a principal’s leadership.
Principal Evaluation Models

The following review of common principal evaluation practices includes a discussion of rating scales, management by objective and principal portfolios. It is important to note that the following evaluation methods are not the only practices in use; however they do represent commonly employed techniques.

Rating scales. Rating scales, otherwise known as checklists, are widely used to evaluate principal performance (Green, 2004a; Marcoux, Brown, Irby, & Lara-Alecio, 2003). Typically rating scales will list qualities and expectations an observer desires to see within a principal (Lashway, 2003). The list is often accompanied by a rating system utilized by the observer to document the degree to which the principal satisfies the noted expectation.

Prior to conducting a principal evaluation, the superintendent normally meets with the principal to discuss the expectations contained within the rating scale (Green, 2004a). Once the rating scale is understood by all parties, the evaluation will commence and the principal is rated according to how well each expectation is satisfied.

Rating scales are attractive because they offer easy management and implementation. The downside of a rating scale is the lack of specific feedback provided to the principal. This lack of feedback limits the principal’s ability to adopt meaningful change designed to enhance performance (Davis & Hensley, 1999; Goleman, 2000; Green, 2004a).
Management by objective. The management by objective approach begins with the principal and superintendent collaborating to construct a performance plan for a specified period, normally the upcoming school year (MacPhail-Wilcox & Forbes, 1990).

Once the objectives of the performance plan have been established, the principal and superintendent create a timeline to meet and monitor progress. During these meetings, the superintendent and principal will often discuss strategies and resources that can assist the principal in meeting the established objectives (Green, 2004a).

At the conclusion of the specified period, the superintendent, based on his or her perception, often determines the extent to which the principal adequately satisfies the previously established goals. In this way the principal is evaluated on the degree to which agreed upon objectives were met (MacPhail-Wilcox & Forbes, 1990).

Principal portfolios. The portfolio process begins with the principal reflecting upon past performance in an effort to identify areas in need of improvement (Green, 2004a; Marcoux et al., 2003). This reflection contributes to the development and establishment of goals that the principal works to satisfy during the upcoming school year (Brown, Irby, & Neumeyer, 1998; Green, 2004a).

Throughout the school year the principal produces evidence designed to indicate successful achievement of the established goals. At the conclusion of the school year the principal reflects upon the extent to which the previously established goals were met in light of the produced evidence.
The attractiveness of principal portfolios is that the principal, through significant reflection and subsequent action, takes an active role in his/her professional growth as it relates to student performance (Lashway, 2003).

It is important to note that portfolios are not intended to be the sole source considered when evaluating principal performance (Green, 2004b; Lashway, 2003). Rather, the portfolio can supplement a principal’s evaluation by providing a context under which the principal’s work took place (Green, 2004b).

Subsequently, my study intends to investigate the manner in which superintendents evaluate principals within the theoretical frame established above. Furthermore, I intend to consider the degree to which actual superintendent evaluation practices are consistent with the evaluative practices suggested within the literature.

*Significance of Study*

In order to adequately convey the significance of this study it is necessary to again revisit the research questions as they form the basis of my work. This study intends to examine the following questions:

1. What types of criteria and evidence does a superintendent consider when evaluating the effectiveness of a principal within his/her school district?
2. When evaluating a principal’s performance, what processes and practices does a superintendent utilize to acquire the aforementioned evidence?
3. What level of consistency exists between the principal evaluation practices advocated in the literature and the principal evaluation practices actually in use?
Understanding the types of pertinent evidence a superintendent considers when evaluating the work of a school principal is hugely significant for those looking to create or improve their current principal evaluative practices (Harrison & Peterson, 1988; Lashway, 2003). Many in the literature have suggested that helpful data may consist of principal portfolios, peer assessments of the principal’s work and solicited feedback from parents, students and teachers who experience the principal’s leadership on a routine basis (Fontana, 1994; Gil, 2001; Green, 2004b; Harrison & Peterson, 1988; Marcoux et al., 2003). By identifying forms of data that assist in the evaluation of a principal, those currently engaged in the work of evaluating principals are provided a better understanding of what such data looks like and how it can be collected. This contention thus strengthens the significance of this study as it relates to effective principal evaluation.

The second research question investigates the manner in which a superintendent or designated evaluator obtains data needed to evaluate a principal. Again the intent here is to identify both favorable and non-favorable evidence collection techniques as related to principal evaluation.

The most commonly cited technique for gathering good data on a principal’s effectiveness has been the school visit (Green, 2004a; Harrison & Peterson, 1988; MacPhail-Wilcox & Forbes, 1990). Most researchers contend that the school visit allows the evaluator to briefly sample the culture of the school in an attempt to determine whether the principal has establish a culture conducive to effective teaching and subsequent student learning (Gil, 2001; Harrison & Peterson, 1988; Normore, 2004)
Another commonly employed data gathering and evaluation technique is a checklist or rating chart. While this method is widely used, many researchers claim it does a poor job of measuring things like school culture, faculty morale, and principal approachability (Green, 2004a; Lashway, 2003).

Consequently a careful understanding of the data gathering techniques and practices employed by principal evaluators is significant because it will assist those currently evaluating principals by providing an improved understanding of both proper and faulty data gathering techniques.

The third and final research question addresses the level of consistency between evaluation techniques as cited in the literature and those currently employed in the field.

In most cases the suggested evaluative techniques have been tested and piloted by superintendents and principals in an effort to gauge their effectiveness (Amsterdam, 2003; Kempher & Cooper, 2002; Marcoulides et al., 1995; Normore, 2004). Since much of the literature consulted for this study has originated from peer reviewed journals and publications, it is inferred that the embedded suggestions are appropriate and thus worthy of implementation within schools and school districts attempting to evaluate principal performance. The significance of this study is then enhanced through heightened awareness of the appropriate evaluative techniques.

In summary, many in the literature infer that principals have considerable influence over student achievement taking place in their schools (Marzano et al., 2005; Neuman & Simmons, 2000; Sousa, 2003; Waters et al., 2004). Thus it is critical that principals effectively satisfy the established expectations of their position if student
learning is to advance. As a society we rely heavily on principal evaluation to ensure our schools maintain a nurturing learning environment (Elmore, 1992; Matthews & Crow, 2003; Neuman & Simmons, 2000). The overall significance of my study resides in its attempt to more fully understand the important process of principal evaluation so we can adequately provide excellent learning conditions for our students.

Research Design

As stated throughout this chapter, my study is guided by the following three research questions.

1. What types of criteria and evidence does a superintendent consider when evaluating the effectiveness of a principal within his/her school district?

2. When evaluating a principal’s performance, what processes and practices does a superintendent utilize to acquire the aforementioned evidence?

3. What level of consistency exists between the principal evaluation practices advocated in the literature and the principal evaluation practices actually in use?

Qualitative Study

In attempting to answer these questions, I will be conducting a qualitative research study that will begin with a careful analysis of the literature to determine what realities currently exist regarding principal evaluation. The literature review will consist of 3 primary bodies of literature:

- The responsibilities of an effective principal
- The purpose of principal evaluation
- Processes and techniques of principal evaluation
Participant Selection

My research will involve a convenience sample of 8 willing superintendents. Specifically, I intend to utilize personal connections within the education field to obtain willing participants for my study.

Interview Protocol

Initially I intend to pilot an interview protocol before designing a final interview procedure. The final protocol will be utilized during participant interviews to determine current principal evaluation practice.

Data gathered from the interviews will be audio taped, transcribed and later coded in an effort to further understand its relevance and implications for my stated research questions. Once the data is coded it will be presented in a thematic format in which the major themes are appropriately discussed.

Field Notes

I will produce field notes related to each interview. The notes will be constructed at the conclusion of each interview to more fully document the context of the superintendent’s interview. The field notes will pay particular attention to the superintendent’s body language, the interview setting and tone of the meeting.

Artifact Analysis

I also intend to conduct an artifact analysis examining state and local documents that govern principal evaluation. Specifically, I hope to examine principal job expectations, evaluation protocols and other documents deemed pertinent to the
evaluation of a principal. These documents will be examined to further satisfy the previously mentioned research questions.

Sample

As stated earlier I intend to employ a convenience sample of 6-8 superintendents.

Limitations of the Study

Sample Size

The target sample size for this study is 6-8 superintendents, a small sample by research standards. As a result, the data collected prohibits the construction of vast generalizations regarding principal evaluation practices in Massachusetts and the nation.

Superintendent Interviews

Since I am employing a convenience sample based on the associations I and my colleagues maintain, it is possible the superintendents who participate will provide a biased viewpoint of the principal evaluation process based on this association. This reality would further limit my ability to make generalizations regarding principal evaluation practices.

Possible Contention

While I intend to ask questions to satisfy the specified research questions, it is possible some superintendents could interpret my questioning as a preconceived judgment that the current practice is poor. Were this to happen, it is conceivable superintendents could then try to provide “correct” or “textbook” responses to my questions instead of discussing the reality of their practice. Ultimately, this positioning
could limit my desire to identify excellent, good and poor examples of the principal evaluation process.

Hopefully, the piloted interview questions and subsequent refinements to the final interview protocol will promote honest superintendent responses.

*Superintendent Perception*

An additional limitation to this study is its focus on superintendent perception. While the hope is that this perception is accurate, it is entirely plausible that it may not be. This circumstance, though one would hope is rather unlikely, still is a possibility and thus poses a limitation to the study.

*Internal Bias*

I readily admit that I hold partial skepticism toward current principal evaluation practices. This mindset could subconsciously influence the data and evidence I collect and result in negative aspects of current principal evaluation practices being unduly stressed.

Also the manner in which I and my peers are presently evaluated could also influence my preconceived opinions of the principal evaluation process.

Hopefully by being conscious of my current skepticism, I will successfully resist any unjustified conclusions that if allowed, could interfere with my efforts to objectively satisfy the previously mentioned research questions.

*Study Overview*
The goal of chapter one was to provide the reader with a brief overview of my study and the subsequent research questions that will guide my work. The contents of ensuing chapters are described below.

In chapter two, the reader will find a comprehensive overview of literature as it relates to the aforementioned research questions. The literature will be presented in three major components: principal responsibilities, the purpose of principal evaluation and the practices and techniques of principal evaluation.

Chapter three will detail the overall research design utilized during this study. Incorporated into chapter three will be an explanation and rationale for the various methodologies employed throughout the study, a description of the pilot interview protocol and resulting finalized interview protocol, the methods of data collection and a comprehensive format for presenting the gathered data.

Chapter four will feature the findings of this study. The findings will be framed according to the research questions and will detail what was found through the superintendent interviews and artifact analysis.

The fifth and final chapter will summarize the findings of this study as they relate to the research questions, literature review and theoretical rationale. The findings will also be discussed in light of implications for future research and recommendations to current principal evaluation practices and policies.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Overview

Chapter two reviews the relevant literature as it pertains to the research questions guiding my study. The literature review is divided into the following three sections to ensure maximum readability:

- Section I: The responsibilities of an effective principal
- Section II: The purpose of principal evaluation
- Section III: Processes, practices and techniques of principal evaluation

At the end of every section a brief summary is provided concerning the importance of each concept as it relates to the research aims of this study.

Before I investigate the responsibilities of an effective principal, it is important to note that many researchers feel there are certain individual traits, that if possessed by a principal, influence that person’s ability to successfully lead a school (Green, 2004a; Matthews & Crow, 2003; Rallis & Highsmith, 1986; Sergiovanni, 2006; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2002; Starratt, 2004).

Consequently this chapter will begin with a very brief discussion of the more common individual traits associated with effective principals as found in the literature in an attempt to provide the contextual background under which most successful principals operate.

Principal Traits

Expertise regarding teaching and learning. As is true with many fields, maintaining a high level of intelligence regarding the critical components of one’s job
helps to ensure success. Consequently effective principals often possess high levels of intelligence which enhances their ability to foster effective teaching and student learning (Green, 2004a; Matthews & Crow, 2003; Mitchell & Tucker, 1992).

Green (2004a) emphasizes the importance of above average cognitive ability when he states, “First, effective administrators must have above average cognitive ability in order to process large amounts of information quickly, allowing them to analyze different scenarios when making decisions” (pg. 17). Since the principalship is a highly complex occupation with continuous information arriving regularly, it becomes clear that high levels of intelligence will certainly enhance the degree of success experienced by a principal.

Reflective capacity. A second trait associated with successful principals is the ability to reflect on current and past circumstances so that future actions and endeavors are properly informed (Senge et al., 2000; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2002; Starratt, 1994). Senge (2000) effectively captures the importance of reflection when he states:

[A]s leaders, we also learn from systemic and informed reflection – for example thinking through the ways in which different groups can be engaged and connecting those ways to theories of organizational development. Critical reflection is more than just reflection. It is reflection that ties practice and theory together (p. 318).
Consequently it is not surprising that the ability to utilize reflective practices is frequently cited as a trait held by the most successful principals (Chirichello & Richmond, 2007; Green, 2004b; Sergiovanni, 2006).

Possession of excellent communication skills. Central to a principal’s effectiveness is his/her ability to communicate; effective principals are often described as highly effective communicators (Busher, 2006; Lindley, 2003; McEwan, 2003; Rallis & Highsmith, 1986; Terry, 1996). The value of being able to communicate effectively is crucial, primarily because principals are communicating in some way nearly all the time. McEwan (2003) emphasizes the pervasiveness of communication when she states:

Successful principals are communicating virtually 100% of the time they are doing their job – listening, speaking, writing, and reading. Even when they don’t think they’re communicating, they are. How they stand, how they shake people’s hands, and even what they wear all send messages to the people in their community (p. 1-2).

Consequently the effective principal is one who is keenly aware of the messages he or she is communicating and takes care to ensure that these messages are consist with the core values and mission of the school (Evans, 1995; Senge et al., 2000; Terry, 1996).

Awareness of others needs. Effective principals and leaders are also very perceptive to the needs of others and they often work to satisfy these needs to the greatest extent possible within the context of their organization (Bolman & Deal, 1997; Goleman, 2000; Starratt, 2004). As Bolman and Deal (1997) point out the most successful leaders
are well attuned to the needs of others. In their book Reframing Organizations, Bolman & Deal reveal that:

Organizations need people (for their effort energy and talent), and people need organizations (for the many intrinsic and extrinsic rewards they offer), but their needs are not always well aligned. When the fit between people and organizations is poor, one or both suffer: individuals may feel neglected or oppressed and organizations sputter because individuals withdraw their efforts or even work against organizational purposes. Conversely, a good fit benefits both: individuals find meaningful and satisfying work, and organizations get the talent and energy they need to succeed (p. 119).

Successful principal’s routinely posses the ability to identify the needs of all stakeholders and then attend to those needs to ensure all constituents find meaning in their work (Marzano et al., 2005; Ricken, 2007; Starratt, 2004).

Integrity. The final trait frequently maintained by successful principals is an uncompromising sense of integrity (Green, 2004a; McEwan, 2003; Sergiovanni, 2006). The benefit of acting with integrity is that a principal’s actions are largely influenced by facts and circumstance, not political affiliations or the proverbial “Good Old Boy” network. Principals who act with integrity are not influenced by the ever-changing winds of popular opinion and convenience and their loyalty resides with the students they serve (T. Whitaker, 2003).
In recalling her time as a principal, McEwan (2003) stresses the importance and challenge of consistently acting with integrity when she states, “Being a character builder when you have to demonstrate integrity on a daily basis is one of the biggest challenges of the principalship. I kept reminding myself that the bottom line was the student’s welfare” (p. 140). The highly effective principal will always base decisions on what is best for their students, regardless of political pressures and it is partly this type of integrity that makes them so successful.

Section I: The Responsibilities of an Effective Principal

This section of the literature review will be structured according to the Marzano et al. (2005) work entitled School Leadership that Works: From Research to Results. In this piece Marzano et al. outlines 21 specific principal responsibilities that effective principals must satisfy to ensure optimum levels of student achievement.

Marzano et al. (2005) arrived at the 21 responsibilities after conducting a meta-analysis of 69 studies that examined the relationship between principal effectiveness and student achievement. The studies involved 2,802 schools, roughly 1.4 million students and 14,000 teachers. From the meta-analysis, Marzano et al. “…computed the correlation between the leadership behavior of the principal in the school and the average academic achievement of students in the school to be .25.” (p. 10).

While Marzano et al. (2005) cautions against averaging the 21 responsibilities into one correlation, it is important to note that taken individually all responsibilities, when successfully satisfied by an effective principal, do possess a positive effect on student achievement (Marzano et al., 2005)
As this portion of the literature review continues, many other authors also comment on some or all of the 21 responsibilities cited by Marzano et al. (2005). Their contributions will be appropriately highlighted.

It is also important to note that many of the responsibilities mentioned by Marzano et al. (2005) are similar, but carry subtle differences. The comparison between the Affirmation and Contingent Awards responsibilities would be one such example.

The 21 responsibilities are listed alphabetically in the table below and throughout this portion of the literature review (Marzano et al., 2005):

Table 1

*Marzano et al. ’s 21 Principal Responsibilities*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Affirmation</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Optimizer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Change Agent</td>
<td>Ideals/Beliefs</td>
<td>Order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contingent Awards</td>
<td>Input</td>
<td>Outreach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Intellectual Stimulation</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>Involvement in Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment</td>
<td>Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline</td>
<td>Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment</td>
<td>Situational Awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>Monitoring/Evaluating</td>
<td>Visibility</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From (Marzano et al. 2005)
Marzano et al. (2005) have presented the responsibilities in alphabetical order to stress that each responsibility is equally important and I have continued with the same format.

Principal Responsibility 1: Affirmation

Marzano et al. (2005) defines the first principal responsibility, Affirmation, as “…the extent to which the leader recognizes and celebrates accomplishments – and acknowledges failures” (p. 41). In this way the leader engages in honest communication regarding the realities under which the school is operating. On the one hand, the genuine successes of students and teachers are celebrated, while the shortcomings of the school are openly identified. By exercising the responsibility of affirmation the principal is providing an honest view of what is happening within the school (Goleman, 2000; Hayes, 2004; Marzano et al., 2005; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2002).

Practicing the responsibility of affirmation also enables the principal to provide motivation and incentive for teachers to offer a consistent effort towards helping students maximize their potential. The impact of affirmation is best described by Whitaker (2003) when he states:

When we acknowledge the efforts of others, especially our highest achievers, they redouble their efforts. They feel more connected to us and to the school. When we show our respect for them, they gain more respect for us. Reinforcing our
teachers – especially the ones we value most – makes everyone’s job easier and more satisfying (p. 84).

While the Marzano et al. (2005) definition of affirmation requires celebration, it also requires an honest acknowledgement of failures within the school. Such honesty is crucial because it allows a school to identify problems in the hopes of finding suitable solutions. Moreover, honesty allows for the creation of healthy, productive organizations that are keenly aware of current realties and consequently work to eliminate failures and unwanted circumstances within the organization (Barth, 1991; McEwan, 2003; Schwahn & Spady, 1998; Waters et al., 2004).

The work to eliminate failure and undesirable situations within the school is often furthered when a principal satisfies the demands of the second principal responsibility, that of the change agent.

*Principal Responsibility 2: Change Agent*

Marzano et al. (2005) identifies the second principal responsibility as that of *Change Agent*. According to Marzano et al. “…the responsibility of *Change Agents* refers to the leader’s disposition to challenge the status quo [and] … temporarily upset the school’s equilibrium” (p. 44). Not surprisingly many researchers consider the principal’s ability to elicit lasting, meaningful change as an essential characteristic of the effective principal (Bolman & Deal, 1997; Hayes, 2004; Matthews & Crow, 2003; Waters et al., 2004).
Likewise, the state of Massachusetts also encourages the principal to engage in meaningful change. Section II (D) of the Principles of Effective Administrative Leadership requires that “The administrator facilitates constructive change.” (603 CMR 35.00). By facilitating meaningful change, the principal can help ensure that his or her school avoids complacency in its instructional activities and instead utilizes emerging improvements to further enhance instructional practice.

Ricken (2007) further stresses the importance of embracing change and challenging the status quo when he states:

… [W]e must realize that principals have to constantly challenge the status quo and become activists for meaningful change. … Being a principal is not a spectator sport. We must always challenge present situations and conditions. Our purpose should be to elevate our current standards and increase both our expectations and those of our staff. Rocking the boat frees the creativity of the staff and is the means to move along a continuum of school improvement (p. 40).

While justified change is important, an effective principal will not engage in modifications simply for the sake of change. The effective principal will engage in change when it is warranted, yet some authors believe the time for such change is now (McEwan, 2003; Schwahn & Spady, 1998; Sergiovanni, 2006).

To this end, Waters et al. (2004) discusses what they term first order and second order changes. First order changes are those applied within existing practices and structural models. They can easily be undertaken through utilization of knowledge
currently available among present teachers and administrators. Waters et al. is critical of first order changes as they believe that such changes only meddle with existing structures and do not produce lasting and needed change (Waters et al., 2004).

Conversely, second order changes challenge existing assumptions and beliefs while requiring knowledge that can only be gained through the utilization of outside resources (Waters et al., 2004). While second order changes require implementation of knowledge new to the school faculty, they cannot be successfully instituted by outside experts. Rather those working within a school must acquire the necessary knowledge and then incorporate the changes from within (Waters et al., 2004).

Waters et al. (2004) claims the benefit of second order change is the change of community beliefs and assumptions in order to provide better student learning experiences. As an example, those who advocate for changing the structure of the school day would be embracing a form of second order change.

When principals appropriately explore and embrace change, while simultaneously urging their faculty to do the same, schools marked by enhanced teaching and high levels of student achievement usually result (Elmore, 1992; McEwan, 2003; Schwahn & Spady, 1998; Sergiovanni, 2006; Waters et al., 2004).

The celebration of the higher levels of student achievement is something that should be appropriately celebrated and rewarded, which lead appropriately to Marzano et al. (2005) third principal responsibility, contingent rewards.

*Principal Responsibility 3: Contingent Rewards*
According to Marzano et al. (2005) the third principal responsibility, “Contingent Rewards, refers to the extent to which the school leader recognizes and rewards individual accomplishments” (p. 45). Recognition of individual accomplishment is crucial because it provides the principal with an opportunity to reinforce behaviors and accomplishments he/she deems important to the overall success of the school (Marzano et al.)

O’Hanlon & Clifton (2004) further elaborate on the importance of celebrating desirable behavior when they state:

They [principals] understand that celebration both identifies what the desirable behaviors and actions are for those in the school and reinforces these behaviors and actions when they occur. They understand that when students and staff feel good about how they are doing and how their school community is doing they move toward doing better. They create positive behavior by paying attention to positive behavior” (p. 45)

As stressed above, the importance of rewarding teachers for behaviors and actions that facilitate the attainment of school goals is the resulting motivation for others to exhibit similar behaviors. The end result is likely to produce more people exhibiting the rewarded behaviors. If the principal is rewarding behaviors that lead to effective teaching and student learning, the school and principal will likely increase their success in educating the students (McEwan, 2003; O'Hanlon & Clifton, 2004; Waters et al., 2004; T. Whitaker, 2003).
Yet, for a principal to appropriately reward and celebrate the accomplishments of others, successful communication is critical. This brings us to our fourth principal responsibility, communication.

**Principal Responsibility 4: Communication**

As noted earlier, the ability to communication is considered a personal trait, but it is also considered a responsibility and the successful principals do it well (Bush, 2006; Evans, 1995; Lindley, 2003; McEwan, 2003; Starratt, 1994). According to Marzano et al. (2005) the fourth principal responsibility, communication...

... refers to the extent to which the school leader establishes strong lines of communication with and between teachers and students … good communication is a critical feature of any endeavor in which people work in close proximity for a common purpose (p. 46).

Moreover, communication skills are identified by the state of Massachusetts as a crucial principle of effective administrative leadership (603 CMR 35.00). Specifically, in describing what an effective administrator must do, the state regulation reads “The administrator demonstrates communication skills that are clear, direct, and responsive” (603 CMR 35.00). This particular regulation goes on to discuss communication in much the same way as the previously mentioned authors, citing the importance of not only communicating ones ideas, but also listening and being attentive to ideas presented by others.
McEwan (2003) further stresses the importance of communication when she states:

The highly successful principal is a Communicator – a genuine and open human being with the capacity to listen, empathize, interact, and connect with individual students, parents, and teachers in productive, helping, and healing ways, as well as the ability to teach, present, and motivate people in larger group settings. (p. 3)

The importance of exercising good communication ensures that the principal clearly expresses ideas, expectations and emotions, while also gaining access to the impressions and perceptions people close to the school possess. The ability to both dispense and acquire insight, thoughts, and ideas – the essence of communication – in all situations will prove crucial to the success of any principal precisely because it will allow for an accurate understanding of a school’s context (Evans, 1995; Lindley, 2003; Senge et al., 2000; Terry, 1996; Wohlstetter & Briggs, 1994).

By exercising excellent communication skills the principal will be better positioned to understand and shape the culture of their school. Accordingly the fifth principal responsibility deals with the all important aspects of school culture.

Principal Responsibility 5: Culture

In defining the fifth principal responsibility, school culture, Marzano et al. (2005) utilizes a recent work (Hanson, 2001) on educational change for a clear definition of the term. As Hanson explains:
Schools also have their own unique cultures that are shaped around a particular combination of values, beliefs, and feelings. These school cultures emphasize what is of paramount importance to them as they strive to develop their knowledge base in a particular direction, such as producing outstanding football teams, high SAT scores, disciplined classrooms and skilled auto mechanics, or sending kids to college who come from inner-city urban schools. Although the culture of a school is not visible to the human eye, its artifacts and symbols reflect specific cultural priorities. (p. 641).

The development and utilization of symbols is a pertinent aspect of culture. Often it is the symbols themselves that inform people of an organization’s existing culture (Bolman & Deal, 1997). Bolman and Deal further this contention when they state, Symbols embody and express an organization’s culture – the interwoven pattern of beliefs, values, practices, and artifacts that define for members who they are and how they are to do things. Culture is both a product and a process. As a product, it embodies accumulated wisdom from those that came before us. As a process, it is continually renewed and re-created as newcomers learn the old ways and eventually become teachers themselves. (p. 217).

As the above quote illustrates a school culture is shaped by the collective values, beliefs, symbols and feelings of the school community. Saphier and King (1985) go a step further and assert that culture is both produced and maintained by the day to day
actions of those individuals who comprise the school community. Specifically, Saphier and King contend that school culture is highly influenced by what they term the twelve cultural norms of school culture. The twelve norms are as follows.

Table 2

*Saphier and King’s 12 Norms of School Culture*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Experimentation</td>
<td>6. Reaching out to the Knowledge Bases</td>
<td>10. Protection of What’s Important</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From (Saphier & King 1985)

Accordingly, the principal’s leadership actions should be geared towards facilitating the realization of these norms within his or her school (Saphier & King, 1985). In this way the school will be better positioned to maximize its educational practice and student achievement.
Saphier and King (1985) further discuss the implications of the twelve cultural norms relative to improvement efforts and the role both teachers and principals play in this process when they state,

The degree to which these norms are strong makes a huge difference in the ability of school improvement activities to have a lasting, or even any effect …
Wherever these norms exist, they reside in the teachers’ and administrators’ beliefs and show up in their actions. (p. 67-68).

As one may surmise from the above quote, a school culture can represent both advantages and liabilities depending upon the actions of those within the school community. Appropriately, Sergiovanni (2006) talks about the advantages and dangers of school culture when he states:

The benefits of a strong school culture are clear. Culture represents an effective means of coordination and control in a loosely connected and nonlinear world. Its covenant or center of purposes and shared values represents a source of inspiration, meaning, and significance for those who live and work in the school. These qualities can lead to enhanced commitment and performance that are beyond expectation. As a result the school is better able to achieve its goals (p. 155).

Despite the benefits a strong school culture can provide, Sergiovanni (2006) also explains that culture can have a negative impact when he states:
The presence of a strong norm system in a school can collectively program the minds of people in such a way that issues of reality come into question. If this is carried to the extreme, the school might see reality in one way, but its environment in another. Finally this is the question of rationality. As commitment to a course of action [culture] increases, people become less rational in their actions. Strong cultures are committed cultures, and in excess, commitment takes a toll on rationality (p. 156).

Thus the successful principal will create a strong culture grounded in furthering the educational achievement of all students while still maintaining the flexibility to adapt and subsequently address newly arrived challenges (Mitchell & Tucker, 1992; Schwahn & Spady, 1998; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2002).

To help shape a culture where student learning is significantly furthered, one need only look to Fullan’s (1992) contention regarding what a principal should do in order to foster a collaborative culture within a school.

To build collaborative work cultures, principals must concentrate on vision-building; norms of collegiality that respect individuality; norms of continuous improvement; problem-coping and conflict-resolution strategies; lifelong teacher development that involves inquiry, reflective practice, collaboration, and technical skills; and restructuring initiatives (p.19).
In light of Fullan’s (1992) comments it becomes very clear that building an effective school culture will require an extraordinary amount of effort on behalf of the principal. Despite these challenges, the effective principal will commit the time and effort to ensure that the school’s culture is continually molded and shaped in order to foster the academic, social, and character growth of all students (Matthews & Crow, 2003; McEwan, 2003; Sagor, 1992; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2002; Sousa, 2003).

Further assisting in the building of a culture that promotes student learning and high achievement brings us to the sixth principal responsibility, discipline.

**Principal Responsibility 6: Discipline**

The sixth responsibility, *Discipline*, is crucial to ensuring students receive high quality instruction each time they enter a classroom. According to Marzano et al. (2005) “The acts of ‘buffering’ and ‘protection’ converge to form our responsibility of *Discipline*. Specifically, *Discipline* refers to protecting teachers from issues that would detract from their instructional time or focus” (p. 48).

Marzano et al. (2005) also relies heavily on Elmore (2000) in describing the discipline responsibility. Accordingly, Elmore states that “School leaders are hired and retained based largely on their capacity to buffer teachers from outside interference” (p. 7). It is the idea of buffering teachers from interference that forms the foundation of the discipline responsibility.

Elmore (2000) expounds upon this responsibility when he talks about the principal’s duty to create and maintain structures that protect instructional activities.
Elmore states that “There is a role for leaders in moving non-instructional issues out of the way [of teachers] to prevent them from creating confusion and distraction in school systems, schools, and classrooms” (p. 24).

When principals engage in the buffering and protecting Marzano et al. (2005) speak of, they create supportive environments where teachers can better elicit maximum student achievement as the result of instructional activities. O’Hanlon & Clifton (2004) encourage the principal to create a supportive environment when they state “The principal must endeavor to establish a supportive environment for them [teachers]. When the teachers are secure in their place in the school, they can give their most to help students learn” (p. 43). Part of this support is achieved when the principal keeps unnecessary distractions from consuming the teacher’s time.

Having a principal help create a school environment that appropriately supports teachers so they can focus on the instruction provided to students is a theme advocated by many in the literature (Bush, 2006; Chirichello & Richmond, 2007; Davis, 1998; Sousa, 2003; Terry, 1996; T. Whitaker, 2003). Consequently effective principals will look to establish disciplined classrooms and schools where teachers can focus on core instructional work.

Yet to satisfy the responsibility of discipline, a principal must also have the flexibility to address the numerous distractions that can, and will materialize within a school. Appropriately, flexibility represents the seventh principal responsibility discussed by Marzano et al. (2005).
**Principal Responsibility 7: Flexibility**

In describing the seventh principal responsibility, Marzano et al. (2005), states that “*Flexibility* refers to the extent to which leaders adapt their leadership behavior to the needs of the current situation and are comfortable with dissent” (p.49). Sergiovanni (2006) also advocates for flexibility when he states, “Successful principals are able to gauge the situations they are in to provide the kind of leadership that best fits those circumstances” (p.158).

The degree of flexibility needed by the principal is very much dependent upon the context in which the principal operates. Goleman (2000) describes different leadership styles and their utilization when he discusses leadership strategy. Goleman writes,

> And perhaps most important, the research indicates that leaders with the best results do not rely on only one leadership style; they use most of them in a given week – seamlessly and in different measure – depending upon the business situation. Imagine the styles, then, as the array of clubs in a golf pro’s bag. Over the course of a game the pro picks and chooses clubs based upon the demands of the shot. Sometimes he has to ponder his selection, usually it is automatic. The pro senses the challenge ahead, swiftly pulls out the right tool, and elegantly puts it to work. That’s how high impact leaders operate, too (p.79-80).

Goleman (2000) continues with his description of the leadership styles when he writes,
… each style, by name and brief description alone, will likely resonate with anyone who leads, is led, or as is the case with most of us, does both. *Coersive leaders* demand immediate compliance. *Authoritative leaders* mobilize toward a vision. *Affiliative leaders* create emotional bonds and harmony. *Democratic leaders* build consensus through participation. *Pacesetting leaders* expect excellence and self-direction. And *coaching leaders* develop people for the future. (p. 80)

The major point behind Goleman’s (2000) work is that many types of leadership exist but no one style can be utilized to successfully deal with each arising situation. According to Goleman, the best leaders will utilize any and all of the styles depending upon the situation at hand. Goleman writes, “Leaders who have mastered four or more [styles] – especially the authoritative, democratic, affiliative, and coaching styles – have the very best climate and business performance. And the most effective leaders switch flexibly among the leadership styles as needed” (p. 87).

In keeping with the assertions of Goleman (2000), many other authors advocate for the utilization of flexible leadership styles that best address current circumstances (Green, 2004a; Matthews & Crow, 2003; Schwahn & Spady, 1998). The contention is that this type of leadership will ensure principals have the ability and courage to act in a way that satisfies the issues before them, even if it requires the utilization of different or novel strategies.
Once an appropriate leadership strategy was been identified, the principal can then focus on addressing the current issues. Accordingly focus represents the eighth principal responsibility.

**Principal Responsibility 8: Focus**

Marzano et al. (2005) describe focus as the principal’s ability to set goals and utilize strategies that culminate in a realization of previously established objectives. Specifically “…the responsibility of focus refers to the extent to which the leader establishes clear goals and keeps those goals at the forefront of the school’s attention” (p. 50). By adhering to this responsibility the principal ensures that the school community will not waste energy on the latest fad or idea. Instead the principal ensures the school will focus on meaningful and achievable initiatives designed to enhance teaching and subsequent student learning.

To maintain focus, the leader must constantly discuss and communicate the school’s goals with appropriate stakeholders, thereby acting as a medium for genuine dialogue. Furthermore, the principal must also recognize and employ suitable strategies for the attainment of each goal. These two actions will help the school maintain focus. As Sagor (1992) points out,

Developing a common focus doesn’t occur through spontaneous generation. Rather a leader usually serves as the medium through which the collective yearnings of a group of empowered professionals can take form and give direction for both group and individual work (p. 13).
McEwan (2003) also highlights the importance of focusing on achievable goals when she labels the principal as an envisioner. For McEwan, a key trait of an envisioner, and thus an effective principal, is focus. Consequently,

[Effective principals] realize that they cannot do it all but know exactly what to eliminate to be most effective. They have the ability to block out the irrelevant, ignore the inconsequential, and disregard the unimportant. They have the discipline that is required to focus their limited resources on the task at hand (p. 45).

Further assisting any principal in maintaining focus on the school’s goals is the school’s agreed upon vision statement (Hayes, 2004; Neuman & Simmons, 2000; Sashkin, 1986; Senge et al., 2000). In discussing the principal’s responsibilities in relation to the school’s vision statement, Neuman & Simmons point out,

The leader’s responsibilities are to provide direction and guidance for the implementation of [the] vision, to keep it constantly evident in their own words and actions, and to help the school community remain faithful to the vision in its daily practice (p. 11).

Establishing a keen focus on the school’s vision is also identified by the state of Massachusetts as an essential administrative quality. Contained within the states regulations, Massachusetts offers the Principles for Effective Administrative Leadership
and Examples of Descriptors. Principle I (A) of this document states that, “The administrator facilitates the development of a shared mission and vision.” (603 CMR 35.00). In this way, Massachusetts also validates Marzano et al.’s (2005) contention that focus on mission and vision is a crucial leadership responsibility.

By constantly discussing, reinforcing and citing the school’s vision, a principal is working to ensure that all school community members are appropriately focused and free of distractions. As Marzano et al. (2005) stress, this trait is crucial to the success of a principal.

Lastly, a major aspect of appropriate focus is that it is rooted in the ideals and beliefs held by the principal. Consequently the ninth principal responsibility discusses the principal’s responsibility to act upon a consistent belief system that stresses exceptional teaching and sustained student learning.

*Principal Responsibility 9: Ideals/Beliefs*

When discussing *Ideals/Beliefs*, the ninth responsibility of the effective principal, Marzano et al. (2005) offer the following:

Specific behaviors and characteristics associated with this responsibility and identified in our meta-analysis are the following:

- possessing well-defined beliefs about schools, teaching and learning
- sharing beliefs about school, teaching and learning with staff
- demonstrating behaviors that are consistent with beliefs (p 51).
Evans (1995) also offers commentary on the importance of a consistent belief system he states that,

Each principal upon assuming the role brings to it (or should) a belief system that encapsulates his or her understanding of the principalship and his or her sense of what is important in terms of administrative behavior, leadership, schools, and schooling … Anyone who serves as a principal and cannot articulate and act upon a set of internally consistent beliefs and principles does not deserve the title. It is this sense of consistency, coherence and wholeness that we call integrity (p.5-7)

Beyond establishing a sense of integrity, a core belief system will also serve as the principal’s internal compass, guiding and determining the principal’s behavior within varying circumstances. To maximize the effectiveness of the principal’s belief system, it must also be effectively communicated to the school in which the principal serves. Over time the principal’s core belief system, if accepted as reasonable given the school’s mission, will ultimately serve as a guide for all working within the school (Bolman & Deal, 1997).

In short, the values held by the principal, when effectively communicated to all, will significantly influence not only the principal’s actions, but also the way in which the school operates (Marzano et al., 2005).

It is equally important that an effective principal’s value system remain consistent from year to year while also possessing the strength to persevere in the face of unfounded criticism. In talking about effective principals Green (2004b) states that “Effective
principals are grounded in a belief system, have the courage to stick to their beliefs – that is to swim upstream – have a social conscience and are devoted to their purpose” (p. 17).

Having the ability to stick to one’s belief system, especially when that system is enduring inappropriate challenge will help ensure the school stays focused on the agreed upon mission and not find itself in a constant state of flux (Marzano et al., 2005).

But sticking to one’s belief system does not preclude the principal from listening to all members of the school community. In fact seeking input from the community will be very important to the success of a principal. For that reason, input constitutes the tenth principal responsibility.

Principal Responsibility 10: Input

According to Marzano et al. (2005) “Input refers to the extent to which the school leader involves teachers in the design and implementation of important decisions and policies” (p. 51). By exercising the responsibility of input, the principal is cognizant of seeking out and, when appropriate, acting upon the views and assertions of the faculty in order to further the educational mission of the school.

To successfully gain input from teachers and others, the principal must ask pertinent questions, but equally important, the principal must exercise highly adept listening skills. McEwan (2003) talks about the importance of listening when she writes, A major difference between highly effective principals and their less effective colleagues is that successful administrators learn early in their careers that the ability to listen isn’t just a nice thing to do: It is an essential thing to do (p. 7)
It is having the ability to listen that will help keep the principal informed of the school’s current realities, thus maximizing the value of community input.

Neuman & Simmons (2000) take the idea of input one step further and incorporate it into their definition of distributed leadership. They assert that an effective principal will routinely seek input from faculty and staff while allowing for appropriately qualified members of the community to take action upon the provided input.

Neuman and Simmons (2000) summarize their position by stating “In the most effective schools we have worked with, every member of the education community has the responsibility – and the authority to take appropriate leadership roles” (p. 9). In this way faculty input is sought and where appropriate, faculty members take the lead in acting upon the given input.

By attending to the responsibility of input, effective principals also further the development of transformational leadership. The value of transformational leadership is that it helps establish agreed upon beliefs about what the school should be doing. Ultimately, transformational leadership bonds people in a shared collective vision. This bonding produces ownership over all school goals where faculty and staff feel responsible for the success of not only their classroom, but of the entire school (Bolman & Deal, 1997; Mitchell & Tucker, 1992; Sergiovanni, 2006; Terry, 1996). According to Sergiovanni, through the utilization of transformational leadership:

Leaders and followers are united in pursuit of higher-level goals that are common to both. Both want to become the best. Both want to shape the school in a new
direction. When transformative leadership is practiced successfully, purposes that might have started out being separate become fused (p. 164)

The benefit of engaging in transformative leadership is that it allows for the formation of common meanings, belief systems and aspirations regarding the goals of a particular school (Mitchell & Tucker, 1992).

The effective principal, who focuses on gaining input from staff, will be working towards constructing a common school culture grounded in shared beliefs and goals. According to Mitchell & Tucker (1992) the notion behind transformative leadership is that “…quality education will arise when professional staff agree about educational goals and the most effective strategies for attainment” (p. 32). The foundational act for fostering such agreement first resides in fulfilling the responsibility of input.

However, input can also require the principal to seek and consult outside knowledge sources in order to more thoroughly understand the provided input. This seeking of knowledge can result in intellectual stimulation, the eleventh principal responsibility discussed by Marzano et al. (2005).

Principal Responsibility 11: Intellectual Stimulation

The eleventh responsibility, intellectual stimulation, requires the principal to remain current and knowledgeable of the latest trends and innovations within education. Once the principal is up to date on current educational practices, he or she must then
ensure that all appropriate educational innovations are disseminated to the faculty. Accordingly, Marzano et al. (2005) refers to intellectual stimulation as:

…the extent to which the school leader ensures that the faculty and staff are aware of the most current theories and practices regarding effective schooling and makes discussions of those theories and practices a regular aspect of the school’s culture. (p. 52).

Many principals help satisfy the responsibility of intellectual stimulation by providing valuable professional development opportunities for their staff (Green, 2004a; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2002; T. Whitaker, 2003; Wohlstetter & Briggs, 1994). Yet to be effective, professional development must be relevant to teacher needs. Accordingly, Matthews & Crow (2003) believe that effective “…professional development must be related to the needs of the school personnel to fulfill the collective vision.” (p. 187).

Matthews & Crow (2003) go on to stress the importance of personalized professional development stating,

Individual needs must be considered as much – if not more – than institutional needs. Teachers and support staff differ in their years of experience, gender, stage of career and life, and expertise in certain areas. Teachers can and will support development when they can choose the type of learning that is best for them. Seldom, if ever, should … a principal or assistant principal enforce professional development programs on others. If it is not voluntary, then little learning will take place. (p. 187).
The above contention is further echoed by Saphier and King (1985) when they state that “…leaders might require teachers to work on expanding their repertoires of teaching skills but leave the choice of how and what up to them.” (p. 69). In this way the principal supports the teacher to become an active participant in their learning and not the victim of an outside process that may or may not be overly relevant to a teacher’s given situation.

Sergiovanni (2006) also furthers the notion of the principal supporting the intellectual growth of his or her teachers via teacher centered professional development. To this end Sergiovanni writes,

In professional development models, the teacher’s capacities, needs and interests are paramount. They are actively involved in contributing data and information, solving problems, analyzing, and so forth. Principals are involved as colleagues. Together, principals and teachers work to develop a common purpose themed to the improvement of teaching and learning. Together, principals and teachers work to build a learning and inquiring community. (p. 274)

To further satisfy the responsibility of intellectual stimulation, Hayes (2004) offers a practical suggestion that will contribute to the collective knowledge of the professional staff. “Some principals actually lead early morning or after-school book discussion groups. An important book is chosen and read by the principal and volunteer faculty. Each week, the group comes together to discuss a portion of the book.” (p. 99).
The point behind Hayes’ (2004) recommendation is that the most effective professional development often is marked by principal participation. It is something the principal and teacher(s) do together, so that both parties benefit. Many advise that professional development should not be something done too the staff, as this often breeds resentment and a lack of motivation. Rather it should be approached in a collective fashion with both administrators and teachers engaged in the initiative (Busher, 2006; Marzano et al., 2005; Matthews & Crow, 2003; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2002).

Naturally, when principals engage in professional development with their staff they are better equipped to discuss the latest innovations within the education field. Discussion and deliberation of such topics is the core of Marzano et al. (2005) twelfth responsibility, Involvement in Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment.

*Principal Responsibility 12: Involvement in Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment*

Many authors indirectly talk about the twelfth responsibility when they describe the principal as an “Instructional Leader.” (Rallis & Highsmith, 1986; Terry, 1996; B. Whitaker, 1997). For Marzano et al. (2005), involvement in curriculum, instruction and assessment “…addresses the extent to which the principal is directly involved in the design and implementation of curriculum, instruction, and assessment activities at the classroom level.” (p. 53). Effective principals routinely engage in this type of behavior.

Bolstering support for this responsibility, Sergiovanni (2006) while discussing the 1978 Gilbert Austin study comparing 18 high-achieving and 12 low-achieving schools, maintains that “In high-achieving schools, principals exerted strong leadership,
participated directly and frequently in instructional matters, had high expectations for success, and were oriented toward academic goals.” (p. 190).

Concurringly, Matthews & Crow (2003) emphasizes that principals take on “…an instructional leadership role, in which principals are expected to focus on teaching and learning and facilitate the learning community of the school.” (p. 47)

Along the same lines, Starratt (2004) in discussing the details of his ethic of responsibility, states that:

Leaders have a responsibility to teachers as learners. This implies that the leaders [the principal] will explore with the teachers what their learning interests are, as well as what the teachers need to learn to help their students learn better. (p.53)

The underlying premise behind the previous assertions is that the effective principal is charged with the responsibility of being routinely involved in curriculum, instruction and assessment such that the school and its teachers are delivering sound educational practices that will enhance student learning. (Marzano et al., 2005; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2002; Terry, 1996).

Yet to be appropriately involved in the planning and design of curriculum, instruction and assessment, the principal must have a foundational knowledge of these disciplines. Accordingly, the thirteenth responsibility, knowledge of curriculum, instruction and assessment speaks to this foundation.

Principal Responsibility 13: Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment
Principal responsibility infers that the principal will have a deep and rich understanding of curriculum, instruction and assessment. Marzano et al. (2005) states that “Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment addresses the extent to which the leader is aware of best practices in these domains. The focus here is on the acquisition and cultivation of knowledge …” (p. 54).

To this end the effective principal should be a life-long consumer of knowledge in order to ensure his or her educational practice is appropriately informed (McEwan, 2003; O'Hanlon & Clifton, 2004; T. Whitaker, 2003).

Matthews & Crow (2003) validate this assertion when they talk about the importance of being a continual learner, especially in light of the constant innovation currently permeating our society. Accordingly, Matthews & Crow state, “As a principal in a society where knowledge forms the basis of the economy, [the principal] must be a learner and must facilitate learning in others.” (p. 49). Furthermore Marzano et al. (2005) goes on to state that:

Specific behaviors and characteristics … associated with this responsibility are the following:

- possessing extensive knowledge about effective instructional practices
- possessing extensive knowledge about curricular practices
- possessing extensive knowledge about effective assessment practices
- providing conceptual guidance regarding effective classroom practices. (p. 55)
By adhering to the responsibility of *knowledge of curriculum, instruction and assessment*, the principal will be improving his or current knowledge base. This knowledge can then be disseminated to the teaching faculty, where appropriate, to better ensure the students are provided with sound educational activities.

The state of Massachusetts, in section I(C) of its Principles of Effective Administrative Leadership, also stressed that the principal remain current in educational practice. To accomplish this goal, “The administrator applies current principles, practices, and research to foster effective teaching.” (603 CMR 35.00). Furthermore, section VI (A) of the same document states that “The administrator demonstrates enthusiasm for his/her learning … [while], 1. Demonstrating that life long learning and professional development are necessary for self and others.” (603 CMR 35.00). In this way the principal can help ensure that both he/she and the teaching faculty are providing sound instructional activities for the students within the school.

Yet to determine if the teaching faculty is providing sound educational activities, the principal must both monitor and evaluate what is taking place within a given school. The responsibility to monitor and evaluate represents the fourteenth responsibility an effective principal must satisfy and is discussed below.

*Principal Responsibility 14: Monitoring/Evaluating*

According to Marzano et al. (2005), the responsibility of *Monitoring/Evaluating* “… refers to the extent to which the leader monitors the effectiveness of school practices in terms of their impact on student achievement.” (p. 55). To this end the principal will
ultimately supervise and evaluate the teaching staff to ensure teaching practices are as appropriate as possible given the needs of the students.

Sergiovanni (2006) is very direct in discussing the need for supervision within a school setting. To this end he argues that:

Principals can no longer get away with just talking about the importance of teacher quality to advancing teaching and learning and the importance of building up the collective intelligence of their schools. They must take the lead by visibly and directly assuming their supervisory responsibilities. (p. 291)

In his earlier work, Sergiovanni & Starratt (2002) again stresses the importance of principal supervision and the realization of the Monitoring/Evaluating responsibility when he states:

[Principal Supervisors] are obliged to concentrate on what students are learning in relationship to what curriculum standards and state tests indicate they are supposed to be learning. Rather than looking for teaching strategies that the school systems consider effective … supervisors have to look for observable evidence that’s students are learning as a result of the various stimuli presented by all their teachers. Supervisors are challenged to sit down, not simply with individual teacher after teacher to discuss specific teaching skills, but more so with groups of teachers to discuss which students are learning at the required levels and which are not … The job of the supervisor is to help teachers pinpoint
the source of the developing difficulty … and to monitor the gradual improvement in the students’ learning. (p. 4).

At the heart of this responsibility is the principal’s capacity to gain information about the effectiveness of teaching and subsequent student learning within the school. The effective principal must then apply this information such that the best possible educational opportunities are available to all students (Marzano et al., 2005; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2002).

Likewise, Massachusetts also supports the principal’s responsibility to monitor and evaluate the teaching staff. Specifically, principle 1(G) of Principles of Effective Administrative Leadership requires that, “The administrator works with teachers and other staff to supervise and evaluate their performance, using performance standards, and to identify areas of growth.” (603 CMR 35.00).

In satisfying the Monitoring/Evaluating responsibility, the principal will likely encounter teachers that are not utilizing the most effective instructional means. While these teachers may be difficult to deal with, the principal who utilizes an optimistic approach will most likely inspire others to make the necessary instructional changes. Accordingly, the fifteenth principal responsibility advocated by Marzano et al. (2005) is optimizer.

*Principal Responsibility 15: Optimizer*
According to Marzano et al. (2005) the optimizer “…refers to the extent to which the leader inspires others and is the driving force when implementing a challenging innovation.” (p. 56). In this way the effective principal will help provide motivation for others by maintaining a positive attitude in response to challenges and difficult tasks that lie ahead.

O’Hanlon & Clifton (2004) describe the qualities of an optimizer principal this way:

You hear it said that we should see problems as opportunities. Effective principals really do. Problems provide the avenue to make things better. They provide ways to help bring out the best in people. Effective principals believe there is an answer to every problem and that they will come up with it. Their mind set is that there is always a better way to do things. … Effective principals can be identified by their optimistic approach to their work. Optimism is present even in the most dire situations. (p. 23-24).

McEwan (2003) readily acknowledges that principals will face formidable problems during their tenure as principal, but she too asserts that the most effective principals will successfully navigate these times by building on strengths:

When principals become ensnared in the [criticism] trap, the only way to get out is to begin keeping track of the ratio of positive, reinforcing comments to negative comments that are made. … Highly effective principals recommend a nine-to-one ratio to their colleagues who are prone to overcorrect and critique. Highly
effective principals major in positives, focus on what’s working and build on strengths rather than highlighting weaknesses. (p. 64-65)

While positive optimism can certainly help individuals, it often helps the overall school community address future challenges. Consider the following:

One of the key responsibilities of an effective leader is to create a positive atmosphere. So many things can bring teachers down: an upset parent, a troubled student, limited resources. … As leaders our job is to continually take a positive approach. (Whitaker, 2003, p. 23)

Whitaker (2003) goes on to state that when principals possess a positive outlook in the face of challenge, they provide energy and force that better enables all school community member to effectively deal with difficult circumstances. “Focusing on all the positive things in our schools – and there are many – gives us more drive and energy to get through the less positive times.” (p. 25).

By having an optimistic outlook, even in the face of adversity, the effective principal is working to make certain that people feel inspired and empowered to address the challenges at hand (Marzano et al., 2005).

What also helps principals and the school community navigate difficult times is the establishment and consistency of effective operating principles that govern the school. Simply stated, such principles can be described as order, the sixteenth principal responsibility offered by Marzano et al. (2005).
Principal Responsibility 16: Order

Principal responsibility 16, order, as defined by Marzano et al. (2005) is “…the extent to which the leader establishes a set of standard operating principles and routines.” (p.57). The result of order is that people within the school are afforded certain predictability within their daily endeavors. This predictability makes focusing on the work at hand much easier for teachers and students (Marzano et al., 2005).

For Bolman & Deal (1997) the term structure is fairly synonymous with the Marzano et al. (2005) definition of order. For Bolman and Deal, “Structure is the blueprint for the pattern of expectations and exchanges among internal players (executives, managers, employees) and external constituencies (such as customers and clients).” (p. 38-39). It is this structure that helps the organization or school meet agreed upon obligations to the students and community.

O’Hanlon & Clifton (2004) also discuss the importance of structure in achieving an orderly school. Specifically, O’Hanlon & Clifton state that “Students expect structure and so do the teachers. The proper supporting structures enable them to do their best work.” (p. 29). Thus, the effective principal will be adept at maintaining an orderly school where students and teachers are allowed to do their best work in an atmosphere free of disorganization.

Order can also be described in terms of management responsibilities (Rallis & Highsmith, 1986). For Rallis & Highsmith, “Management means keeping the nuts and bolts in place and the machinery working smoothly.” (p. 300). In the context of a school,
Rallis & Highsmith infer that order is a central element to the managerial success of a principal:

As a manager alone, the principal has more than enough duties to keep busy. First, he or she must orchestrate all the loosely coupled structures of the building organization so that they can work together smoothly. Before teachers can begin to instruct students, custodians must have prepared classrooms and cleaned hallways; classes must be scheduled and students assigned; cafeteria workers must prepare meals; heat and electricity must be working. Most of all, there must continually communication with parents and district offices. (p. 301).

Cleary, the principal’s ability to create and ultimately maintain an ordered school environment will influence the level of teaching and subsequent student learning taking place within the school. Consequently the effective principal is encouraged to establish an orderly school conducive to high levels of student achievement.

To maximize the previously mentioned student achievement, the principal is also encouraged to involve the entire community in supporting the educational goals of the school. Such outreach can increase the teaching capacity of the school and thus represents the seventeenth responsibility discussed Marzano et al. (2005).

*Principal Responsibility 17: Outreach*
In talking about outreach, Marzano et al. (2005) stresses that a school should not act in isolation and instead tap the many resources available in order to complement the existing educational program. Accordingly they state:

A school is not an island. Rather, it functions in a complex context that must be addressed if a school is to be highly effective. The responsibility of Outreach refers to the extent to which the leader is an advocate and a spokesperson for the school to all stakeholders. (p. 58)

The state of Massachusetts also advocates for the principal engaging in outreach initiatives with the community. In section V (B) of the Principles of Effective Administrative Leadership, it is asserted that “The administrator promotes partnerships among staff, parents, business and the community.” (603 CMR 35.00). In this way the principal can garner support for instructional programs beyond the resources found within school walls.

In light of this assertion, the effective principal is encouraged to identify and capitalize upon all available resources such that the school’s educational mission is adequately furthered.

Not surprisingly, in describing the qualities of effective principals many authors cite community outreach as a critical component to school success (Davis, 1998; Lindley, 2003; Senge et al., 2000). Davis rather bluntly describes the importance of outreach when he states that “Effective principals are visionaries who can galvanize and mobilize school-community support around shared beliefs and goals for the school.” (p. 8).
This type of support can yield huge benefits for the educational growth of many students. As Senge et al. (2000) point out:

When schools learn to see the value of other groups that affect children’s lives, and other groups learn to see the value and connections of schools, then new possibilities emerge. Support groups that work with children in poverty suddenly hook up not just with social services but with educators. Educational experiences occur across numerous community institutions: museums, symphonies, public libraries, Scouts, theaters, conservation groups, public services, religious organizations, local law enforcement, HeadStart and businesses. (p. 464).

Clearly, it is these types of connections with the community that an effective principal will cultivate and nurture. When the connections are successfully made, Neuman & Simmons (2000) assert that principals will find that their …

… schools make use of the knowledge and skills of community members; they value the community outside the school and want to elicit community feedback, both positive and negative; and they provide a place where everyone feels welcome and encouraged to get involved in student learning. (p. 11).

This type of community engagement can further the educational goals of the school, making satisfaction of the outreach responsibility crucial to the effective principal (Davis, 1998; Marzano et al., 2005; Matthews & Crow, 2003; Neuman & Simmons, 2000; Senge et al., 2000).
While outreach can certainly enhance the educational opportunities the school provides for students, it can also aid in the development of relationships. Relationships, both within a school and the community, are crucial to the success of a principal. Accordingly the eighteenth principal responsibility is titled *Relationships*.

**Principal Responsibility 18: Relationships**

In discussing the importance of relationships to the success of a principal, Marzano et al. (2005) state that:

A case can be made that effective professional relationships are central to the effective execution of many of the other responsibilities. In the context of our meta-analysis, the responsibility of *Relationships* refers to the extent to which the school leader demonstrates an awareness of the personal lives of teachers and staff. (p. 58)

Relationships exist everywhere and a school is no different. However, in a school setting it is the principal’s responsibility to ensure that all relationships are tended to on both a professional and personal level (Starratt, 1994). Starratt talks directly to the principal’s responsibility of nurturing relationships when he describes his ethic of care:

This ethic places the human persons-in-relationship as occupying a position for each other of absolute value; neither one can be used as a means to an end; each enjoys and intrinsic dignity and worth, and, given the chance, will reveal genuinely lovable qualities. An ethic of care requires fidelity to persons, a
willingness to acknowledge their right to be who they are, an openness to encountering them in their authentic individuality, a loyalty to the relationship. Such an ethic … postulates a level of caring that honors the dignity of each person and desires to see that person enjoy a fully human life. (p. 52)

By first treating people with the dignity and respect, effective principals begin the journey of establishing trusting relationships (Chirichello & Richmond, 2007). As Chirichello & Richmond point out, “Effective school leaders know the importance of building trusting relationships. They know that relationships grow and strengthen over time. They acknowledge that accessibility and proximity are essential to building relationships.” (p. 15).

The major benefit to establishing trusting relationships is the influence afforded to the principal as a result of such relationships (Bolman & Deal, 1997; Busher, 2006; Chirichello & Richmond, 2007). Matthews & Crow (2003) reiterate this claim when they state, “Principals and assistant principals need to build networks [relationships] wherein a large number of people can influence each other.” (p. 139). It is this influence that will help the principal build support for the many school initiatives.

Without positive relationships and the influence those relationships carry, the principal will have a very difficult time acquiring the resources needed to further the educational mission of the school. Acquiring and attending to these resources represents the nineteenth principal responsibility identified by Marzano et al. (2005).
**Principal Responsibility 19: Resources**

When describing the nineteenth principal responsibility, Marzano et al. (2005) states that “… the responsibility of Resources refers to the extent to which the leader provides teachers with materials and professional development necessary for the successful execution of their duties.” (p. 60). In this regard the principal serves as a provider for the teachers, ensuring that they have access to the materials necessary for fostering high achievement levels among students.

Hayes (2004) also speaks about the principal’s role in providing adequate resources for the teaching staff. To this end Hayes writes,

> As an intellectual leader of a school, the administrator must join with the faculty in an ongoing effort to remain involved in learning about the field. Money should be set aside for a professional library, and educational periodicals should be made readily available to all faculty members. (p. 98-99).

While Hayes’ (2004) statement also speaks to principal responsibility 13, *Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment*, he further validates the Marzano et al.’s (2005) assertion that the principal must help set aside the necessary resources for the teaching staff.

The resources allocated to the teachers can also take the form of professional development opportunities. Such professional development opportunities must be structured to foster refinement of teacher’s instructional practice, thereby improving the educational experience for all students. As Sergiovanni (2006) points out,
Professional development approaches emphasize providing teachers with a rich environment loaded with teaching materials, media, books and devices. With encouragement and support, teachers interact with this environment and with each other through exploration and discovery. (p. 273).

When a principal offers this type of professional support, teachers that embrace the professional development opportunities are more likely to see a strengthening of their instructional skills. It is this strengthening that leads to enhanced instructional activities for students (Matthews & Crow, 2003; McEwan, 2003; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2002; T. Whitaker, 2003).

While the effective principal will provide adequate resources to teachers and staff, he or she will also tailor those resources to address the situation at hand. Having the ability to identify current teacher needs and then provide appropriate support brings us to the twentieth principal responsibility, situational awareness.

**Principal Responsibility 20: Situational Awareness**

According to Marzano et al. (2005) “Situational Awareness addresses the leaders’ awareness of the details and undercurrents regarding the functioning of the school and their use of this information to address current and potential problems.” (p. 60). Many authors claim that maintaining such awareness is crucial to the effectiveness of a principal and the subsequent running of a school (Bolman & Deal, 1997; Goleman, 2000; Marzano et al., 2005; McEwan, 2003; Waters et al., 2004).
Goleman (2000) discusses situational awareness in his conversation of multiple leadership styles and the degree to which the effective principal utilizes different leadership styles depending upon the situation. Consider the following, “…the research indicates that leaders with the best results do not rely on only one leadership style; they use most of them in a given week – seamlessly and in different measure – depending on the business situation.” (p. 79-80). It is situational awareness that will allow the effective principal to realize changes in the situation and thus act accordingly.

As Bolman & Deal (1997) point out, having the ability to maintain situational awareness is a crucial to one’s success. Those who lack this ability usually encounter difficult situations that could have otherwise been avoided.

To illustrate this point, Bolman & Deal (1997) highlight the crew of a jetliner that mistook abnormally high airspeed readouts as being accurate. The distorted readouts resulted from freeze up on the airspeed indicators, something the professional crew, given their extensive training and preparation, should have realized. As a result, the plane was actually traveling at a speed much lower than the instruments indicated. Since the crew was not situationally aware, they pulled back on the throttle to reduce speed when in fact they should have done the opposite. As a result, the plane crashed killing all aboard. As Bolman & Deal put it, “The costs of misreading a situation can be dire – in an airplane, a business, or government.” (p. 5).

McEwan (2003) also discusses the importance of situational awareness, specifically when undertaking change initiatives at a school. To first understand the
situation it is imperative that the principal listen to the community members so that an accurate picture of the situation materializes.

Once the situation has been appropriately analyzed, the principal is in a much better position to address the situation. This action may differ depending upon the community, hence it is critical that the principal assess the situation properly. As McEwan (2003) points out “Every school community requires a somewhat different approach to change, but using the wrong one can frustrate or derail needed improvements.” (p. 79). Thus having a keen awareness of the situation will ensure that the principal takes action appropriate for the given situation.

As with all things a principal does, the actions taken to address a situation will usually be visible to a great deal of people. These people will then form perceptions and opinions about the school and principal based upon what they see. Thus the manner in which a principal attends to the twenty-first responsibility, visibility, will influence the level of success and acceptance a school enjoys.

Principal Responsibility 21: Visibility

According to Marzano et al. (2005), the twenty-first responsibility of Visibility “… addresses the extent to which the school leader has contact and interacts with teachers, students and parents” (p.61). To successfully meet the requirements of this responsibility the principal must engage all stakeholders on a routine basis, particularly in matters of curriculum and instruction.
Whitaker (1997) offers further specifics on how the effective principal satisfies the responsibility of visibility in both the school and local communities when she writes: To create a visible presence in the day-to-day activities, principals must model behaviors consistent with the school’s vision; live and breathe their beliefs in education; organize resources to accomplish building and district goals; informally drop in on classrooms; make staff development activities a priority; and, most of all, help people do the right things and reinforce those activities.

Whitaker (1997) goes on to identify the classroom visit as an important avenue to enhance visibility. Whitaker writes further:

Effective instructional leaders must make it a point to visit classrooms daily. These visits should be structured to show that they have meaning and purpose. They validate the idea that the classrooms are where the truly important activities in the school occur and that instructional leadership is the most critical responsibility of the school principal. (p. 2).

The most effective principals also know that being visible is not limited solely to the school walls. The principal must also be visible within the community (Rallis & Highsmith, 1986). Such visibility allows the principal to deliver a clear message regarding school progress, while also allowing one to gauge community perceptions of the school. Rallis & Highsmith expound upon this point when they write:
…few people on the outside really understand the workings of any given school. People judge a school from what they can readily see combined with what they have always believed. Thus a principal’s every act and word must be performed or spoken with the external environment in mind. A principal must be visible, making sure that the culture of the school does not clash with the culture of the community. (p. 302)

Thus, by remaining visible within both the school and local communities the effective principal sends the important message that he or she is very interested in the workings and success of the school. Visibility also helps the principal to establish ties and relationships that will ultimately keep him or her informed with regard to substantive issues affecting the school (Marzano et al., 2005).

*The Responsibilities of an Effective Principal – Brief Commentary*

The aforementioned discussion of Marzano et al.’s (2005) 21 principal responsibilities is critical for properly addressing the research questions guiding my study. As a reminder, those questions are:

1. What types of criteria and evidence does a superintendent consider when evaluating the effectiveness of a principal within his/her school district?

2. When evaluating a principal’s performance, what processes and practices does a superintendent utilize to acquire the aforementioned evidence?
3. What level of consistency exists between the principal evaluation practices advocated in the literature and the principal evaluation practices actually in use?

While maintaining a clear understanding of a principal’s responsibilities is beneficial for addressing all of the previous research questions, it is most helpful for answering questions one and three. The very nature of questions one and three require me to have a broad understanding of an effective principal’s responsibilities in order to proceed.

It is also important to note that Marzano et al. (2005) 21 responsibilities, as comprehensive as they are, may not capture all that the effective principal must do. Consider Davis (1998) and his claim that “…the attributes of effective principals simply can’t be reduced to a statistical checklist …” (p. 6).

The problem with a “checklist” is that it does not account for the local context within which a principal may operate.

For example, consider the principal who receives a specific directive from the superintendent to determine the maintenance needs of the school during the summer months. While this assignment would constitute a responsibility according to the evaluating superintendent, something this specific might not be covered by Marzano et al. (2005). Thus, responsibilities such as the previous example will materialize largely on a local level and vary from school to school depending upon the specific context facing the principal in question.
However, despite this criticism of Marzano et al.’s (2005) 21 responsibilities, what is very notable is their assertion that “… all 21 of the [principal] responsibilities we identified have a statistically significant relationship with student achievement.” (p. 62).

That being said, the principal who can effectively master each of the responsibilities is likely to have a positive influence on the academic achievement of students within his or her school. In this light, the 21 responsibilities become very relevant to the development, effectiveness and ultimately, evaluation, of a school principal.

As was noted at the start of this section, Marzano et al. (2005) presented the 21 responsibilities in alphabetical order. As Marzano et al. explains, they chose alphabetical order out of their desire “… to communicate the message that they [the 21 responsibilities] are all important.” (p. 62).

Marzano et al. (2005) further encourages looking at the 21 responsibilities on the whole because “Our findings indicate that all are important to the effective execution of leadership in schools.” (p. 64). In light of this assertion and the validating statements found in other works (Elmore, 2000; Evans, 1995; Fink & Resnick, 2001; Hayes, 2004; Neuman & Simmons, 2000; Sergiovanni, 2006; Terry, 1996), I chose to maintain the alphabetical format established by Marzano et al.

Section II: The Purpose of Principal Evaluation
The purpose of evaluating principals in the state of Massachusetts is best described through examination of the Code of Massachusetts Regulations. Specifically 603 CMR 35.01 states that:

The specific purpose of [administrative] evaluation under M.G.L. c. 71, §38 and 603 CMR 35.00 is:

(a) to provide information for the continuous improvement of performance through an exchange of information between the person being evaluated and the evaluator, and

(b) to provide a record of facts and assessments for personnel decisions.

In further commenting on the purpose of principal evaluation, Massachusetts state regulation 603 CMR 35.01, states that:

The purpose of 603 CMR 35.00 is to ensure that every school committee has a system to enhance the professionalism and accountability of teachers and administrators which enable them to assist all students at high levels. 603 CMR 35.00, together with the Principles of Effective Teaching and Principles of Effective Administrative Leadership … set out what Massachusetts teachers and administrators are expected to know and be able to do. 603 CMR 35.00 requires that school committees establish a rigorous and comprehensive evaluation process … to assure effective teaching and administrative leadership in the Commonwealth’s public schools.
Embedded in the Massachusetts regulations governing the evaluation of principals are three primary purposes.

The first purpose centers on improving the principal’s performance. This desire is best evidenced by the statement “… to provide information for the continuous improvement of performance” (603 CMR 35.01). Within the educational literature on principal evaluation, systems that attempt to support the development of an administrator’s skill set are commonly referred to as formative evaluation (Brown & Irby, 1998; Brown et al., 1998; Davis & Hensley, 1999; MacPhail-Wilcox & Forbes, 1990; Marcoulides et al., 1995; Normore, 2004).

A secondary purpose for evaluating principals in Massachusetts is the need to provide a summary record of the principal’s performance. This intention is best evidenced through Massachusetts’ desire “…to provide a record of facts and assessments for personnel decisions” (603 CMR 35.01). To satisfy this purpose, the use of summative evaluation is commonly employed (Brown & Irby, 1998; Green, 2004a; Harrison & Peterson, 1988; MacPhail-Wilcox & Forbes, 1990; Normore, 2004; Sousa, 2003).

Lastly, the final purpose of the Massachusetts principal evaluation regulations is to ensure the principal is held accountable for effectively operating his or her school. This purpose is best expressed in the statement, “603 CMR 35.00 requires that school committees establish a rigorous and comprehensive evaluation process … to assure effective teaching and administrative leadership in the Commonwealth’s public schools” (603 CMR 35.01). This purpose is often referred to as evaluation for accountability
In addition to the Massachusetts regulations, educational authors and researchers have also discussed the purposes behind principal evaluation. What follows is commentary on the three primary purposes of evaluation (formative, summative and accountability) as found in the current literature.

**Formative Evaluation**

According to MacPhail-Wilcox & Forbes (1990), the purpose behind formative evaluation is to develop and support the principal. They claim that,

[Formative evaluation], evaluation for development, helps administrators develop the skills needed to perform their duties effectively. Strategies used in this type of evaluation identify an administrator’s strengths and weaknesses in particular areas, and assist with and monitor improvements so that he or she continues to develop professionally. When appraising for this purpose, the evaluator functions as a *helper*. (p. 3).

Careful execution of formative evaluation requires close collaboration between the principal and central office personnel (Brown & Irby, 1998). Brown & Irby claim that, “During the formative evaluation stage, the principals and central office administrators review each principal’s annual goals and discuss how they relate to the collaboratively-developed district leadership standards/criteria” (p. 2).
In this way the evaluator can ensure the principal is provided reliable feedback that fosters development of the principal’s administrative and leadership skills (Brown et al., 1998; Fontana, 1994; Lashway, 1998; Normore, 2004; Thomas et al., 2000).

While the purpose behind formative evaluation is to help the principal develop professionally, summative evaluation is designed to judge the appropriateness of the principal’s actions as he or she attempts to satisfy the responsibilities of the principalship.

**Summative Evaluation**

In describing the purpose of summative evaluation, MacPhail-Wilcox & Forbes (1990) offer the following,

[Summative Evaluation] is evaluation for personnel decisions – retention or dismissal, contract renewal or termination, recognition or formal reprimand, promotions or reassignments, and distribution of performance incentives. Each of these decisions should be made thoughtfully and on the basis of carefully documented evaluation information. When appraising for this purpose, the evaluator functions as a cautious and fair judge (p. 4).

Normore (2004) also offers detailed commentary on the purpose of summative evaluation. Accordingly he writes,

Summative evaluation is done on an annual basis, not only for the purpose of improvement, but also and primarily for making decisions on tenure; advancement to leadership positions; and in those situations that have it, merit pay
or entry and advancement on the career ladder. This type of evaluation culminates in a comprehensive appraisal either annually or as otherwise required by the state or locality (p. 288).

In contrast, where formative evaluation attempts to further develop the skills and competencies of a principal (Brown & Irby, 1998; Green, 2004a; Harrison & Peterson, 1988; Marcoux et al., 2003), summative evaluation attempts to judge the quality of the skill set, competencies, and actions of the principal (Amsterdam, 2003; Harrison & Peterson, 1988; Lashway, 2003; Normore, 2004).

In addition to formative and summative purposes, principal evaluation is frequently being conducted to satisfy a growing thirst for accountability among policy makers and the general public. This third purpose, evaluation for accountability, is discussed below.

**Accountability Evaluation**

In discussing the evolving role of principal evaluation as an accountability tool, MacPhail-Wilcox & Forbes (1990), contend that,

… evaluation for accountability, ensures the community’s interest in the educational welfare of their children. The public is a paying customer. Thus they have legitimate expectations of administrators that must be met, concerns about how their tax dollars are used, and strong interest in the education their children receive. Maintaining public trust in schools and school personnel is very
important. When appraising for this purpose the evaluator functions as a
guardian of the public trust (p. 3).

In light of the above assertion, many authors conclude that evaluation for
accountability is needed to ensure that the principal is leading the school in a manner
consistent with state and local expectations (Amsterdam, 2003; Green, 2004a; Lashway,
1998; Thomas et al., 2000). Not surprisingly, principals who do not satisfy state and
local expectations, increasingly find themselves in jeopardy of losing their jobs. As
Davis & Hensley (1999) point out, “The bottom line is that principals who fail to win the
respect and trust of school constituents (including supervisors) simply do not last very
long” (p. 401).

Central to the three evaluative purposes highlighted above, is the notion that a
superintendent or designated person will make perceived judgments regarding the
principal’s performance. These judgments will lead to decisions and actions that will
ultimately impact the principal, his or her school, and the local school district. Yet what
guides an evaluator when making such consequential judgments about principal
performance? To answer this question, many have turned to administrative standards as a
guide for principal evaluation.

**Principal Evaluation Standards**

To satisfy the three primary purposes behind principal evaluation, many
evaluators utilize leadership standards to direct their assessment of a principal. As
mentioned above, Massachusetts state regulation 603 CMR 35.00, together with the Massachusetts Principles of Effective Teaching and Principles of Effective Administrative Leadership, describe the standards by which principals in Massachusetts must act. A review of the literature indicates that many other states also maintain similar standards. In addition to state standards, there are also non-binding national standards that can influence the evaluation of principals.

Chief among the non-binding national standards are those developed by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC), commonly referred to as the ISLLC Standards. A second, and lesser known set of principal standards were developed by the National Association of Elementary School principals. Both sets of principal standards are discussed below.

**ISLLC standards.** According to Murphy (2005), The ISSLC standards emerged out of a desire “…to influence the leadership skills of existing school leaders as much as they were to shape the knowledge, performances, and skills of prospective leaders in preparation programs” (p. 155). Consequently, six standards were developed to collectively guide the work of principals at the elementary, middle and high school levels (Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium, 1996). Those standards state that,

A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by:

1. facilitating the development, articulation, implementation and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community.
2. advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and professional growth.

3. ensuring management of the organization, operations and resources for a safe, efficient and effective learning environment.

4. collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.

5. acting with integrity, fairness and in an ethical manner

6. understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context. (p. 10-20)

In further describing the ISSLC standards and their accompanying success indicators, Lashway (1998) claims that,

ISLLC has boiled down its definition of leadership to six standards, raging from facilitating vision to nurturing school culture. The standards include specific success indicators. For example, the standard for vision includes indicators such as “the vision is developed with and among stakeholders,” “assessment data related to student learning are used to develop the school vision and goals” and “existing resources are used to support the school vision and goals.” (p. 16).
If a principal is described as satisfactorily meeting a given standard, it is understood that the success indicators accompanying the standard have been satisfied (Lashway, 1998).

While the ISSLC standards and their accompanying success indicators are largely seen as an aid to evaluating principals (Lashway, 1998; Marcoux et al., 2003; Sergiovanni, 2006) it must be stated that they do possess some limitations.

One such limitation is that the local context within which a principal performs cannot be fully accounted for by standards developed at the national level (Amsterdam, 2003; Lashway, 1998; Normore, 2004). To this end, Lashway (1998) cautions that “The ISLLC standards provide a good foundation for thinking about assessment, but the list should be refined and adapted to fit the leadership priorities in [the local] district” (p. 16).

A second criticism of the ISLLC standards centers on the manner in which they were constructed. Some claim the standards are not based on accepted scientific research and therefore represent nothing more than the opinions of those asked to participate in their construction (English, 2000).

More specifically, English states that, “Some dispositions and performances which comprise the standards are neither scientific (research based) nor empirically supportable. The standards are ambiguous and not without internal contradiction” (p. 159).

Subsequently, while there is lingering debate among some researchers as to the quality and applicability of the ISLLC standards (English, 2000; Joseph Murphy, 2005), the majority of authors were very supportive of their use, particularly when used to help
establish principal evaluation systems to satisfy the three primary purposes mentioned above (Hayes, 2004; Lindley, 2003; Joseph Murphy, 2005; Normore, 2004; Ricken, 2007; Sergiovanni, 2006).

According to Green (2004a) in addition to the ISLLC standards, “Another set of criteria is available from the National Association of Elementary School Principals through Leading in Learning Communities: Standards for What Principals Should Know and Be Able to Do (2001)” (p. 5). A brief discussion of the NAESP (2001) standards and the impact they have on the purpose of principal evaluation is described below.

**NAESP principal standards.** Though not as frequently referenced or discussed as the ISLLC standards, the NAESP principal standards represent an additional set of national standards for principals leading an elementary or middle school. As Green (2004a) points out, “One advantage of using national standards is the credibility that comes from a professional organization of school administrators” (p. 5). In this way an evaluation system that compares a principal’s performance to a set of national standards will position itself for enhanced credibility, something that speaks directly to evaluating a principal for the purpose of public accountability.

The NAESP principal standards were designed to provide a definition of what an effective instructional leader should be able to do while leading an elementary or middle school (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2001). Accordingly, the NAESP developed six standards which state that,

**Effective leaders:**

1. Lead schools in a way that places student and adult learning at the center.
2. Set high expectations and standards for academic and social development of all students and the performance of adults.

3. Demand content and instruction that ensure student achievement of agreed-upon academic standards.

4. Create a culture of continuous learning for adults tied to student learning and other school goals.

5. Use multiple sources of data as diagnostic tools to assess, identify and apply instructional improvement.

6. Actively engage the community to create shared responsibility for student and school success (p. 2).

Like the ISLLC standards, the NAESP standards were developed at the national level by individuals closely connected with the work of principals. Yet as mentioned above, when developing an evaluation system based upon the work and thoughts of national experts, there are certain limitations. Consider MacPhail-Wilcox & Forbes (1990) and their commentary on evaluation items derived primarily from expert opinion, unfortunately, [evaluation] items derived from tradition and expert opinion may be very different from what should be included in an evaluation system. They may be outdated and not relevant to what is really needed for satisfactory job performance. Items derived by these methods ignore the fact that what is needed to perform well in one educational setting need not be the same in a different setting (p. 13).
In light of this contention, many authors infer that national principal standards, while certainly beneficial, should be used as a guide or reference to assist in the establishment of localized principal evaluation systems (Green, 2004a; Hayes, 2004; MacPhail-Wilcox & Forbes, 1990; Ricken, 2007; Sergiovanni, 2006). In this way the resulting localized principal evaluation systems will garner the credibility that comes from being based upon a national body of work, but tailored to meet the specific needs of a given school or school district.

Finally, as mentioned above the NAESP standards pertain to elementary and middle school principals. A careful search of the relevant literature failed to identify a similar, comprehensive set of national standards designed specifically for high school principals.

The Purpose of Principal Evaluation – Brief Commentary

This section of the literature review is pertinent to addressing each research question guiding this study. As a reminder, those questions are:

1. What types of criteria and evidence does a superintendent consider when evaluating the effectiveness of a principal within his/her school district?

2. When evaluating a principal’s performance, what processes and practices does a superintendent utilize to acquire the aforementioned evidence?
3. What level of consistency exists between the principal evaluation practices advocated in the literature and the principal evaluation practices actually in use?

By examining the various purposes behind principal evaluation, I am better positioned to address each of the above research questions. With regard to question one, knowing the purposes behind principal evaluation will allow me to better understand the relationship between the criteria utilized and evidence collected when a superintendent evaluates a principal. As Green (2004a) points out,

*Why* we evaluate, *who* should evaluate, and *what* we evaluate all determine the nature of the evidence to be used in an evaluation system. For example, if the purpose of evaluation is to rank principals according to progress they make toward meeting standardized testing targets, then test score averages are valid evidence. If we decide that teachers should have a say in the evaluation of their principal, then data from a survey of teachers are necessary (p. 5).

Consequently, examining the evidence collected and its appropriateness to the purposes of principal evaluation is critical to the success of any evaluative tool and to addressing the first research question.

With regard to question two, by knowing the various purposes behind principal evaluation, I am better suited to assess the relevancy of the collection processes and practices utilized by principal evaluators. In particular, by compiling this section of
literature, I am in a much better position to examine the collection processes and practices employed by superintendents and the degree to which those practices yield information relevant to formative, summative and/or accountability geared evaluations.

Moreover, since different principal evaluation purposes likely require different types of data, many authors advocate for a diversified approach to collecting evidence meant to inform the evaluation (Fontana, 1994; Kempher & Cooper, 2002; Lashway, 2003; MacPhail-Wilcox & Forbes, 1990). To this end, Kempher & Cooper write,

Good leadership is very difficult to define, thus districts should adopt a variety of methods for evaluating principals. Districts should use different methods when developing the evaluation plan. Many of these different methods have a different focus [or purpose] therefore, they require different means of collecting data (p. 34).

Having a firm understanding of evaluation purposes advocated in the literature is also crucial for addressing the third research question. Obviously, to determine the consistency between the purposes discussed in the literature and those purposes behind current evaluative practice requires knowledge of the literature.

While I am unsure of the evaluative practices I will find through my field research, some authors contend that evaluation in practice is not overly consistent with evaluation procedures advocated in the literature (Green, 2004a; Kempher & Cooper, 2002; Normore, 2004). Consider Kempher & Cooper and their claim that, “Current principal evaluation practices often do not assess the effective leadership characteristics
recommended in the literature. Unfortunately, according to the literature, the typical principal assessment is only perfunctory” (p. 30).

Consequently, this section of literature is very relevant to the aims of this study as it places me in a much more favorable position to examine the manner in which principals are evaluated by their superintendents and the level of consistency between current practice and that recommended in the literature.

In light of the three major purposes fueling principal evaluation, that is, evaluation for formation, summation and accountability, along with the national and state standards developed to help guide evaluation toward satisfying these purposes, the next question centers on how one might undertake such evaluations. Appropriately, the next section contained within this literature review will examine the principal evaluation techniques offered by the literature.

Section III: Processes, Practices and Techniques of Principal Evaluation

The previous two sections of literature review discussed the responsibilities of an effective principal and the purposes behind principal evaluation. This section will review the evaluative processes, techniques and practices utilized by superintendents to evaluate principal performance. As many have noted, the evaluation of a principal is critical to ensuring that those charged with leading a school exhibit behaviors conducive to student learning and achievement (Davis & Hensley, 1999; Fontana, 1994; Herman, 1988; MacPhail-Wilcox & Forbes, 1990).
While principal evaluation techniques take many forms, Davis & Hensley (1999) point out the essential elements, namely that “Principal evaluation needs to be clear, consistent and purposeful” (p. 400). Herman (1988) goes a step further and contends that,

For a competency evaluation system to function well it should include:

- a clear statement of competency areas
- a list of example indicators
- a requirement that evidence be provided
- a weighting of competency areas
- a differentiated weighting for the various administrators to be evaluated

(p. 5)

On the surface, meeting the criteria advocated by Davis & Hensley (1999) and Herman (1988) sounds simple, but the complexity associated with the principalship makes evaluating the role anything but simple (Evans, 1995; Green, 2004a; Lashway, 2003; Neuman & Simmons, 2000; Normore, 2004).

Kempher & Cooper (2002) speak directly to the difficulty in evaluating the principalship in all its complexities when they state,

The role of the principal has been made more complex by the expectations and desired qualities that students, teachers, parents and central office administrators have come to demand of their leaders. The principal must be the facilitator, mediator, problem-solver, financial planner, disciplinarian, goal-setter, crisis

95
manager, special education expert, evaluator, and most importantly, instructional leader. In other words, the principal’s job has become so complex that it is difficult to define and even more difficult to evaluate. (p. 30).

Lashway (1998) also speaks to the complexity of the principalship and the corresponding difficulty associated with evaluating the role. Lashway states, “… trying to assess the work of principals is a challenging task. Today’s principalship is a complex, demanding and frequently ambiguous job that doesn’t lends itself to precise analysis” (p. 14).

Despite the difficulty in assessing a principal’s performance, evaluation continues as a method to support the instructional leader’s development, judge the leader’s performance and ensure public accountability to community expectations.

What follows is a review of the literature regarding the some of the more common processes and techniques currently cited with regard to evaluating school principals. These techniques include:

- rating scales/checklists
- 360-degree feedback/peer evaluation
- management by objective
- principal assessment centers
- principal portfolios
The aforementioned techniques represent the majority of those currently cited in the literature. Consequently they will be discussed in greater detail below in hopes of further informing the aims of this study.

**Rating Scales/Checklists**

In discussing rating scales/checklists, Green (2004a) claims they represent the most popular way for evaluating principals. Green goes on to state that, Their use dates back to the early 20th century, when modern techniques of industrial management were first introduced into education. Typically, a school district will adopt a form that lists expectations, the form will be made available to the principal, and then the principal’s immediate supervisor will complete the form and discuss it with the principal. (p. 21-22).

MacPhail-Wilcox & Forbes (1990) also describe rating scales and checklists. In their description they write, Checklists and rating scales are the oldest and most widely used formal models of administrative evaluation. These instruments assess traits, behaviors, processes and outcomes that administrators are expected to demonstrate. [They] require evaluators to make judgments about parts or all of an administrator’s performance. Depending upon the types of items and rating scales, evaluators must make high- or low-inference judgments … Most checklists and rating scales require appraisers to assign a single rating to performance at the end. Often these
global judgments are made on a scale that ranges from outstanding to poor, or excels to unsatisfactory. (p. 56).

Further discussing rating scales/checklists, Lashway (2003) references work in California (Stine, 2001) which explored the manner in which principal’s were evaluated. Lashway comments that “Checklists rated principals on a variety of behaviors or traits, ranging from time management to loyalty” (p. 2).

The appeal of rating scales and checklist resides in the ease of which they can be completed and managed (Green, 2004a). It is this ease that Green maintains is the central reason behind their widespread use. Unfortunately, as easy as they may be to implement, Green claims rating scales and checklists do have a downside. According to Green, “The problem with rating scales, even though they remain in wide use, is that principals do not find them especially helpful for improving performance” (p. 22). As a consequence the formative purpose behind evaluating a principal is not entirely achieved by rating scales alone.

The next technique for evaluating a principal, 360-degree Feedback/Peer Evaluation, holds better promise for supporting the growth and development of a principal.

360-degree Feedback/Peer Evaluation

360-degree feedback and peer evaluation can be classified as two separate evaluative techniques, but they maintain many similarities. Consequently they are
grouped together in this review with the understanding that significant differences will be appropriately highlighted.

When utilizing 360-degree feedback, the evaluated principal acquires data from multiple constituent groups to gain a complete picture of his or her performance as perceived by the various constituents. Typically, a principal will solicit insights from students, parents, teachers, building staff, fellow administrators, the superintendent, school board members and other community stakeholders.

The insights are culled through surveys, interviews, discussions and other forms of written and verbal feedback. The principal and his or her evaluator then utilize the collected feedback in an effort to gauge the extent to which the principal is satisfying the demands of the principalship, as defined by the school district and superintendent (Dyer, 2001).

The idea behind 360-degree feedback is that a principal who receives feedback from multiple perspectives will obtain a more accurate view of his/her work (Dyer, 2001). Dyer goes on to state,

… 360-degree feedback allows the leader to gather data about themselves from multiple sources in their circle of influence. The fundamental premise is that data gathered from multiple perspectives are more comprehensive and objective than data gathered from only one source. …the raters are usually superiors, peers, subordinates, parents, community members, and students. (p. 35-36).
In further describing the use and value of 360-degree feedback, Green (2004a) maintains that,

The principal is a mid-level manager in a complex bureaucratic organization. At the same time, the principal is the leader of a community comprising diverse groups with their own agendas. The use of 360-degree feedback is a response to the increasingly broad range of constituencies found in a school community. The premise of 360-degree evaluation is that information that is collected from multiple perspectives will be more valuable than information collected from only a single perspective. (p. 24).

Peer evaluation is very similar to 360-degree feedback in that the principal seeks the perceptions of others as a way of evaluating his/her practice. The obvious difference between the two is that peer evaluation provides principals with feedback exclusively from other principals, not necessarily representatives from various constituent groups (Gil, 2001).

To ultimately gain pertinent feedback from other principals, Gil (1998) describes the peer evaluation process as the following,

Each principal has an initial conference with the superintendent followed by a group goal-setting session. The group selects a common focus based on predetermined criterion. … The peer groups use an array of approaches to observe, learn and provide feedback to each principal. These include classroom observations, analysis of student work, formal interviews with key staff and
parent leaders, and regular meetings to solve problems and exchange ideas. … At the end of the first year, group conferences with the superintendent address these two questions: What did we learn? What difference has it made (if any) on my leadership ability to improve student learning? (p.29).

In this way principals can evaluate their work in the context of district wide goals and initiatives that both their peers and the superintendent feel are necessary for the continued success of the school and school district. Again, the major difference between 360-degree feedback and principal peer evaluation is that 360-degree feedback seeks to obtain feedback from nearly every constituent group affected by the principal’s leadership (Dyer, 2001; Green, 2004a; Lashway, 1998). In contrast, principal peer evaluation provides feedback gained almost exclusively from fellow principals (Fontana, 1994; Gil, 1998, 2001).

Despite this difference, Gil (2001) reports that peer evaluation provides vary similar benefits when compared to 360-degree feedback. According to Gil,

- valued interactions with other principals, which led to new relationships and friendships
- support and assistance in dealing with difficult issues
- diverse perspectives and varied expertise
- meaningful evaluation established through learning and cooperative efforts (p. 31).
In this way 360-degree feedback and peer evaluation both provide the principal with feedback from individuals in an attempt to better inform the principal of his/her practice.

One concern, about 360-degree feedback and peer evaluation is that the principal who has made particularly difficult decisions could receive evaluations that are skewed as a result. Lashway (2003) points out “… an evaluation that used parent surveys might unfairly penalize a principal who had just made an unpopular but necessary decision” (p. 3). Thus the context under which 360-degree feedback and peer evaluation take place must be considered to ensure the principal receives a comprehensive view of his or her actions.

Despite this concern, many principals feel feedback from constituents and peers is overly helpful (Gil, 1998; Lashway, 1998). In describing the peer evaluation process implemented in the Chula Vista Elementary School District in Chula Vista California, Gil quotes Principal Pete Matz as saying “The process is extremely valuable and effective in encouraging and enabling principals to ‘think outside the box’ and stretch their expectations for themselves. We’re constantly swapping ideas, duplicating and expanding each other’s success …” (p. 30).

It is multiple examples of this affirmation which indicate that 360-degree feedback and peer evaluation represent two types of evaluation that can significantly improve principal performance (Gil, 1998, 2001; Green, 2004a; MacPhail-Wilcox &
Forbes, 1990). Thus these two evaluation techniques are aligned well with serving the formative purpose behind evaluation.

Conversely the next evaluative technique, management by objective, speaks more to satisfying the accountability and summative purposes of principal evaluation.

*Management by Objective*

Management by objective (MBO) originated in the business sector and was later adapted for use in evaluating school principals against a set of mutually established criteria (Green, 2004a; Lashway, 1998; MacPhail-Wilcox & Forbes, 1990). Consequently, from a business perspective, there are multiple steps that must be followed in order to successfully implement management by objective (Simpson, 1993). Simpson elaborates on the MBO process when he states,

The following four steps are required to establish MBO:

1. The desired goals and direction for an organization during a particular period are determined by management (i.e., the overall objectives and priorities are established).

2. All key managerial, professional, and administrative personnel are required, permitted and encouraged to contribute their maximum effort to achieving the overall objectives.

3. The individual objectives of all key personnel are blended and balanced to achieve the organizational goals of the firm.

4. A control mechanism is established to monitor progress on objectives and feed the results back to those accountable at all levels. (p. 382-383).
From an educational standpoint, Green (2004a) describes the adaptation of MBO to the evaluation of a principal as follows,

In the case of principals, management by objective consists of setting measurable goals at the beginning of the evaluation period, along with incentives for reaching those goals. At the end of the evaluation period, the principal and the evaluator review the progress that was made toward reaching those goals. (p. 22-21).

When the principal establishes clearly defined objectives with his or her evaluator, nearly all ambiguity regarding what the principal should do is removed. The resulting focus on specific objectives can be a welcome benefit of MBO as it will help eliminate the sometimes subjective nature of principal evaluation. Green (2004a) further discusses this advantage when he states,

[MBO] removes subjectivity from the evaluation process. If raising the school average for standardized test scores by five percentile points is one of the objectives, there will be clear evidence at the end of the evaluation period whether that objective has been met. (p. 23)

Simpson (1993) speaks of a second advantage, namely that MBO helps employees focus on the most important goals and not waste time on less important or irrelevant activities. Simpson writes,
Management by objective asserts that the important business activities be
separated from the routine. Because an [employee] is responsible for meeting
challenging goals and is rewarded accordingly, a conscious effort is made to
avoid frivolous activities not geared toward an objective.

A third benefit of the MBO process is its ability to be tailored to a specific
individual and the unique strengths and weaknesses that person possesses (MacPhail-
Wilcox & Forbes, 1990). MacPhail-Wilcox & Forbes comment further on this aspect of
MBO when they write,

MBO makes it possible for administrators to have unique sets of objectives and
unique ways of meeting them. The outcomes and directions are not standardized
and cannot be used to compare one administrator’s performance to another’s.
This model of appraisal can be used to compare an administrator’s actual
performance with what he or she agreed to accomplish. (p. 60)

In spite of the benefits MBO offers, there are also disadvantages to the process.
Chief among the concerns related to MBO is the tendency of some principals to focus
more on short term goals and neglect planning for the long range future (Green, 2004a;
Simpson, 1993). Further elaborating on this point Green writes,

The more pressure there is to meet the objective, the more single minded becomes
the principal. This leads to a ‘front-burner’ and ‘back-burner’ mentality, and the
tendency is to put on the front burner only those matters that will have immediate
and significant effects on the short-term goal. However, education is a long-term endeavor. (p. 23)

A second concern centers on the evaluator and principal becoming too focused on the agreed upon objectives such that they lose sight of unforeseen conditions that will arise in the running of a school and thus necessitate a tweaking or restructuring of the objectives. Simpson (1993) speaks of this concern when he writes,

Management must be sympathetic and interested in the goal-setting process and be continually responsive to the various situational changes that may occur over time. Management inflexibility, or returning to an authoritarian style of management, will quickly destroy the benefits of MBO. (p. 386)

As mentioned earlier, MBO is a principal evaluation technique that when properly utilized can help satisfy the summative and accountability aspects associated with appraising the principal’s work. The next principal evaluation technique, the use of assessment centers, can be modified to satisfy the three main purposes behind evaluating the principal.

Principal Assessment Centers

Principal assessment centers confront principals with activities designed to duplicate challenges and issues a principal would normally face on a typical day (Green, 2004a; Lashway, 1998; MacPhail-Wilcox & Forbes, 1990). The principal usually encounters these simulations over a one- to three-day time period as designated by the
assessment center. Of the various assessment centers currently in operation, many cite the NASSP sponsored centers as the most comprehensive (Dunn, 1999; Green, 2004a; Lashway, 1998; MacPhail-Wilcox & Forbes, 1990).

In nearly all centers, as the principal addresses the simulated challenges, trained observers watch the principal with the intent of providing meaningful feedback regarding the principal’s ability to address each situation. This feedback can then be provided to the principal, or district evaluator. Green (2004a) further describes the assessment center approach to evaluating the skills and competencies of a principal when he writes,

The purpose of assessment centers is to determine a principal’s strengths and to identify specific areas to be targeted for improvement. …assessment centers use simulations. The principal’s performance in the simulations is evaluated by independent assessors who have been trained in the procedures and rubrics used for the assessment. …the day [at the assessment center] is supposed to resemble what a principal really does.

Specifically, while at an assessment center or engaging in center activities via an online instrument, the principal is typically confronted with in-basket exercises, group discussions, fact-finding exercises, analysis and decision-making problems, oral presentation exercises, psychological profiles, leaderless group experiences, written and oral communication tasks, hypothetical case studies, and timed activities (Green, 2004a; Lashway, 1998; MacPhail-Wilcox & Forbes, 1990) (p. 29-30). As mentioned above, the
principal’s performance in each of these activities is then assessed by observers who provide detailed feedback to the principal and any other assigned individuals.

It can be inferred from various authors that the benefit of assessment centers resides in its ability to provide the principals with accurate, objective feedback regarding their ability to address issues likely to arise in the operation of a school (Dunn, 1999; Green, 2004a; Lashway, 1998; MacPhail-Wilcox & Forbes, 1990). Yet with all principal evaluation techniques and processes, there are downsides that must be addressed.

The major disadvantage of assessment centers is the associated cost (Lashway, 1998). After accessing the NASSP website, the cost for instituting an assessment center within a local district totaled roughly $7780.00 (NASSP website, 2007). Clearly this cost could represent a significant barrier to a district interested in the assessment center practices.

Lashway (1998) also highlights a second disadvantage, namely the time required to complete the simulated scenarios, debrief with evaluators, and address indicated weaknesses. Further contributing to the time required when utilizing assessment centers, principals are normally expected to complete extensive follow-up at both the center and their school. This commitment will thus lessen the time available for a principal to meet other obligations (Green, 2004a; Lashway, 1998; MacPhail-Wilcox & Forbes, 1990).

While the assessment center is primarily advertised as a vehicle to support and improve the work of principals (Dunn, 1999; Green, 2004a; Lashway, 1998; MacPhail-Wilcox & Forbes, 1990), and thus satisfying the formative purpose of principal evaluation by taking a different perspective on the principal’s work at an assessment
center, a district can also consider the principal’s assessment center activities as satisfying the demands of evaluation for accountability purposes.

To utilize the assessment center as an accountability measure, the district can choose to look at the principal’s performance within the center, not as a way to identify areas of improvement, but rather as an indicator of the principal’s skill level. This subtle difference in perspective can then allow the district and superintendent to judge the principal’s ability and subsequent worth to the school district based partly upon his or her performance at an assessment center. This judging component is consistent with evaluation for accountability purposes.

In this way the principal’s work at an assessment center is now viewed as a measure of the principal’s knowledge in much the same way a teacher may look at a student’s final exam to judge the students ability to grasp content. When the superintendent and school district shift their perspective in this way, the assessment center becomes less of a tool for formative purposes and more for accountability purposes.

The next technique, principal portfolios, is more oriented towards satisfying the formative purpose of evaluation.

Principal Portfolios

Principal portfolios represent a relatively new way to evaluate principals when compared to the aforementioned techniques. Despite the uniqueness of the portfolio process, many authors feel it holds great promise for further developing the abilities of a principal (Brown et al., 1998; Green, 2004a, 2004b; Lashway, 1998, 2003; MacPhail-
Wilcox & Forbes, 1990; Marcoux et al., 2003). Green (2004a) describes the principal portfolio this way,

A principal’s portfolio is a self-assessment of attributes, skills, and goals based on personal reflection and professional dialogue. It uses authentic evidence to communicate a portrait of leadership and a plan for growth. Portfolios are particularly suited for the evaluation of complex skills and elusive personal attributes. (p. 33).

In nearly all cases, the documents and artifacts contained within a portfolio are obtained by the principal (Brown et al., 1998; Green, 2004b). Items included in the portfolio are purposeful in that they provide concrete evidence of the principal’s behaviors and actions as a leader, normally in relation to previously established goals. Green (2004b) expounds upon this point when he writes,

For example, if a principal wants to show how implementing a new activities program has improved school wide discipline, then a brief description of the implementation process coupled with a summary of trend lines for various discipline data would be the appropriate evidence. Or, if a principal wishes to depict how restructuring parent and faculty councils has improved school climate, then a data summary from school climate surveys would be appropriate evidence. (p. 2).
Further describing the use and applicability of portfolios as evaluative tools, Lashway (2003) states,

Portfolios are not actually instruments but “conceptual containers” into which principals can place a wide variety of artifacts documenting their achievements. … After identifying goals as the focus, the principal then gathers evidence demonstrating progress toward the desired outcome. Depending upon the goal relevant evidence might include items such as parent newsletters, meeting minutes, records of dropout rates, test scores, and handbooks. (p. 5).

When using portfolios, principals and evaluators cite many benefits (Brown et al., 1998; Green, 2004a, 2004b; Kempher & Cooper, 2002; MacPhail-Wilcox & Forbes, 1990). Chief among these benefits is principal involvement in the process.

To this end, Kempher & Cooper (2002) contend that, “Portfolios encourage principals to become more involved in their own learning and performance evaluation” (p. 31). The benefit of increased principal participation usually results in a deeper sense of internal ownership and accountability within the principal to developing his or her individual skills and competencies (Green, 2004a). Consider Green’s comment that when “…given the opportunity to identify shortcomings on their own, [principals] are more likely to take action” (p. 34).

In addition to principal involvement in the development and construction of the portfolio, the process has the second benefit of stimulating internal reflection within the principal (Brown et al., 1998; Green, 2004a, 2004b; MacPhail-Wilcox & Forbes, 1990).
This reflective capacity can be hugely important to a principal’s growth and conduct, especially given the complexity associated with the leadership role. Sergiovanni (2006) speaks about reflective practice when he states,

Professionals rely heavily on informed intuition as they create knowledge in use. Intuition is informed by theoretical knowledge on the one hand and by interacting with the context of practice on the other. When teachers use informed intuition, they are engaging in reflective practice. When principals use informed intuition, they too are engaging in reflective practice. Knowing is in the action itself, and reflective professionals become students of their practice. (p. 75).

In further discussing the importance of reflective practice Sergiovanni (2006) claims that,

…reflective principals are in charge of their professional practice. They do not passively accept solutions or mechanically apply them. They do not assume that the norm is the one best way to practice, and they are suspicious of easy answers to complex questions. They are painfully aware of how context and situations vary, how teachers and students differ in many ways, and how complex school goals and objectives actually are; they recognize that despite difficulties, tailored treatments to problems must be the norm. (p. 76-77).
Clearly having such reflective capacity will help a principal better satisfy the demands of his or her role. The portfolio process is particularly adept at foster such reflection (Brown et al., 1998; Green, 2004a, 2004b; Lashway, 2003).

A third benefit to the portfolio process commonly cited in the literature is the reliance on authentic evidence. Green (2004a) claims that,

…the evidence in a portfolio is authentic. The self-evaluation is based on artifacts found in the school. For example, if a principal intends to document a skill in writing grants, then the abstract of a funding proposal should be included. If the principal wishes to depict a successful program to improve school climate, then a data summary from school climate surveys should be appropriate evidence. A distinctive feature of a principal’s portfolio is that every statement that is made is backed up with artifacts. (p. 35).

In this way, the evaluation of a principal becomes more objective. Since judgments and conclusions are now formed from the presented (or missing) evidence, the judgments inherently become more credible simply because they are based upon tangible artifacts (Brown et al., 1998; Green, 2004a, 2004b).

Despite the benefits of the portfolio process, there are disadvantages to its implementation. One concern when employing the portfolio evaluation technique centers on the relevance of the principal supplied evidence to the intended goals of the portfolio (Green, 2004b; MacPhail-Wilcox & Forbes, 1990). Green (2004b) speaks of this concern when he states,
When reviewing portfolios, it is a common error to be taken by the slickness of the presentation and fail to observe the qualities and accomplishments of the person who is being portrayed. Evaluators will find that two questions will help them stay focused. First, do the exhibits that the principal included in the portfolio have substance? That is do they reveal leadership qualities through actual accomplishments or is it fluff? Second, has the principal included other observations of administrative competence, such as ratings by the principal’s supervisor or survey’s of teachers and parents? (p. 4).

By asking these questions when reviewing a principal’s portfolio the evaluator can ensure that the included evidence is relevant and informative with regard to the principal’s actual work and accomplishments.

A second concern regarding portfolio utilization centers on the assumption that the process represents an all encompassing evaluative tool. While portfolios can be extremely beneficial for satisfying the formative purpose of evaluation, they tend to come up short in terms of evaluation conducted for summative and accountability purposes (Green, 2004a, 2004b; Kempher & Cooper, 2002; Lashway, 2003) Furthering this conclusion Green (2004a) writes,

The value of a principal’s portfolio is found in the extent to which it causes the principal to engage in personal reflection, self-assessment, and professional dialogue. Accordingly portfolios serve a function similar to professional
development. They should not be the primary method by which a district evaluates principals for the purpose of personnel decisions. (p. 38).

In spite of these weaknesses, principal portfolios continue to be viewed with optimism within the literature (Brown & Irby, 1998; Brown et al., 1998; Green, 2004a, 2004b; Lashway, 2003; Marcoux et al., 2003). Consequently they are increasingly being viewed as a way to help satisfy the major purposes behind principal evaluation.

Processes and Techniques of Principal Evaluation – A Brief Commentary

This section carries specific relevancy to addressing the research questions guiding this study. As a reminder, those research questions are:

1. What types of criteria and evidence does a superintendent consider when evaluating the effectiveness of a principal within his/her school district?
2. When evaluating a principal’s performance, what processes and practices does a superintendent utilize to acquire the aforementioned evidence?
3. What level of consistency exists between the principal evaluation practices advocated in the literature and the principal evaluation practices actually in use?

In light of the above questions, investigating the processes, techniques and practices utilized for evaluating principals as described in the literature certainly relates to all three questions. However it is most relevant to questions two and three.
In terms of question two, I would assume that a superintendent or designated person charged with evaluating the work of a principal would utilize either one, or a combination of, the methods described in the previous literature section. Thus, having an understanding of the type of evaluation methods and techniques currently described in the literature, will better position me to competently discuss and recognize the techniques and processes associated with the actual evaluation of principals in the field. Having the ability to recognize these processes and techniques is essential for addressing the second research question.

The previous discussed body of literature is also very helpful for addressing the third research question. To compare current principal evaluation practices, with the evaluation practices recommended in the literature, it is obviously crucial that I have a working understanding of the literature. Hence this section provides me with the background necessary to investigate the comparisons that form the basis of the third research question.

While the aim of the previous section was to describe the various processes, practices and techniques of principal evaluation as described in the literature, in some cases the literary pieces consulted also provided principal perspectives on the various techniques. While principal perspectives on how they are evaluated are beyond the scope of section III, there were some consistent assertions that should be noted.

The first, and by far most pronounced assertion heard from principals regarding their evaluation was the desire for pertinent, accurate, actionable feedback, provided in a timely manner (Brown & Irby, 1998; Davis & Hensley, 1999; Fontana, 1994; Lashway,
2003; Marcoux et al., 2003; Normore, 2004). Not surprisingly, Davis & Hensley claim that “…it is imperative that performance appraisals by district supervisors provide accurate, fair and meaningful feedback to principals” (p. 385).

Moreover, in her review of the Administrator Portfolio Appraisal System and its implementation within the Judson, Texas Independent School System, Brown (1998) found that principals and their evaluators had specific expectations concerning feedback. Brown writes,

The [evaluators] discovered that a timeline for getting feedback to principals must be established and carefully followed. The lack of adherence to the timeline for feedback caused great anguish among the principals. Additionally written feedback, not just a score, was necessary for principals to feel comfortable with ‘where they had been and where they were headed.’ (p. 5).

The need for feedback is crucial as it will keep the principal informed and enlightened as to his or her performance. Dyer (2001), talks about the value of feedback when she states, “… feedback is powerful because it gives school leaders opportunities to receive useful information about their behavior … These data identify behaviors that leaders can work either to strengthen or diminish” (p. 36). While the importance of feedback is indicated repeatedly throughout the literature (Brown et al., 1998; Davis & Hensley, 1999; Fontana, 1994; Lashway, 2003; Normore, 2004), the desire to have such feedback delivered on a steady basis also represents a consistent theme (Davis &

In closing, the three sections of this literature review, *Section I: The responsibilities of an effective principal*, *Section II: The purpose of principal evaluation* and *Section III: Processes, practices and techniques of principal evaluation* are crucial to addressing the overall aims of this study as described by the research questions. In particular, these three sections provide the foundation upon which my field research rests.

Accordingly, Chapter 3 will discuss in detail, the research methodology utilized to explore the manner in which superintendents or other designated individuals evaluate the work of school principals.
Chapter Three: Design of the Study

Introduction

As has been mentioned earlier, this qualitative study was designed to investigate the manner in which superintendents evaluate the work of principals within a given school district. To help orient the reader, a brief description of the chapter three contents is provided below.

Of particular significance, chapter three provides the reader with a restatement of the guiding research questions, a description of the employed research methodology, a description of the selected sample, commentary on the pilot testing of the utilized interview protocol, the employed data gathering techniques, and the formats for reporting the data.

Research Questions

The primary goal of this qualitative study was to investigate the manner in which superintendents perceive they evaluate principals within their school district. Many researchers and authors claim that principals can significantly influence the culture of a school and therefore influence the quality of education a student receives (Bottoms, 2003; Busher, 2006; Davis, 1998; Fink & Resnick, 2001; Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium, 1996; MacPhail-Wilcox & Forbes, 1990; McEwan, 2003; Neuman & Simmons, 2000; O'Hanlon & Clifton, 2004; Sergiovanni, 2006; Terry, 1996; Waters et al., 2004; T. Whitaker, 2003). This contention represented a crucial assumption in my research, namely that a principal, through his or her actions, significantly influences the educational outcomes of the students within their school.
Consequently, because principals carry such influence in the educational development of students within their schools, it is imperative that a superintendent routinely evaluate the principal to ensure his or her work helps produce the desired educational gains.

The core of my research into the evaluation of principals, studied how superintendents conducted the aforementioned evaluations. The following research questions provided a guide to this study,

1. What types of criteria and evidence does a superintendent consider when evaluating the effectiveness of a principal within his/her school district?
2. When evaluating a principal’s performance, what processes and practices does a superintendent utilize to acquire the aforementioned evidence?
3. What level of consistency exists between the principal evaluation practices advocated in the literature and the principal evaluation practices actually in use?

By addressing these questions, my research was better focused to examine the ways in which principal evaluation was, and continues to be carried out in the field.

*Description of the Employed Research Methodology*

To address the aforementioned research questions, I utilized qualitative methods in hopes of better understanding the principal evaluation process. Since my study was based in the highly contextual environment of public school districts, a qualitative approach was deemed appropriate for satisfying the aims of this study (Ary, Cheser-Jacobs, & Razavieh, 1996; Krathwohl, 1998).
In further discussing the applicability of qualitative research to highly contextual issues and circumstances, Ary et al. (1996) writes,

…human behavior is always bound to the context in which it occurs, that social reality (for example, cultures, cultural objects, institutions, and the like) cannot be reduced to variables in the same manner as physical reality, and that what is most important in the social disciplines is understanding and portraying the meaning that is constructed by the participants involved in particular social settings or events. Qualitative inquiry seeks to understand human and social behavior from the “insider’s” perspective – that is, as it is lived by participants in a particular social setting (for example, a culture, school, community, group or institution). (p. 476).

Since my research was indeed highly contextual, simply because it included various public school districts, a qualitative approach was determined to offer the most appropriate means for investigation.

As part of the qualitative approach, I employed focused interviews, constructed researcher field notes and conducted a document analysis. A brief description regarding the utilization of each technique subsequently follows.

*Interviews*

Since the action of a superintendent evaluating a principal (determining what constitutes appropriate evidence of principal performance, and then obtaining the identified evidence) is grounded in the superintendent’s behavior and perception,
interviewing the superintendents presented a logical way to explore their behavior. Appropriately, Ary et al. (1996) state, “A focused interview is a way of gathering qualitative data by asking individuals questions about their behavior” (p. 487).

Moreover, as indicated through the literature review, principal evaluation was, and continues to be, a highly contextual endeavor. Thus one would expect each district and its superintendent to have established a localized evaluation process grounded in the evaluation purposes, strategies and techniques discussed earlier in chapter two. Consequently, the superintendent interviews conducted for this research served as a crucial means of accessing the localized evaluation process.

To this end, Krathwohl (1998) states, “… whenever there is a desire to tap an internal process, to gain knowledge of a person’s perceptions, feelings, or emotions, or to study a complex individual or social behavior, some form of interviewing is most helpful” (p. 286). The evaluation of a principal clearly represents a complex social behavior occurring within the localized context of a school district and community. Consequently, superintendent interviews, during which I constructed an audio recording of the superintendent responses that was later transcribed, played a crucial role in generating data relevant to satisfying the aims of this study.

Helping me garner additional insights into how a superintendent perceives that he or she evaluates a principal, I also utilized content analysis.

*Content Analysis*
Content analysis, also referred to as document analysis, can be very helpful in assisting a researcher to learn more about a particular situation (Ary et al., 1996). Ary et al. go on to describe content analysis in the following way,

Content analysis is a research method applied to written or visual materials for the purpose of identifying specified characteristics of the material. The materials analyzed can be textbooks, newspapers, speeches, television programs, advertisements, musical compositions, or any of a host of other types of documents. (p. 485).

Continuing the discussion of gathering and analyzing documents for the purpose of better understanding a certain activity, in this case the evaluation of a principal, Krathwohl (1998) claims that,

Although observation and interviewing are the major qualitative data-gathering methods, diaries and other personal as well as official records and artifacts are frequently analyzed by qualitative researchers … Similar to quantitative data, qualitative data may be gathered from situations as diverse as the human imaginations permits. (p. 240).

Consequently the documents gathered and analyzed for this study included Massachusetts regulations and laws regarding what a principal should know and be able to do and, when available, the local district policies and procedures related to principal
evaluation. In most cases the local policies detailed the protocol superintendents would follow when evaluating principal.

Where available, principal job descriptions were also explored to gain heightened specificity regarding the district’s expectations for what a principal ought to be doing as well as the manner in which the district intended to gauge the principal’s ability to meet the established expectations.

In all cases, the documents collected for this study were evaluated in light of the aforementioned research questions. In addition to interviews and content analysis, I also generated field notes relative to my research activities.

Field Notes

Almost immediately after each superintendent interview and analysis of the previously described documents, I constructed field notes on what I had observed during the most recent activity. Krathwohl (1998), describes field notes and their value as follows,

Field notes and logs are the observer’s records of what has been observed - descriptions of the individuals, the setting, and what happened, recapitulating the conversations and other interaction as completely as possible. Notes on the initial contact with gatekeepers, as soon as you seek access, should all be part of the record. They may shed light on something that occurred latter, but without these early notes you would have missed the connection. (p. 266)
In particular, field notes were essential because they provided a much more inclusive picture of the gathered data. Specifically, there were times when the posture of the interviewed superintendent seemed to indicate a guarded or muted response to a specific inquiry. Since these actions were dutifully recorded in my field notes, I was able to obtain a more complete understanding of the individual superintendent responses, more so than if I had solely employed the audiotape recording.

Thematic Analysis

Once the data was compiled it was examined using a thematic analysis approach. Thematic analysis allows for a rich and detailed account of the data and all that it entails (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis also allows for differing themes to be both explored and presented in light of the research aims (Attride-Stirling, 2001). For these reasons, thematic analysis was selected as the most appropriate means for analyzing and then presenting the data and subsequent findings.

As stated earlier, the nature of my research questions attempted to examine the behavior and process of each superintendent as they engaged in the practice of evaluating principals within their district. Accordingly, interviewing the superintendents and critically analyzing the aforementioned documents, served as a comprehensive way to better understand superintendent thoughts, behaviors and actions. For that reason these methodologies were employed within the context of this study.

A Description of the Selected Sample

The sample for this study consisted of eight, male Massachusetts school superintendents who were obtained through convenience sampling. Convenience
sampling is traditionally less rigorous (Lunsford & Lunsford, 1995) in comparison to other sampling techniques, however it was sufficient given the aims of this study.

Further discussing convenience sampling Lunsford & Lunsford (1995) offer the following description, “... subjects are selected because of their convenient accessibility to the researcher. These subjects are chosen simply because they are the easiest to obtain for the study. This technique is easy, fast, and usually the least expensive and troublesome.” (p. 110). It is for these reasons that a convenience sample was obtained. Specifically, I utilized my various contacts within the education field to identify and obtain some of the superintendents for this research. Other superintendents were accessed via simple cold calling.

Through these efforts I gained access to school districts with different characteristics regarding student population, demographics, socio-economic standing and MCAS performance. As a result, the 8 participating superintendents came from middle to upper-middle class, suburban, school districts.

To preserve confidentiality statistics for each district are forbidden. However, combined descriptive statistics for the eight school districts are presented in the table below and give a sense of the districts involved in the study. The data presented in this table was gathered from the Massachusetts Department of Education website (www.doe.mass.edu, 2007) as well as the United States Census 2000 web page (www.census.gov, 2000)

Table 3
Combined descriptive statistics for the eight school districts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Per Capita Income</th>
<th>Median Income</th>
<th>Per Pupil Expenditure</th>
<th>Student Population District Wide</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>$34,701.00</td>
<td>$77,715.00</td>
<td>$11,402.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>$39,585.75</td>
<td>$84,252.25</td>
<td>11,846.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3,625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4,019</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From (www.doe.mass.edu, 2007 and www.census.gov, 2000)

Furthermore, the research conducted for this study was consistent with Boston College’s provisions for the protection of human subjects. Prior to participating in this study, all participants were required to sign informed consent forms. Generally speaking, this form signified that the participants fully understood the scope of my research, the manner in which the information they provided would be used, and the foreseeable, potential outcomes of their participation. By signing this form the superintendents voluntarily agreed to participate in the study.

Additionally, superintendents who volunteered to participate were granted maximum confidentiality. Pseudonyms were utilized with regard to participant names. This confidentiality was important in protecting superintendents from third parties and others who might attempt to utilize superintendent responses associated with this study in a manner detrimental to the personal or professional work of the participants.

Furthermore, I suspect that the afforded confidentiality help me obtain accurate information regarding the principal evaluation process taking place within a given school district. I make this assertion simply because the superintendents were assured that their
responses, especially those critical of the principal evaluation process, would not be identifiable.

_Pilot Test_

Prior to conducting the superintendent interviews, I pilot tested the interview questionnaire. Pilot testing is strongly advocated in research and the comments of Krathwohl (1998) confirm this assertion,

All interview schedules, questionnaires and letters of transmittal must always be subject to pilot testing before being used! Use test respondents who closely resemble those you intend to query. Then review with a sufficient sample of the pilot group, question by question, what they reacted to, what they meant by their answer, and why they answered as they did. This process will confirm that you have conveyed what you intended by each question and that you can interpret responses as replies to what you were asking. (p. 372)

Accordingly, the interview questions were pilot tested with one former and one current superintendent, who closely resembled the volunteer participants of this study. After piloting the initial interview questions, I reviewed each question with the interviewee to ensure the questions were correctly understood and thus likely to yield information relevant to the research questions guiding this study. In instances where confusion or ambiguity resided, questions were modified and then re-tested to ensure they produced responses relevant to the aims of this study.

_Data Gathering Procedures_
In gathering the data for this study I first began by securing the necessary permissions from Boston College. This required a careful review of the American Psychological Association’s and American Educational Research Association’s ethical standards and principles. I also secured the necessary documentation to certify that I completed the required training course associated with Boston College’s human subjects review process.

Once the necessary permissions were secured from Boston College, I began contacting prospective participants in this study. The people I approached for participation were those I had either known through a past affiliation, were recommended to me by people aware of the aims of my study or were simply cold called. Once the participants agreed to take part in the study, the data gathering began.

Each superintendent was interviewed for approximately 60 minutes and an audio tape of the interview was constructed and then later transcribed. The interviews were geared towards obtaining as much information as possible with regard to the three research questions guiding this study and actual principal evaluation process in particular. The resulting transcripts were then coded by hand and grouped into relevant themes.

School district documents related to principal responsibilities and principal evaluations were also acquired. These documents were also analyzed and hand coded in the hope of more clearly understanding the methods employed by superintendents when evaluating principal performance. The coding system utilized for the superintendent interviews and the coding system utilized for document analysis were both structured according to the three research questions associated with this study.
At the conclusion of each interview and review of the district documents, researcher field notes were constructed to capture additional information relative to the interview and document analysis processes. The field notes were designed to highlight important contextual information that might otherwise have been missed by the interview and document analysis activities.

The aforementioned coding process helped me capture themes of the principal evaluation process consistent from participant to participant and relevant to the three research questions. Specifically, the collected data was coded according to the research question it best addressed in the eyes of the researcher. This resulted in the construction of four themes.

Each theme maintained two primary characteristics. The first characteristic was that the theme was in some way associated with a research question as identified by the researcher. The second characteristic was that each theme contained data expressed by 50 percent of more of the participants.

**Data Coding**

As has been highlighted throughout this dissertation, the three research questions that guided the scope and focus of this study are as follows,

1. What types of criteria and evidence does a superintendent consider when evaluating the effectiveness of a principal within his/her school district?
2. When evaluating a principal’s performance, what processes and practices does a superintendent utilize to acquire the aforementioned evidence?
3. What level of consistency exists between the principal evaluation practices advocated in the literature and the principal evaluation practices actually in use?

Accordingly, the data collected from the interview and document analysis activities was initially broken down into multiple categories. The multiple categories were then reexamined to identify consistent themes. As the reexamination took place, four major themes emerged. A brief discussion of those themes is below.

Theme one refers to the reported purpose for why a superintendent evaluates a principal. Theme two refers to the type of criteria and evidence a superintendent considers when evaluating a principal. Theme three pertains to the processes and techniques a superintendent employs to collect data necessary for principal evaluation. Theme four refers to the concerns expressed by superintendents regarding the evaluation of principals.

The aforementioned themes along with their various sub themes will be discussed in great detail in chapter four.

Formats for Reporting Data

The collected data for this study was reported in four thematic sections. Within the contents of each thematic section, quotations from the conducted interviews along with pertinent citations from documents associated with the content analysis are provided.
The content associated with each thematic section was presented in a manner that attempted to provide specific information relative to each theme while also addressing the particular research questions, where appropriate.

*Design of the Study – A Brief Commentary*

Chapter three was designed to provide an in-depth description of this study’s design. This design is again aimed at addressing the three questions guiding this study. As a review, those questions are:

4. What types of criteria and evidence does a superintendent consider when evaluating the effectiveness of a principal within his/her school district?

5. When evaluating a principal’s performance, what processes and practices does a superintendent utilize to acquire the aforementioned evidence?

6. What level of consistency exists between the principal evaluation practices advocated in the literature and the principal evaluation practices actually in use?

Consequently, chapter four is broken into four main sections, each section discussing one of the major themes that emerged. Sub themes that more fully investigate the contents of each theme are also presented.
Chapter Four: Analysis of Data and Findings

Introduction to the Chapter

The thematic analysis conducted for this study examined the manner in which public school superintendents perceive they evaluate principals within their school district. The study was specifically focused on satisfying the guiding research questions. As a reminder, the research questions for this study were,

1. What types of criteria and evidence does a superintendent consider when evaluating the effectiveness of a principal within his/her school district?
2. When evaluating a principal’s performance, what processes and practices does a superintendent utilize to acquire the aforementioned evidence?
3. What level of consistency exists between the principal evaluation practices advocated in the literature and the principal evaluation practices actually in use?

To satisfactorily address the aforementioned research questions, interviews were conducted with eight public school superintendents using a piloted interview protocol derived from the research questions. The interviews were audio taped and then transcribed. Secondly, participants were asked to provide principal job descriptions, evaluation policies and procedures, and written principal evaluations that they had authored.

Interviews transpired with all eight participants and six participants provided principal job descriptions. Six participants also provided actual written policies designed
to guide the evaluation of a principal. Three participants provided copies of written principal evaluations that they had authored.

In pursuing the research questions, it must be stated that the underlying assumption of this study is that principals have the power, authority and resources to ensure students within their schools are effectively learning. This assumption is crucial because it signifies the importance of maintaining a properly functioning principal evaluation protocol within a given school district. If the above assumption is in fact true, it becomes in the best interests of the superintendent to effectively evaluate each principal under his/her authority.

This chapter will begin with an introduction to the research project setting and its participants. A discussion of the relevant themes revealed by the data will follow and each thematic discussion will conclude with a brief summary. The chapter will end with a concluding summary that once again highlights the major findings of this study in relation to the research questions.

*Introduction to the Project*

*Setting*

The thematic analysis was not centered in a centralized location. Instead the interviews and data collection were conducted on-site with seven of the eight interviews conducted at the participant’s office. One interview took place at a superintendent’s residence. All of the documents analyzed for this study were supplied by the superintendent and/or employees of the given school district.
As noted in the previous chapter, providing detailed demographic information regarding each district could compromise confidentiality and is thus purposefully withheld from this study. However, the eight districts can generally be described as middle to upper middle class with an average 2007-2008 per pupil expenditure of $11,846.00. As a group, the eight districts were heterogeneous in their demographic make-up.

From an MCAS perspective, the superintendents who participated in this study led districts that obtained high scores relative to other Massachusetts school districts. Again, confidentiality forbids exact data pertinent to each district, however considering the characteristics of the group as a whole will provide a better sense of where the group stands with respect to MCAS scores.

The website for the Boston Globe, Boston.com provides valuable comparative data for the representative districts in this study. Boston.com and the Boston Globe are both business units of the New York Times Company and together they annually rank Massachusetts school districts according to their MCAS scores. MCAS scores are available for public consumption via the Massachusetts Department of Education.

In the Boston.com rankings, districts are ranked against each other according to the English and Mathematics test scores for grades 3 through 8 and grade 10 (Boston.com, 2007). Rankings are provided by grade and subject matter. Table 4 gives the combined average ranking for grades three, six and 10 in both English and Math for the districts involved in this study. The combined average for all eight districts was computed by adding the eight individual district rankings together and then dividing the
sum by eight. This mathematical operation was done for each column contained in table 4.

A statewide range of rankings for each particular test is also included so comparisons can be made regarding the performance of the eight districts in the study relative to other Massachusetts school districts.

Table 4.

*Average MCAS Rankings for Participant Districts*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collective average ranking for the eight districts in this study</td>
<td>81st</td>
<td>76th</td>
<td>65th</td>
<td>70th</td>
<td>56th</td>
<td>53rd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range of Rankings for all MA school districts</td>
<td>1-299</td>
<td>1-299</td>
<td>1-308</td>
<td>1-308</td>
<td>1-283</td>
<td>1-283</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data culled from (www.Boston.com 2007)

As the table above indicates, the combined average 2007 ranking for districts involved in this study was high compared to other districts in Massachusetts. It is important to note that these rankings are not endorsed by the Massachusetts Department of Education and are constructed solely by the staff at Boston.com. Yet, despite these
limitations they do provide the reader with a sense of the collective MCAS performance for the district sites involved in this study.

Participants

The eight superintendent participants ranged from a first-year superintendent to a 20 year veteran. All participants were male and all had earned advanced degrees, either master’s degrees, doctorate degrees or both. Pseudonyms were provided to each participant in an effort to conceal their identity. Subsequently the individuals who participated in this study were Bernard, Walter, Lionel, Ned, William, Fred, Morris and Maxwell. A brief description of each participant is contained in table 5 and in the brief narrative following the table.

Table 5.

Participant Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th># Years in Education</th>
<th># Years as a Superintendent</th>
<th># Years in Present District</th>
<th># Years in Present District as Superintendent</th>
<th>Highest attained Degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bernard</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Ed.D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walter</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lionel</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ned</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>MBA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fred</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>CAGS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Years</td>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>Degrees</td>
<td>Highest Degree</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morris</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>35+</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maxwell</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Two Master’s degrees</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Bernard**

Bernard has the most experience in education with regard to years in the profession as he has been an educator for 43 years. Bernard has served as superintendent for 20 of those 43 years, all in the same school district. Bernard’s highest attained degree is a doctorate in addition to several other degrees. Bernard retired from his post at the end of the 2007-2008 school year.

**Walter**

Walter has spent 37 years in education. Of the 37 years, Walter has been a superintendent for 10 and like Bernard, has served as superintendent exclusively in one district. Walter’s highest attained degree is a doctorate. Walter retired from his superintendent position at the end of the 2007-2008 school year.

**Lionel**

Lionel has been in education for 35 years and has been a superintendent for ten of those years. Lionel is the only participant to have served in more than one district as a superintendent. In his present district, Lionel is currently in his third year as superintendent. Lionel’s highest attained degree is a Ph.D.

**Ned**

Ned has been in education for 36 years and was a superintendent for seven of those years. Ned served as superintendent exclusively in his current district and his
highest attained degree is a doctorate. Ned retired from his superintendent post at the conclusion of the 2007-2008 school year.

William

William is in his tenth year of education and his third as superintendent. William has served as superintendent only in his present district and his highest attained degree is an MBA.

Fred

Fred has been in education for 33 years and like William has been a superintendent for three years. His tenure as superintendent has been exclusively in one district and his highest attained degree is a CAGS, a certificate of advanced studies.

Morris

Morris has spent over 35 years in education and four of those years have been as a superintendent. Morris has been a superintendent in only one district and his highest attained degree is a doctorate. Morris retired from the superintendent role at the close of the 2007-2008 school year.

Maxwell

Maxwell has spent 13 years in education and has spent the majority of this time, ten years, in his current district. Maxwell has served as superintendent for one year, and thus has the shortest amount of time in that role relative to the other participants. Maxwell currently has two master’s degrees and is working towards his doctorate.

From interviews with the participants and the accompanying documents they provided, clear themes emerged relative to the manner in which superintendents perceive
that they evaluate principals. Theme one refers to the reported purpose for why a superintendent evaluates a principal. Theme two refers to the type of criteria and evidence a superintendent considers when evaluating a principal. Theme three pertains to the processes and techniques a superintendent employs to collect data necessary for principal evaluation. Theme four refers to the concerns expressed by superintendents regarding the evaluation of principals. Each theme, along with their relevant sub themes is discussed below.

*Thematic Analysis of the Data*

*Theme 1: Purpose of Principal Evaluation*

As the data analysis commenced a consistent theme emerged among the participants relative to the perceived purpose of evaluating principals. While there was certainly slight variation among the participants and their perceived purpose in evaluating principals, reoccurring sub themes did emerge. Those sub themes include,

- the desire to determine the effectiveness of a principal
- the desire to improve principal performance
- the desire to provide pertinent feedback to the principals regarding their performance.

These sub themes represent the stated core reasons for why the participants claimed to engage in evaluating principals. Each sub theme will be discussed in greater detail below.

*Purpose of principal evaluation: To determine the effectiveness of a principal.*
All eight participants in this study stated that a major purpose behind evaluating a principal was to determine his or her effectiveness as a school leader. Lionel described this perceived purpose rather succinctly when he stated,

The overall purpose is to determine the leader’s effectiveness in producing high academic achievement in a school and creating a culture – a caring and respectful culture conducive to students feeling safe, workers feeling safe, and able to do their best work.

When evaluating for this purpose, the superintendents were simply seeking to answer the question, “Is this principal working according to expectations set by the state and district in an attempt to meet the demands inherent in the given school?” In short, superintendents under this sub theme were attempting to determine if the principal was satisfactorily completing his or her role.

In addition to Lionel, Bernard also spoke of this sub theme. In his comments Bernard stated, “Well, the purpose is to give them an assessment on a bi-annual basis of how they are doing relative to our expectations.” .

William also echoed the sentiments of Bernard and Lionel. When asked what the purpose of principal evaluation was, William stated,

…it is really just to make sure that there is no question as to my satisfaction with their job performance or their standing in the organization. …our evaluation is hopefully a way to formalize that we are all on the same page for the work ahead.
In short, all eight participants stated that one of their perceived purposes in evaluating a principal was to ensure the person was satisfactorily meeting the requirements of the principalship as described by the district.

A second sub theme related to the purpose of evaluating principals resides in the superintendent’s desire to support the principal in a way that improves performance. This sub theme is discussed below.

*Purpose of principal evaluation: To improve principal performance.*

Regarding the purpose of evaluating principals, superintendents cited a desire to improve a principal’s performance via the evaluation process and associated activities. Walter echoed this claim when he stated, “…the overall purpose is to improve performance in general and to give feedback to people about how they can improve performance.” Six of the eight participants echoed this claim.

The main vehicle for satisfying this intention is through honest and actionable feedback. Specifically all eight superintendents stated that they routinely provide feedback to principals with suggestions for how the principals can improve their performance.

An example of this type of feedback resides in a principal evaluation document authored by Walter. In that document Walter advised a principal to “Be succinct in your discussions and interactions…your ideas are generally on target, but you some times take more time than is necessary to make your point.”

A second example of feedback designed to improve practice can be found in an evaluation authored by Morris. Prior to writing the evaluation, Morris had noticed the
lack of time spent in the classroom by the principal. To help the principal grow in this area Morris contained the following statement in his final written evaluation, “…submit a formal plan to me that outlines the methods and procedures that you will follow for the 2006-2007 school year to allow you to find more time to schedule informal visits to classrooms and walkabouts throughout the school.” Morris indicated that it was his hope this recommendation would increase the visibility of the principal in the building while simultaneously increasing the principal’s working knowledge of the school.

Fred also expressed that principal evaluation can help satisfy the purpose of improving principal performance. When asked to elaborate on what he perceived is the purpose of principal evaluation, Fred stated,

…to help give them feedback on their performance, you know, from my perspective and from others … for the purpose of making them better at what they are doing. My purpose is to help a cadre of principals and other administrators just to get better at what they do …

As the above assertions demonstrate, many superintendents utilize the evaluation of a principal as a way to help improve principal performance. The data revealed that this desire represents a core purpose behind a superintendent evaluating a principal. An additional reported purpose, although very closely related to this one, is the desire to provide feedback to principals relative to their performance and practice.

Purpose of principal evaluation: Providing pertinent feedback to principals regarding their performance.
Throughout this study all eight participants cited the desire to provide feedback to principals as a major purpose behind evaluation activities. Walter stated that one of the hallmarks of his evaluation system is the degree to which it allows him to provide feedback that helps a principal grow. To that end Walter stated that, “The hallmark of our [evaluation] system is the regular feedback, the formative feedback that is provided.” Thus the opportunity to provide feedback regarding a principal’s performance is again cited as a purpose for engaging in principal evaluation activities.

Morris, when discussing the virtues of feedback stated that “I think if you have good administrators, good principals working for you, they deserve to get a good, honest thorough evaluation that supports the positive things that they’re doing and gives them some points to grow on.”

As one might expect given the above comment, feedback to a principal did not always take the form of recommendations or suggestions. Complimentary feedback was also provided. A further illustration of this point was found in a principal evaluation authored by Walter who wrote,

First, your communication skills are very good. You have opened up a direct and scheduled dialogue with the faculty and staff about the school and its operation. Several people have noted how refreshing it is to have a leader with the organizational skills and collegial attitude that enable discussion and the resolution of issues.
William also provided commentary to one of his principals that commend her efforts. In the evaluation document authored by William he wrote,

Your implementation of the 3-minute walk through model is to be commended, and serves many purposes, including sending a clear (yet positive) message to all staff that you are the instructional leader in the building. It is important that it does lead to “constructive conversations” … especially for non-professional status teachers.

Thus the data for this study revealed that the eight participants viewed evaluation as an opportunity to provide both positive and growth oriented feedback to a principal. Therefore having the opportunity to deliver feedback represents a core reason for why superintendents engage in principal evaluation activities.

**Summary of theme one: The purpose of principal evaluation.**

In sum, theme one centers on the purpose of evaluation as perceived by the superintendent participants. Again the data revealed that the most prominent purposes for engaging in evaluation are the desire to determine the effectiveness of a principal, the desire to improve principal performance and the desire to provide pertinent feedback to a principal regarding his or her work. The above purposes collectively represent the primary stated reasons for why the superintendents in this study engage in the evaluation of a principal.

*Theme 2: Evidence Considered by Superintendents When Evaluating Principals*
In reviewing the data collected from the superintendent interviews and document analysis, a second theme emerged. This theme centered on the criteria and evidence a superintendent considers when evaluating a principal. The data revealed that the most common criterion and associated evidence utilized by superintendents to evaluate principals included,

- the utilization of principal based goals
- the consistency between a principal’s behavior and the Massachusetts principles of effective administrative leadership (MPEAL)
- the principal’s focus on teaching and student learning
- the culture of a school as a result of the principal’s leadership
- principal contributions to the district leadership team

Each of these sub themes will be discussed below with special attention paid to the criteria and evidence associated with each.

_Evidence considered by superintendents when evaluating principals: Utilization of principal based goals._

As the collected data from this study was examined, the most consistently discussed criteria utilized by superintendents were the yearly goals established by the principal and superintendent. In all instances where principal based goals were utilized, the superintendent and principal would establish the goals together. No where in this study were principal goals devised exclusively by the principal or exclusively by the
superintendent. Rather in all instances, some level of collaboration existed between both parties when goals were established.

The individual goals varied from district to district and principal to principal. The data revealed that the goals were closely aligned with the career stage of the given principal, the particular needs facing a principal’s school and the particular needs facing the school district in which the principal worked. In short, the goals were highly contextual depending upon the aforementioned factors.

Yet despite the uniqueness of the individual goals found in this study, the eight participants were in agreement that principal goals and the attainment of those goals represented a significant criterion in the evaluation of a principal.

To this end, Maxwell talked at length about goals and the role they play in his principal evaluations. Maxwell described the process as follows,

…we have goal setting, for administrators, at the beginning of the school year. I then sit down with each principal and go through their goals. I have them explain their goals to me and then I sign off on them. I then give a mid-year reflection, usually sometime in January, I ask the principals where they are in their progress and I give feedback. We conclude with an end of the year discussion as to whether or not the goals were satisfied.

Similarly, when describing the impact of goals on his evaluation of principals, Morris stated,
What we do is we sit down and we establish goals in one particular year. Some goals could have a one year life expectancy, some could be multi-year goals. At the end of the year, I sit down with the principal - if the goal was accomplished, then generally something different is selected for the following year. …if the final evaluation at the end of the year proves that goal has not been accomplished, then it would be noted in the following year’s goals. And in all likelihood, the language and the goals for the second year would be ramped up a bit and be a little bit more forceful…

When considering goals that had gone unachieved, Morris also offered some interesting insights regarding the establishment and monitoring of future goals. These goals would now become more specific and the timeframe for each goal would again be emphasized. In addition, Morris also stated that more frequent checks would occur to determine the extent of progress being made. These checks would consist of face to face conversations between Morris and the principal in an effort to gauge whether or not sufficient progress was being made. In this way, Morris hoped that he could help support the principal to obtain previously established goals that had gone unmet the year before.

Goals and a principal’s ability to satisfy established goals were also reflected in the documents examined for this study. In a principal evaluation authored by Morris, he repeated a principal’s goal and then provided specific evidence relative to the principal’s achievement of that goal. An excerpt taken from the aforementioned evaluation document reads as follows,
2) To continue use of the school website in communicating information to students, parents and the community. The information will take the form of bi-weekly updates, newsletters and copies of pertinent school documents.

[Feedback supplied by superintendent]
- used the website for principal press notices
- although bi-weekly was not consistent after April, this will be continued for the future
- posted many more successes, informational items, and press releases
- posted many more PDF files such as schedules, handbooks, information
- worked with a parent to keep our calendar updated for public use

(Morris, 2006)

In utilizing goal completion as a criterion for evaluating a principal, seven of the eight participants strongly advocated, if not mandated, that principal goals be tied to district goals and school improvement plans. From the participants’ vantage point, linking a principal’s goals to both school and district goals would provide the best opportunity for both principal and district growth. To further illustrate this point, consider the comments of Maxwell when he states,

I require principals to link their goals directly to the district’s improvement plan … So there should be a direct correlation between the improvement plan for the district, their individual school improvement plan, and their individual goals. There has to be a thread, an identifiable thread that runs through all three …
While the degree to which a principal successfully satisfied previously
established goals was often a criteria considered by superintendents when evaluating a
principal, the evidence consulted to verify the goals was also discussed. In keeping with
the contextual aspects of the goals, the evidence to satisfy each goal was also highly
contextual. Therefore some types of evidence may be acceptable in demonstrating goal
completion for one principal where it may not be adequate for another.

Despite these differences, the data revealed similarities with regard to the
characteristics superintendents expected that evidence to maintain. For example, six of
the eight superintendents explicitly stated that the evidence used to satisfy principal
goals must be tangible and or measurable.

To this point Maxwell was discussing his high school principal’s goal of
expanding vocational opportunities. As evidence of whether or not the principal was
moving toward achievement of this goal the superintendent expected the principal to
provide evidence related to the following questions, “Do we have the kids now? Do we
have a grant in place, a competitive grant for a vocational program? If so for what
program, who will it attract?”

The answers supplied by the principal would then constitute the evidence
demonstrative of the principal’s ability to satisfy the established goal. The point is that
the evidence presented to satisfy a given goal must be tangible.

As Lionel stated, “… [the principals] are putting out goals that are tied back to
improving the school. Because of this, the goals have to be specific, measurable,
attainable, results oriented and time bound.” Thus, the data consulted for this study indicated that before a superintendent would accept a proposed goal, there had to be a clear idea of the type of evidence that would be required to substantiate completion of the goal.

For instance, if a principal goal included better communication between the school and parents, the principal would be expected to provide evidence that this goal was obtained. The evidence could be a tally of principal constructed web postings during the last year that relay crucial information to parents, a log of principal meetings in which communication with members of the school community took place or an increased number of faculty meetings where the principal relayed helpful information to faculty members.

The point behind the notion of clear evidence is that the principal must be able to first articulate a clearly defined goal and then provide evidence to the superintendent that indicated the degree to which the goal was satisfied.

Often times the evidence presented to the superintendent was prepared by the principal. As Ned recounted a conversation he had with a principal regarding a goal rooted in communication, he described what would constitute acceptable evidence.

You are going to give me lots of proof of what you have done relative to this goal. … you will use your written evaluations of teachers to provide me with evidence of communication with the teaching community, PTO minutes, school council minutes, anything that you have devised to help improve communication.
The above statement represents the collective thinking of the participants regarding acceptable evidence intended to satisfy principal established goals. In short the evidence must be specific, tangible and measurable in order to potentially satisfy a given goal.

In sum, the degree to which a principal can first establish and then satisfy, by providing tangible evidence, a set of goals for each year represented a significant criterion utilized by superintendents in their evaluation of principals. Yet as the data revealed, this was not the only criterion utilized to gauge principal effectiveness. The Massachusetts Principles of Effective Administrative Leadership also served as a criterion utilized by superintendents in evaluating principals.

Evidence considered by superintendents when evaluating principals: Utilization of the Massachusetts principles of effective administrative leadership.

While the data revealed that utilization of principal goals was universal among this study’s participants, utilization of the Massachusetts principles of effective administrative leadership (MPEAL) was also very high, with seven of the eight participants citing MPEAL as a major part of their evaluation activities.

As discussed in chapter two, this document details what the state of Massachusetts believes all principals and administrators should be doing as they lead their schools. As a recap, the document discusses the administrator’s role in the following six areas:

- effective instructional leadership
- effective organizational leadership
• effective administration and management
• promotion of equity and appreciation of diversity
• effective relationships with the community
• fulfillment of professional responsibilities

Not surprisingly seven of the eight participants referenced the MPEAL either in their interview, in the documents they provided or in both.

Fred acknowledged that the MPEAL represent a significant criterion in the evaluation of a principal. During his interview, when asked what he looks for to determine if a principal is effective, Fred stated that “…I’m looking at the six standards of professional administrative practice. You know in the categories of leadership, community relations, professional responsibility, etc.” Fred went on to state that he is looking for the degree to which each principal satisfies the standards contained within the MPEAL as a criterion utilized to evaluate a principal.

Walter also stressed utilization of the MPEAL in evaluating principals within his district. The document analysis conducted on Walter’s evaluation instrument revealed that he would offer written commentary, both positive and negative on each of the six standards relative to the given principal’s performance during a given school year.

Ned also stated that the MPEAL serves as a criterion in his evaluation practices, although Ned’s use of the document plays a lesser role when compared to other participants. In discussing the MPEAL, Ned stated that “We use the Massachusetts principles of effective administrative leadership that the state established as … our starting point and then we kind of go through it, looking at how the principal performed
in light of that document.” It should be noted the interviewee’s demeanor during this interview as documented in the established field notes indicated that the MPEAL plays less of a role in comparison to the other districts represented in this study.

While utilization of the MPEAL was found quite frequently throughout the data, Morris’s response to a question about the MPEAL can at best be considered an outlier.

When asked to discuss the criterion role, if any, played by the MPEAL, Morris stated that, “Essentially the Massachusetts principles of effective administrative leadership – I would say it does not play a big role or a significant part in the evaluation of a principal.” Morris went on to state that he prefers to rely more heavily on the yearly established goals for each principal and the degree to which those goals were satisfied during the course of a school year. To this end Morris stated,

Really what I try to do in the goals and objective setting stage with the principals is to sit down and really look at the district needs and the needs of their particular school. Focus in on those and then, really concentrate on having them [the principals] write meaningful goals that are obtainable but that are going to produce results.

Similar to the evidence utilized to demonstrate that a principal has satisfied his or her yearly goals, the participants noted that they would also look for specific evidence when determining the degree to which a principal satisfied the MPEAL. Again, often times what would be considered acceptable evidence was highly contextualized with regard to the individual principal, school and district.
When talking about the utilization of MPEAL as a criterion for determining the effectiveness of a principal it should be noted that the data revealed that this criterion was not the most sought after measure. Instead the thematic analysis revealed that superintendents placed a higher value on the principal’s ability to satisfy agreed upon goals, then they were to rely on the MPEAL in evaluating principals.

In addition to a superintendent’s perception of how well a principal satisfied yearly goals and the principal’s ability to meet the standards described in the MPEAL, superintendents also cited the principal’s focus on students, teaching and learning as a significant criterion utilized to evaluate principals.

Evidence considered by superintendents when evaluating principals: Principal focus on teaching and learning.

As the data generated for this study was analyzed, the degree to which a principal spent time focused on teaching and student learning emerged as an additional criterion considered by superintendents during the evaluation of a principal. When asked during the interview what he thought was most informative criterion Bernard responded,

Well, it seems to me that the principal’s focus on teaching and learning is extremely informative. One of the things that I try to discuss in the evaluation is the principal’s use of MCAS data or our SAT data or whatever – but mainly MCAS data in terms of informing instruction.
Bernard’s contention was that by reviewing testing data with a principal he could obtain a greater sense of how the principal intended to address and strengthen the teaching and learning occurring at the given school.

Walter also placed similar value on the degree to which a principal focuses on teaching and learning. When talking about the evaluation of principals, Walter stated, “There’s nothing more important to me than to have the central focus on teaching the students well. Remember why we are here, what were doing. …so I try to make sure that their [the principal’s] focus and my focus should be primarily teaching and learning and I will discuss this as part of their evaluations.”

True to form, when reviewing principal evaluations composed by Walter, there was almost always some mention of the principal’s efforts with regard to teaching and learning. In one particular evaluation Walter wrote to a principal, “In your first year as the leader of the school you have done a fine job of setting the tone and process emphasizing teaching and learning as the most important mission of the school.”

Morris also places a similar premium on the degree to which principals focus on students and the education they receive. After being asked about the expectations he holds for his principals, Morris stated, “The first expectation is that what is going on in the classroom is engaging the students. The bottom line in this business is really about educating students and getting them ready to be successful in life. If I feel the principal evaluations of teachers are thorough, complete, have good suggestions and provide appropriate
praise, the principal is probably going to receive high marks relative to instructional leadership. Improving teachers and engaging students, to me that is the most important thing we do.

Therefore, the degree to which a principal focused on teaching and learning emerged as a consistent criterion utilized by superintendents as they evaluated principals.

Evidence considered by superintendents when evaluating principals: Principal focus on creating and maintaining a culture conducive to learning.

The degree to which a principal established a school culture in which excellent teaching and high levels of student learning routinely occurred also emerged as a criterion superintendents considered when evaluating principals.

When asked to describe the characteristics of an acceptable school culture, Lionel was rather direct in his response stating,

What’s really sufficient is that the principal has encouraged, and actually gotten, to a point where people are able to collaborate with one another to really improve the quality of teaching and learning. …a great principal is the choreographer, the director and the producer of teacher collaboration to move the school forward to improve, and that is the honesty about leadership.

Thus the degree to which a principal can create, improve and maintain such a culture is considered by seven of the eight participants, as a significant criterion in
evaluating a principal. Moreover, in talking about school culture, the data indicated that the academic component is just one aspect of school culture superintendents consider.

The participants also indicated that they look to whether or not the faculty enjoy being in the school, whether parents feel welcome, whether the students feel respected, whether community input is valued. All of these things together contribute to the fabric of a school’s culture and the principal’s actions can have both a positive and negative effect on this culture.

Ned talked about culture as a cause of the principal’s actions, but more specifically as a cause of the tone felt in the school by the teachers, students and greater community.

In responding to a question about school culture, Ned seemed to indicate that the culture of a school, and the principal beliefs about culture could, to a certain extent, be seen in the behaviors of others. In describing how he gauged culture, Ned stated,

Well, first of all how is the office functioning? You know when you walk in do you get a big hello from somebody? And not just because of who I am, but do you see other people as they walk in get a big hello. That usually just tells me that [being welcomed] is something that is important to that principal; they want people to feel welcome when they walk through that building.

The data revealed that the notion of culture was also evident in the evaluation write-ups and job descriptions, in addition to being a part of superintendent commentary. In a principal evaluation document authored by Walter, he was very specific in
commenting on the principal’s ability to establish an inclusive culture. In writing this evaluation Walter stated,

…you have set up a very positive climate that encourages openness on the part of staff and parents about the school. Members of the community feel comfortable raising concerns. More importantly there is a sense that you as leader are “on top” of things and that they can rely on a reasonable response to issues. Establishing this type of climate enables others to focus on issues of curriculum and instruction that should be the priority of the school.

When the participants were asked to describe the type of evidence they would desire as an indicator that the principal had in fact established a positive school culture, six of the eight cited the “feeling” or “vibe” they felt upon walking into a school. When asked how he knows if the principal has produced a positive or less than positive school culture and accompanying vibe, William responded,

Well, I don’t know, it’s not really quantifiable in an empirical sense. I mean it’s quantifiable in the sense that if it’s a successful academic culture your going to see at least positive test scores … [but] again I think it goes back to the student engagement and what the teachers are doing. …I want to see differentiated instruction, I want to see small group instruction, I want to see students learning… I also want to see parents helping in the building. … I think culture goes to the academic, it goes to behaviors, it goes to the character of the kids, I
think it encompasses everything … I can go into a building and I can know if the
culture is good.

The notion of culture as something evidenced by the “feel” someone gets when
walking into a building was noted throughout the data. Morris stated that,
…it’s the principal who really sets the tone … you can pretty much walk into a
building and you can feel whether people are warm to each other, warm to you
when you walk in … you can get a sense of whether the teachers are uptight when
you walk in or relaxed, whether they make you feel welcome or walk out of the
room when you walk in.

In sum, the superintendents consulted for this study were very much interested in
the culture a principal established within his or her school. Moreover the principal’s
efforts in establishing and maintaining culture were often cited as a criterion upon which
principals were measured, despite the seeming lack of empirical data to validate cultural
assertions. As indicated in the data and in the quotes above, superintendents harbored a
clear sense of what the culture of a school should be, even if there was no standard or
promulgated way to measure it.

Evidence considered by superintendents when evaluating principals: Principal
ccontributions to the district leadership team.

When discussing the criteria utilized to determine the effectiveness of a principal,
the data revealed that all eight of the superintendents were highly interested in the
principal’s contributions and performance during meetings with the district leadership team.

Participants on this team included the district’s principals and normally the assistant superintendents and the superintendent. The data showed that these teams would meet roughly one to two times a month. The data also showed that the manner in which a principal preformed in this setting represented criterion superintendents utilized when evaluating a principal.

In talking about the way superintendents evaluated principal actions during district leadership meetings, Morris noted,

Say we have a difficult budget situation and I’m looking for principals to step up to the plate and make suggestions about where they could be helpful and serve the best interests of the district. Do they crawl under the table and hide at a management meetings? Or do they step up to be a team player and say ‘you know, although this would be very painful, I’m listening to principal X over here, and if you’re going to cut a teacher loose, it makes more sense to cut a paraprofessional in my building.’ I think how much they contribute at management team meetings is very important.

Not surprisingly, the degree to which principals cooperate with other district leaders was also noted in many of the artifacts examined during this study. Specifically in all instances where a job description for principals was obtained, some mention of the principal’s ability to work with and collaborate with other district wide administrators
was listed as a responsibility. The importance of principal collaboration and contributions was also echoed by William when he stated,

I factor into their [principal] evaluations their fit and role on our administrative council. We have discussions all the time and during those discussions I’m asking ‘What are you contributing to the administrative council? What strengths do you bring to the table? What’s your role, are you a positive influence, a neutral influence? To me that’s a big deal. …are they just sitting at the table? I have one principal who doesn’t talk the entire time, … he’s a great principal but, that’s not helping me in other areas, so I need that to happen, not just at the school but at the district level too, that’s big for me.”

In sum, the data collected for this study revealed that the degree to which a principal contributed to the growth of the district via his or her performance at district level meetings represented a significant criterion in the evaluation of a principal and was thus considered by seven of the superintendents.

Summary of theme two: Evidence considered by superintendents when evaluating principals.

As discussed above, the data revealed a second theme associated with the evaluation of principals, namely the type of evidence and criteria a superintendent considers when evaluating a principal. Again, as revealed in the data, the most prominent criteria included,

- the utilization of principal based goals
• the consistency between a principal’s behavior and the Massachusetts principles of effective administrative leadership (MPEAL)

• the principal’s focus on teaching and student learning

• the culture of a school as a result of the principal’s leadership

• principal contributions to the district leadership team

Of the criterion listed above, this study revealed that superintendents across the board placed a premium on all items, but the utilization of principal-based goals appeared to be the most widely used measure. Certainly the other factors listed above played a prominent role in principal evaluation, but the frequency and depth of discussion around principal goals leads this researcher to conclude that it carried the most weight among this study’s participants in terms of evaluating a principal.

It should also be noted that the superintendents who participated in this study cited additional criterion utilized when evaluating a principal. These criteria included the principal’s ability to follow-through on superintendent directives, the principal’s ability to facilitate teacher growth and the manner in which the principal interacted with the community beyond the school walls. While these criterions are certainly valid and acceptable ways to evaluate a principal, they were not as widely utilized as the five criterion discussed in this section.

In considering the criterion and evidence superintendents utilize to gauge the effectiveness of a principal, it is not surprising that the third theme to emerge from this study centers on how superintendents access the data necessary to make evaluative judgments about principals.
Theme 3: The Manner in Which Superintendents Acquire Data to Evaluate Principals

As the collected data for this study was coded and grouped into themes, what emerged was a consistency among superintendents with regard to the processes and techniques they utilized to acquire data necessary to make evaluative judgments. While multiple process and techniques emerged, what follows is a review of those processes employed by the majority of participants. Those processes and techniques included,

- the site visit and observations
- collection of principal supplied data
- comments and data supplied by various constituents

What follows is a discussion of the previously mentioned data collection processes and techniques employed by the participants in this study. The first to be discussed centers on the superintendent site visit to a school and the resulting observations made during the visit.

The manner in which superintendents acquire data to evaluate principals: The site visit and observations.

The site visit is best described as a superintendent’s physical visit to a particular school or school event. The visit allows the superintendent to see any and all aspects of a school. Most often a superintendent on a site visit will walk the hallways, visit classrooms, talk with faculty and staff, visit the main office and meet with the principal. At times a site visit will also provide the superintendent the opportunity to sit in on meetings, attend school wide events and dialogue with parents.
While analyzing the data collected for this study, the site visit emerged as a crucial technique employed by superintendents attempting to gain insights into principal behaviors and ultimately, to evaluate those behaviors.

William spoke about the importance of the site visit when he stated, “…I don’t know how a superintendent can survive without popping into classrooms and popping into buildings.” Similarly Fred talked about the value of the site visit when he stated, …for the first half hour I walk with the principal and we’re just talking about the school. ‘What’s going on? Tell me about these people. Who are the new teachers? Let’s go see them. What are the good things that are happening? What are the things that you are keeping an eye on?’ … So it’s an opportunity for me to have some insight into the principal’s leadership.”

Fred went on to state that the site visit provides an excellent opportunity to simply observe what happens in the school under a particular principal’s leadership.

So If I go into your classrooms, are your missions and expectations publicized? When you and I are walking down the hallway and I see a student and teacher interacting, is one of the expectations that people treat each other with respect? So if we come across two people who are not being respectful, do you get involved and intervene? …the site visits have become tremendous vehicles for me to collect data about a school and, therefore about the principal’s leadership.
As noted above the site visit is not limited to simply visiting a school. In fact the visit can be to any school wide event. Take Morris’s comments about visiting football games for example,

Another informal but good way to get a sense for the person [principal] you are evaluating is to attend a lot of extra curricular functions. Either athletic events, banquets, … Many times a parent will come up to you and let you know that they’re very pleased with something that the principal has done that I might not be aware of. …you get to speak with - whether its teachers who are at the function or parents or community members … I think they will be more willing to speak freely and sometimes, just tell you something that they think of in passing, but that might be very interesting information for finding out how solid the principal is.

Not surprisingly, information gained from site visits was also found in the written evaluations authored by superintendents. To this end Walter, in praising a principal for the work done at a school wrote, “You model an enthusiasm for learning and a great interest in sharing your knowledge. …I note this in my visits to the school, in meeting with you, in my observations at other meetings and in the comments I receive from others.”

As the above contentions maintain, the site visit represented a vital data gathering technique for superintendents as they evaluated principals. While seven of the eight participants were very supportive of the site visit, it should be noted that Lionel believed
the site visit could be informative for gaining preliminary data, but favored other
techniques for gathering in-depth data necessary to evaluate a principal.

To this end Lionel stated that if the situation warranted, he would call in teachers
to talk about the health of the school. Specifically, Lionel would select six people from a
given school while having the principal select an additional six people. Lionel would
then have independent conversations with the 12 people in order to gain a deeper
understanding of the inner workings at the particular school. Lionel favored this
technique over the site visit, particularly if a superintendent desires a more fully informed
view of the school. Lastly, Lionel indicated that the information gained from the
meetings would then be shared with the principal of the school and a discussion about
what had been found would commence.

Lionel noted that the information gained through a site visit is important, but he
favored collecting the same information in the manner described above.

Despite Lionel’s view that the site visit was not crucial to the evaluation of a
principal, all other superintendents seemed to indicate that the site visit was a vital data
gathering technique. Seven of the eight participants maintained that the site visit and all
the activities, observations and dialogues it entails, represent a favored technique in terms
of acquiring an overall sense of a principal’s leadership.

However superintendents also claimed that their collection of principal produced
data represented a beneficial practice for necessary for evaluating principals.

*The manner in which superintendents acquire data to evaluate principals:*

*Collection of principal supplied data.*

167
The data accumulated for this study also revealed that superintendents would systematically request and utilize data supplied by the principals in order to facilitate evaluation. Often times, this type of data consisted of principal constructed newsletters, announcements posted to web pages, policies written and disseminated to staff and principal observations of teachers. On par with the site visit, the data from this study revealed that this technique was utilized by all eight superintendents as an attempt to cull data for principal evaluation purposes.

Supporting the technique of collecting data via the principal, Ned talked specifically about the process he utilized regarding principal authored teacher evaluations when he states,

I have the principals give me copies of the [teacher] evaluations throughout the year. So I read through them, you know, and if sometimes somebody says, ‘everyone is wonderful’ … I know that’s not really true. That will give me a sense of the leadership in that school.

Similarly, Walter also placed a heavy emphasis on obtaining and reviewing principal authored teacher evaluations. In this regard Walter stated,

I will have my personnel department pull random observation forms completed by the principal. I pull them because I want to make sure that they [the principals] write the observation reports – that the reports are high quality, and I’m looking for evidence that they have tried to ascertain that the teacher has objectives, has a clear idea of what they want to accomplish in the lesson. …That will quickly tell
me a lot about whether the principal has a clear picture of what effective
instruction looks like or not, if I read enough reports.

Fred also stated that the gathering and reviewing of principal produced documents
represented a key technique in the evaluation of principals, especially in light of the
MPEAL standard on community relationships. Fred stated,

So if we’re talking about the state standard on community relations and I’m
[evaluating] you as a principal, I’m getting copies of your monthly newsletter that
everyone else is getting. …and I’m trying to give you focused feedback on your
written communications. …And so that – your ten monthly newsletters that you
have supplied to me have become a source of data about your written
communication and community relation skills.

In addition to requesting and then reviewing principal produced observation
reports and principal produced newsletters, three participants also spoke to the value of
requesting and then reviewing a principal’s constructed budget. Maxwell offered some
insights into the value of this technique when he stated,

I look at their budget and how they prioritize their budget. Let me give you an
example – so the principal’s submitted their budget and I asked them to identity
their priorities. Once I received the priorities I went back to the principals and
asked them to rank order the priorities. …And it came back, you would have
thought the priorities were originally in rank order, but they weren’t. So if I gave
them the first thing on their original list, in some cases it would not have been a priority. That’s a problem.

Walter also noted the favorable work one principal did in relation to budget. In a written evaluation Walter stated, “Budget work – you have been prompt and forthright in your work and recommendations. I am particularly impressed with your collegial attitude as part of the administrative council.”

Lastly, Fred also talked about gathering data from principals, specifically as it related to initiatives taking place in a particular school. In one instance a school was attempting to more clearly define what they meant by student effort. To review the principal’s leadership of this endeavor, Fred said to this principal,

I want a sampling of everything that you and your teachers do that report on effort to kids or parents. …So if you redesign the progress report, I want a copy. If you have examples of what teachers are putting out in terms of effort on report cards – is it standards based or are you going to develop a standard for effort? I want a copy of it.

In closing, in addition to using the site visit as a technique for gathering data on the work of a principal, superintendents often request and consult artifacts generated and supplied by the principal.

In addition to these two techniques, the data revealed that all eight superintendents consider comments and data supplied by others when evaluating a
principal. Thus the third sub theme under theme three is the process where superintendents utilize commentary and data provided by people associated with the school. These people can include parents, teachers, assistant superintendents, students and curriculum coordinators. The information they provide is then used to help shape a given principal’s evaluation.

The manner in which superintendents acquire data to evaluate principals:
Comments and data supplied by various constituents.

The data consulted for this study revealed that all superintendents collect data by conversing with individuals close to the principal. As indicated above, these individuals can include parents, teachers, assistant superintendents, students and curriculum coordinators. In short these people are those that have a working relationship with the principal.

It must be noted however, that three of the superintendents in this study stressed that they do not simply walk into a school and ask the teachers, “So, how is the principal doing?” As Walter noted, such a cavalier approach could jeopardize the trust he has established with his principals.

Yet what the participants will do is position themselves so that conversations about the principal’s leadership are likely to emerge, perhaps by sitting in on a school council meeting or reviewing MCAS data with an assistant superintendent or curriculum coordinator. In using this technique, superintendents are able to collect data from these multiple sources. That data is then utilized by the superintendent in the evaluation of the principal.
When discussing data culled from various sources, Walter was rather specific as to how he comes in contact with such information. Specifically, when asked to describe the people who supply data that could later be used in a principal’s evaluation Walter stated,

I’ve formed committees with teachers from every school … I hear about what is going on in the schools so I collect information that way. …The school committee gives me feedback from parents about leadership and what they think. …The assistant principal, assistant superintendent, the various central office folks here, the METCO director. We have a number of folks who are K-12 folks for music, art, they’ll give me feedback too, our director of facilities and I’ll ask for that kind of feedback which I’ll collect information on.

Walter also revealed that he gathered insights from constituents. To this end Walter wrote in an evaluation, “The feedback from the parent community has been very positive this year. Many parents have commented on your work as principal and the efforts you have made to develop relationships and respond to concerns.” By writing in this way, Walter acknowledged that data obtained from multiple sources, in this case parents, represented a practiced technique for acquiring data relative to a principal’s performance.

By positioning one’s self for access to data about the principal, the superintendents were better able to access the full spectrum of a principal’s leadership
activities. Similarly, Bernard also talked about gathering data from multiple constituents when he stated,

One of the ways we do our evaluations, we rely on the assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction to sort of give me her handle of what’s going on. I talk to our human resource manager to get a sense of how she perceives [the principals] and then I talk to the budget person, the business manager who does budget for finance and control to let me know the quality of the budget they provide, …I rely on those people [for information].

Similarly Lionel also talked about gathering information from multiple sources. When asked to describe how data is gained from multiple constituent sources, Lionel stated, “…you hear about it – whether it be from the teachers – you hear about it from the parents. You hear about it from a variety of sources.” Lionel went on to state that all of the acquired information can play a role in his evaluation of a principal.

Lastly, William also talked about gathering data from multiple constituents to better evaluate a principal. To this end William stated,

…I really value the feedback and data of multiple constituencies … You have your teachers who are affected by the [principal’s] leadership; you have your parents who are affected by their leadership, naturally the relationship with the superintendent and other administrators. So in short I value them [the constituents and their feedback] all fairly equally …
While the data revealed that all eight participants relied on comments and thoughts verbally supplied by multiple constituent sources, it also revealed that three participants actively solicited this commentary via surveys. The technique of surveying constituents was not as widespread as that of simply positioning oneself to have conversations about the principals’ leadership, however it was noted as a plausible data gathering practice and thus is expounded upon below.

The data revealed that some superintendents utilized fully established survey mechanisms, others were in the planning and development stages and others simply chose not to utilize this practice.

Fred stated that he began to pursue surveys after reflecting on his own experiences as a principal being evaluated by a superintendent. In that experience Fred stated that he would receive glowing observations that were high on praise but not real conducive to highlighting areas in which he needed to improve. In commenting on this experience Fred stated,

… I felt like they [his observations] were useless. They didn’t help me grow, mature or improve. They highlighted the most obvious accomplishments without helping me advance in the areas where I was less good. …This survey stuff that we as a group are developing and adopting is more 360-degree [feedback], kind of multiple data for the principal to consider…

In talking more about the survey work that he had initiated, Fred stated that he was excited about the prospects for such an endeavor. To this end Fred stated,
You obviously can tell that I’m excited about the direction we are going to and the direction we are moving away from, because I think it [the surveys] holds the most promise for us in improving what it is we do and what we need to do.

It is important to pause here and note that Fred’s commentary talks directly to one of the core purposes of principal evaluation as perceived by the participants in this study. That purpose views evaluation as a tool that should also work to improve principals by providing them with specific, actionable feedback. As Fred noted, surveys from those who the principal serves help accomplish this desire.

Lionel was also heavily in favor of utilizing 360-degree surveys as a technique for gathering information relative to a principal’s job performance. Lionel stated that the survey he utilized was given to teachers in the principal’s building. The teachers were informed before hand that once the survey was completed it would be shown to the principal. However the teachers had the option of having their name concealed should they so choose.

In reviewing the survey document constructed by Lionel, it is clearly related to the Massachusetts principles of effective administrative leadership. The survey document seeks information relative to management skills, professional expertise, instructional leadership, curriculum leadership, community relations, communications and team building, among other areas. These are all areas that the MPEAL also considers.
In this regard, Lionel echoed the sentiments of Fred in stating that the practice of gathering data on a principal via surveys can yield information, which if acted upon, can help a principal grow and improve.

Morris also noted that he utilizes surveys, although in a slightly limited fashion relative to Fred and Lionel. To this end Morris stated,

From a formal standpoint, one of the things I do, particularly with the newer principals, is I ask them to put out a survey at the end of the year … the principal will then get a response from the faculty and staff, and get a sense as to whether or not they are comfortable with the leadership style. Then I have the principals sit down and report to me on the findings of the survey. … Then it is my job to try to advise them and get them to make the necessary corrections where improvement has to be made.

Again, in the same spirit of Fred and Lionel, Morris also utilized the survey as a means to help the principal grow. These three participants were arguably the farthest along in terms of utilizing the survey technique to gain information relative to the principal actions and subsequent evaluation.

Bernard also talked about surveys and the value they hold, but he does not mandate that principals implement them. However he was extremely complimentary of one principal who independently chose to survey her faculty. In talking about this process, Bernard stated,
One of the elementary principals is terrific, she actually will go out of her way to get anonymous surveys from her faculty at the end of each year and she actually shares it with me. I never use it in an evaluation but I think it is useful feedback for her to get.

Two other participants were in the planning and development stages with regard to surveys and their use as a technique to gain data relative to principal performance. In the two cases, Maxwell and William expressed a desire to develop a survey instrument that would be acceptable to principals while also yielding valuable, evaluative information.

Other participants chose not to utilize the survey technique mainly because they felt the potential negative impact on trust between the superintendent and building principal slightly outweighed the benefits the survey technique could provide.

Thus, this study revealed that a favored process for gathering data relative to a principal’s performance centered on acquiring data from the principal’s constituents. What follows is a summery of theme three regarding the processes and techniques utilized by superintendents to gather data relative to principal performance.

*Summary of Theme 3: The manner in which superintendents acquire data to evaluate principals.*

As the data emerging from this study was analyzed, a consistent theme developed regarding the processes and techniques utilized by a superintendent to collect data
relative to principal job performance. Under this theme, three sub themes emerged.

Those sub themes included,

- the site visit and observations
- collection of principal supplied data
- comments and data supplied by various constituents

By utilizing all of these techniques or variations of them, superintendents were able to acquire vast amounts of data that could then be utilized to facilitate the subsequent evaluation of a principal. It should be noted that no participant relied exclusively on one data gathering technique. Rather all participants reported that they utilized multiple data gathering techniques to form a fuller picture of the principal’s actions.

**Theme Four: Expressed Concerns Regarding Principal Evaluation**

As the data collected from this study was coded and analyzed, a fourth theme emerged. This theme centered on concerns expressed by a handful of participants. While the concerns were not numerous in quantity, they were significant enough to be mentioned here. The primary concerns cited by the participants included,

- the need for more practical information pertinent to principal evaluation
- a desire for more time

Subsequently, a discussion of the sub themes associated with theme four is below.

**Expressed concerns regarding principal evaluation: The need for more practical information pertinent to principal evaluation.**
As the title of this sub theme suggests, there was an expressed desire among two
of the participants to acquire more pertinent information regarding the practice of
evaluating principals. The desire for more knowledge was most salient in the
commentary of William, a third year superintendent and Maxwell a first year
superintendent.

William seemed to express some concern about his practice of gathering data for
the principal evaluation, especially from sources outside his personal connections. To
this end William stated,

I haven’t done a good job of formalizing that [the collection of data] in anyway
and that’s something I’ve – that’s what I was talking about, you know, is it a
survey, is it something else? I haven’t quite nailed that down yet. I’m really just
using personal contacts at this point … Honestly, beside that, I’m not doing a
great job, I readily admit.

To the contrary, William also indicated that some aspects of his principal
evaluation process were pleasing. Specifically he stated that “… our process is very
practical, it’s something we use … the process contributes toward improving the
building, improving student achievement.” But despite this fact, it was clear that William
would welcome ways in which he could further strengthen his principal evaluation
system. To the researcher, this seemed to indicate that William was not overly
comfortable with all aspects of his principal evaluation system and the desire to improve
the system is certainly an admirable aspiration.
The notion of dissatisfaction with certain aspects of the current evaluation was also held by Maxwell. Maxwell began his interview by reflecting on what had transpired in the past, specifically with regard to the evaluation of principals by the previous superintendent. To this end Maxwell who was in his first year as a superintendent stated,

…before we start, this is my first year as superintendent…So coming on, I wasn’t sure what was already in place in terms of [principal evaluation] instruments. We have an instrument we’ve adopted for evaluating faculty and staff, but in terms of evaluating principals there existed no formalized document … I’m not proud that we don’t have an instrument in place and I’m working toward that.

Maxwell went on to discuss the steps he took over his first year to formalize the principal evaluation process. As cited above, he utilizes goals and is interested in establishing a formalized survey document. Again, like William it seems as though Maxwell, feels there is still much work to be done in terms of establishing a principal evaluation system reflective of his standards.

In pursuit of refining and honing their current systems, both William and Maxwell asked me what information I had uncovered that could be of potential benefit to improving their principal evaluation system. I provide this information not to brag, but simple to highlight the palpable desire, at least articulated by William and Maxwell, to improve their principal evaluation systems beyond its current status.

Expressed concerns regarding principal evaluation: A desire for more time.
A second concern held by five of the eight participants was the desire to somehow provide more time to work with principals through the principal evaluation process. To this end Bernard stated,

It would certainly be great if there was more time to do this [principal evaluation] and be able to acquire more information from more sources, but that’s hard to do with all the kinds of things [a superintendent] is doing.

Morris also expressed a desire to spend more time with principals via the principal evaluation process. In discussing this desire Morris stated,

…. instead of having the goal setting at the beginning of the year, the mid-year assessment and then a final assessment, try to make them [meetings with principals] more frequent. I have informal meetings and I let the principals know whether they’re doing a good job or whether I have some area of concern, but to actually bring them in and sit in this office like you and I are sitting right here – if I could do that on a monthly basis that would be terrific … but there’s the management part of the job that also has to be taken care of … and everything else that takes up so much time.

The desire to commit more time to the evaluation process was also expressed by Lionel as he was talking about the data collection process and the six categories of MPEAL. Lionel stated,
The truth of the matter is superintendents never have enough time to collect data under all of those categories … and the other part of this has to do with the fact that a superintendent’s life is so busy that you really don’t have much time to visit schools and collect all the desired information.

As indicated by the quotes above, it was evident that superintendents would welcome more time in order to work with principals. The question then turns to how superintendents and their districts can create this time.

One thought regarding how a superintendent could potentially create more time came up in Maxwell’s interview. In talking about how he could potentially make the process of evaluation as a whole more efficient, Maxwell talked about devising an evaluation instrument that could be used with different personnel. To this end Maxwell stated,

The question is, how can I apply it [the evaluative instrument] to – can I apply it to just principals? Can it be more broadly applied to anybody … I’m sure I can make it broad enough to apply it to central office secretaries and school administrators so that I have the same instrument for consistency.

Were this to be achieved, not only would consistently be improved, but it is possible that time spent with principals could be increased because the same process would be again and again. Maxwell indicated that through this repetition the process
could become more efficiently implemented, potentially freeing up additional amounts of time.

**Summary of Theme 4: Expressed Concerns Regarding Principal Evaluation**

As the above section mentioned there were some concerns expressed by the superintendents regarding the current status of principal evaluation practices within their district. The two primary sub themes associated with theme four include,

- the need for more practical information pertinent to principal evaluation
- a desire for more time

As indicated most strongly by William and Maxwell, they would sincerely welcome quick access to practices and techniques that have been proven beneficial to evaluating principals. As captured in their commentary and their request for information from the researcher, they both expressed a sincere desire to move principal evaluation forward from its current standpoint. It could be possible that this desire is one held by many other superintendents, not just the two mentioned above.

It was also very strongly indicated that superintendents would welcome more time to work with principals via the principal evaluation process. This desire was highlighted via the selected comments above and was expressed in some fashion by five of the eight participants. Thus the lack of time available for working with principals as a function of the many responsibilities a superintendent maintains represents a noteworthy concern.

**Summary of Chapter Four**
The thematic data analysis conducted for this study emerged out of the previously stated research questions. As a reminder the research questions for this study were,

1. What types of criteria and evidence does a superintendent consider when evaluating the effectiveness of a principal within his/her school district?
2. When evaluating a principal’s performance, what processes and practices does a superintendent utilize to acquire the aforementioned evidence?
3. What level of consistency exists between the principal evaluation practices advocated in the literature and the principal evaluation practices actually in use?

As discussed above, four major themes emerged from the data analysis. Those themes included the superintendent’s perception of purpose for evaluating a principal, the evidence and criteria considered by superintendents as they evaluate a principal, the processes, practices and techniques a superintendent utilizes to access the aforementioned data and concerns expressed by the superintendents with regard to evaluating principals.

When considering theme one, the purpose behind a superintendent evaluating a principal, the data yielded three sub themes. The sub themes were the desire to determine the effectiveness of a principal, the desire to improve principal performance and the closely related desire to provide pertinent feedback to principals regarding their performance. Often these sub themes were pursued in unison by a superintendent as he evaluated a principal.

When considering theme two, namely the evidence and data a superintendent considered when evaluating a principal, five sub themes emerged. These sub-themes
included, the principal’s ability to satisfy established goals, the consistency between a principal’s behavior and the Massachusetts Principles of Effective Administrative Leadership (MPEAL), the principal’s focus on teaching and student learning, the culture of a school as a result of the principal’s leadership and principal contributions to the district leadership team. All of these sub themes represented criterion or evidence considered by a superintendent when evaluating a principal.

When considering theme three, namely the processes and techniques a superintendent utilizes to gather data needed to evaluate a principal, three sub themes emerged. Those themes included the superintendent site visit and resulting observations, the collection of principal supplied data and the commentary and data supplied by various constituents. All of these sub themes represented processes, practices and techniques a superintendent utilized when attempting to collect data necessary for evaluating a principal.

Theme four, identified the concerns expressed by superintendents as they participated in evaluating principals. This theme was composed of two primary sub themes. Those sub themes were the desire for more practical information relative to principal evaluation techniques and the desire for more time to spend with principals. As indicated above these concerns were mentioned in the sprit of improving principal evaluation practices.

It should be noted that as the analysis continued, a clear connection between themes one, two and three emerged. For example, once a superintendent determined the primary purpose for evaluating a particular principal, that purpose would then be
reflected in the type of data the superintendent attempted to collect and the subsequent collection process to be utilized. As a simple but illustrative example, many superintendents stated that their primary purpose in evaluating a principal is to help that person grow. In turn, they would seek out evidence that would highlight areas in need of growth or improvement relative to a particular principal.

Conversely, in cases where a superintendent was evaluating whether or not a new principal possessed the desired attributes for district level team work and collaboration, the superintendent would tend to look more closely at data that focused on cooperation and institutional relationships.

It should also be noted that the manner in which a superintendent appeared to evaluate a principal was dependent upon the career stage a principal was in. For example, a superintendent may have slightly different objectives in evaluating a new principal than he might when evaluating a veteran principal. Again, depending upon this factor a superintendent may alter his evaluative techniques to be more properly aligned with the current standing of the principal being evaluated.

In closing, although clearly consistent themes regarding superintendent evaluations of a principal emerged, what also emerged was the highly contextualized nature of the process. It is within this contextual environment that other possibilities for future study emerged. These potential areas will be discussed in detail in chapter five.
Chapter Five: Summary, Discussion and Implications

Introduction to the Chapter

In an attempt to orient the reader, the following introduction will discuss the contents of chapter five. As a reminder, this study was rooted in the exploration of three research questions. Once again, those questions are:

1. What types of criteria and evidence does a superintendent consider when evaluating the effectiveness of a principal within his/her school district?
2. When evaluating a principal’s performance, what processes and practices does a superintendent utilize to acquire the aforementioned evidence?
3. What level of consistency exists between the principal evaluation practices advocated in the literature and the principal evaluation practices actually in use?

At the onset, the ensuing discussion will provide a summary of the findings as they relate specifically to the above three research questions. After each research question has been answered, the chapter will discuss the limitations of this study. Specifically the limitations will be contemplated with an appreciation for how these limitations could have potentially influenced the subsequent findings.

Once discussion of the study’s limitations has concluded, the chapter will then focus on the identified implications for practice, policy and future research. The implications will be discussed in light of this study’s overall findings in the hopes that others may begin to address the revealed issues and concerns.
The chapter will close with a concluding statement that reflects upon the work associated with the study and the potential progress that lies ahead relative to principal evaluation.

**Summary of Findings**

**Research Question One: What Types of Criteria and Evidence does a Superintendent Consider when Evaluating the Effectiveness of a Principal Within his/her School District?**

As the research for this study commenced, it became apparent that the above question was in reality two distinct questions. This first question concerned the types of criteria a superintendent considers when evaluating a principal. For instance, what standards, competencies or principles would a superintendent use as a baseline for judging principal performance?

The second question revolves around evidence. Essentially the second question asked what types of evidence a superintendent would deem as acceptable proof that a principal had indeed fulfilled his or her role according to state and district standards. Since these two questions are indeed different, they will be answered separately, beginning with a discussion regarding the criterion a superintendent considered while evaluating a principal.

**Response to research question one: Criteria utilized by superintendents – Massachusetts principles of effective administrative leadership**

As the research for this study took place it became apparent that superintendents utilized variations of three distinct criteria when evaluating a principal. These criteria
included the Massachusetts principles of effective administrative leadership (MPEAL) found in Massachusetts state regulations (603 CMR 35.00), the principal’s ability to achieve goals previously established by the principal and superintendent, and superintendent conceptions of what a principal should be doing within a given school. These three frameworks represented the primary criteria by which superintendents judged and evaluated principal performance.

In discussing MPEAL, this document describes what the State of Massachusetts believes an effective administrator, in this case a principal, ought to be doing as he or she leads a school. As a reminder, the MPEAL requires that a principal be attentive to six school leadership standards. Those areas include instructional leadership, organizational leadership, administration and management, equity and diversity, relationships with the community and professional responsibilities.

Under each of the six standards, the State of Massachusetts provides anywhere from two to eight descriptors of the given leadership standard. In reviewing the document, it is evident that its contents represent what the state feels an effective administrator ought to know and be able to do.

To that end, 603 CMR 35.00, also indicated that within the state of Massachusetts the evaluation of a principal should be done by the district superintendent or his/her designee. All designees should have training in principal evaluation according to the 603 CMR 35.00. The superintendent or designee is then expected to use the principles set forth in the MPEAL as the criteria by which a principal’s performance is evaluated and measured.
Not surprisingly the vast majority of superintendents participating in this study identified the MPEAL as a criterion used to evaluate a principal. To be specific, seven of the eight superintendents cited the MPEAL as a criterion they utilized to judge principal performance. As indicated in chapter four, this notion was supported in both the transcribed interviews as well as the document analysis. In the supplied written evaluations and principal job descriptions there were contents that were directly linked to the MPEAL.

What was surprising is that not all of the participants viewed the MPEAL favorably. While seven of the eight participants cited this document as a significant criterion for judging principal performance, one did not see the document as overly useful. Morris claimed the document was not a significant criterion in the evaluation of a principal and instead favored other criterion, namely principal goals and goal completion.

Based upon this finding, it appears that superintendents will exercise discretion when choosing which criterion they will use to judge principal performance. The basis for acting upon this discretion is the contextual nature of the principalship. Yes, requirements and expectations can be broadly established at the state level to guide the work and subsequent evaluation of a principal and many of the expectations will relate quite nicely to what a principal is doing at the district level.

Yet, it appears that the MPEAL will be modified at the local level if, in the eyes of the superintendent, such modification will better enhance the principal’s leadership over his or her school.
Morris was a prime example of this modification. While Morris spoke favorably regarding the contents of the MPEAL, he preferred to meet with a principal and jointly develop specific goals pertinent to the principal and his or her school. While most of the goals contained similarities to the MPEAL document, this resulted more from chance than design. In short, Morris was more likely to develop “criteria” in the form of personalized goals, than conduct evaluations based solely on the expectations set-forth in MPEAL. As discussed in Chapter four, the creation and use of goals as criteria for judging principal performance was wide-spread.

Response to research question one: Criteria utilized by superintendents – Principal and superintendent developed goals.

In fact all eight of the participants in this study indicated that the construction of principal-based goals and the subsequent attainment of those goals represented a major criterion in evaluating principal performance.

While the construction of individualized, principal-based goals contained significant variability from district to district, their use was widespread. Eight participants stated that a principal’s ability to meet previously established goals served as major criteria in the principal’s evaluation.

Generally speaking the goals were often constructed with a keen eye toward the principal’s current ability level (rookie principal or veteran principal), the specific needs of his/her school, and the needs of the district. Once these factors were identified, the principal and superintendent would jointly develop the goals.
As part of establishing the goals, superintendents were also concerned with ensuring that the degree to which a principal satisfied a given goal was measurable. For all participants measurability of the goals was a major factor in the goal construction process. In all cases, before a superintendent would agree to a goal for a given principal, the principal and superintendent had to reach agreement on how the goal attainment would ultimately be measured.

Lionel was perhaps the most vocal with regard to identifying the conditions that had to be met in order for a goal to be acceptable. In his interview, Lionel referred to acceptable goals as, “SMART” goals, meaning the goals had to be “…specific, measurable, attainable, results oriented and time bound.” If a goal failed to meet any of these conditions, Lionel would not accept it as a valid. In this way Lionel hoped to foster the construction of goals that would move the principal and his or her school forward, while simultaneously avoiding goals that when attained, would result in little or no growth.

Consequently, the construction and subsequent achievement of specific principal-based goals represented a second criterion superintendents would use when evaluating a principal. The degree to which a principal satisfied the agreed upon goals thus carried significant weight with regard to a principal’s evaluation. It should also be noted that when compared to the MPEAL, the use of goals as a criterion for evaluating principal performance was more heavily favored by superintendents than the state constructed document.
Response to research question one: Criteria utilized by superintendents – 

Superintendent conceptions.

The third criterion superintendents utilized when evaluating principals resided in their own conceptions of what a principal should know and be doing. Bernard talked about this notion most directly when he stated, “The other thing that I use [when evaluating principal] is my own sense of how a school should be run, how a community is led and it’s my judgment.”

Document analysis of principal evaluation write-ups and interview transcripts further echoed Bernard’s claim that a superintendent will bring his or her own conceptions of the principalship to bear when evaluating a principal. Therefore it can be stated that this notion represented a third criterion superintendents utilized when evaluating principal performance.

In closing, this study found that superintendents utilized three primary criteria when evaluating principal performance. Those criteria were the MPEAL as articulate in Massachusetts state regulation 603 CMR 35.00, the principal’s ability to develop and achieve district and school based goals, and the superintendents individual conception of how the principal should act as compared to actual principal performance. Lastly, it should be noted that of the three criteria mentioned, the use of goals was most favored among the superintendents.

The second part of research question one shifts away from the criteria superintendents used and talks directly to the type of evidence a superintendent considered when evaluating a principal.
Response to research question one: Evidence utilized by superintendents.

In discussing the evidence and or data a superintendent considered to evaluate principal performance, the participants cited two primary sources. The first source was the principal’s behaviors, both as a school leader and as a member of the district-wide leadership team. The second piece of evidence consisted of the types of artifacts a principal would produce in response to the aforementioned goals.

Response to research question one: Evidence utilized by superintendents – Principal behaviors.

With regard to principal behaviors, superintendents were very clear that they were and are keen observers. Not only did they observe principals in their schools, but they also observed principals and their behaviors at district level meetings.

In describing the notion of observing principal behaviors, William discussed his visit to a school. William stated that,

I can learn a lot by what the principal is doing when I visit a school… When I walked into this one building, all the time, this [principal] would shadow me and that was a big deal to me. I actually called her on it once. I asked ‘Why are you following me, what are you afraid I’m going to see?’”

In this way William obtained a sense of this principal’s uncomfortableness while visitors walked the school. Taken initially, all this observation revealed was that this principal was uncomfortable with the superintendent’s visit. What caused this distress,
no one can know for sure, but its very existence signaled to William that there could be a potential problem in the school, something that he later revealed revolved around student behavior.

Not only were principal behaviors in school considered as evidence of his or her competency as a leader, but the principal’s ability to work as a team at district level meetings also constituted evidence a superintendent considered during principal evaluation.

In particular, all participants stated that the manner in which a principal conducted him or herself at district level meetings provided insights into his or her leadership ability. These behaviors, both positive and negative were often cited as evidence of the principal’s leadership and thus appropriately reflected principal evaluations.

In this setting, the superintendents looked favorably on those principals who positively participated in conversations designed to solve district wide issues, issues that went beyond the confines of a principal’s individual school. Conversely, if a principal was disengaged and not overly helpful in resolving district level issues, superintendents often concluded that a principal was not a team player and such behavior could represent unfavorable evidence of the principal’s leadership and teamwork.

Thus, the manner in which a principal behaved in multiple settings was considered by the participants to represent evidence of the principal’s leadership ability. Subsequently these behaviors were cited in principal evaluation documents and thus represented evidence considered during principal evaluation.
Response to research question one: Evidence utilized by superintendents –

Principal produced artifacts.

In addition to principal behaviors, the results or artifacts a principal produced, usually associated with the aforementioned goals, represented evidence considered by superintendents in their evaluation of principal performance.

For example, if a principal and superintendent had established a goal centered on website communications, a copy of the webpage from both before and after the goal was established was often considered evidence of the degree to which the principal satisfied the communications goal. In most cases the copies would be compared in an attempt to hopefully identify improvement to the website.

As a second example, if a principal had established the goal of increasing third grade English MCAS scores via the adoption of a new writing program, both the actual implementation of the writing program and third grade English MCAS scores would be viewed as outgrowths of the principal’s leadership in this area. The findings of this study revealed that evidence such as that described above, or in some cases lack thereof, was often cited in written principal evaluations as an indicator of principal leadership and goal attainment.

In closing, it is important to note that both the criteria and evidence a superintendent considered were essential to the principal evaluation process. By having both properties the principal and superintendent are thus ensuring that the principal evaluation system operates fairly and yields results in principal evaluations of worth and merit.
Research Question Two: When Evaluating a Principal’s Performance, what Processes and Practices does a Superintendent Utilize to Acquire the Aforementioned Evidence?

As outlined in chapter four, there were three primary practices a superintendent used to gather the aforementioned evidence. The first practice consisted of a superintendent visiting a school, commonly referred to as a site visit. The second practice involved the request and review of documents and artifacts produced by a principal, usually in regard to previously established goals. The third practice consisted of superintendents conversing with members of the school community regarding the principal’s leadership of the school.

Response to research question two: The site visit.

The site visit constitutes the primary practice superintendents used to collect data regarding principal performance. During a routine site visit the principal often spent time with the superintendent reviewing various aspects of the school such as the teaching staff, school initiatives, recent standardized testing results and anything else the superintendent and principal were collectively addressing at the time.

The site visit also allowed superintendents to walk through the school, stop into classrooms and converse with students, teachers, guests and anyone else present in the building. During the visit the superintendents were sometimes accompanied by the principal, other times they were not. The idea behind a site visit is that it provided the superintendent with a glimpse of how the school is being run.
At the conclusion of their visit, seven of the eight participants reported that they engaged in later conversation with the principal regarding what took place in the school’s various settings. The superintendents reported that these discussions represented an ideal time for them to gauge how well the principal knew the school’s strengths and weaknesses and whether the superintendent and principal valued the presence of similar practices within a school.

In addition, the site visit provided the superintendent and principal the opportunity to discuss the impact of the principal’s leadership. These conversations provided superintendents with valuable information regarding the principal’s leadership, especially with regard to determining the degree to which the principal saw his or her actions as the foundation for conditions within the school.

Not surprisingly, Fred described how he gained information about the principal on a site visit via observation. Fred described the hypothetical situation of a male student repeatedly swearing at a teacher. If Fred had witnessed such a situation, he indicated that he would follow up with the principal as to what, if anything had transpired as a result of the student’s behavior. The principal’s response to such a situation often influenced Fred’s perception of the principal and thus would likely play a role in his later evaluation of the principal.

Fred stated that if the principal indicated the student’s behavior was not overly concerning, perhaps stating that “Boys will be boys” this served as a red flag, especially regarding Fred’s desire for respectful relations among school community members. Therefore, Fred stated that the described response could indicate to him that the principal
was out of touch with the district’s goals for student behavior. Fred indicated that when he arrived at such conclusions they often influenced his perception of the principal and therefore his subsequent evaluation.

On the other hand if the principal expressed concern over the student’s behavior and had initiated a follow-up conversation with the student and teacher to ensure such conduct did not reoccur, this too impacted Fred’s perception of the principal. Such a reaction signified to Fred that the principal was attentive to student conduct and working to ensure that student conduct was appropriate. A proactive response such as the one just described would be viewed in a favorable fashion once it came time to formally evaluate the principal and his or her efforts to develop a respectful climate within the school.

The site visit also allowed superintendents to obtain a sense of the principal’s leadership as viewed by the faculty. For instance, five of the eight participants purposefully visited the faculty room during their site visits, often bringing their lunch and eating with teachers. In this way superintendents conversed with faculty and afforded themselves the opportunity to obtain the teacher’s sense of the principal’s leadership.

While engaged in conversation with faculty, the superintendent often formed additional opinions and perceptions of the principal’s leadership. Specifically the favorable or unfavorable nature of teacher comments relative to the principal and school often influenced superintendent perceptions of the principal. In most cases comments of a concerning nature resulted in follow-up conversations between the superintendent and principal. These conversations and the principal’s subsequent course of action often
became useful bits of information that could influence a superintendent’s evaluation of the principal.

Seven of the eight participants also valued the site visit because it allowed the superintendent to get a sense of what the principal believed in terms of curriculum and instruction. For example, Maxwell stated that after viewing teacher instruction with a principal, they would often talk about what they had seen in the various classrooms. Such a discussion helped Maxwell obtain a sense of what the principal valued with regard to teacher instruction, a factor that would later influence the principal’s evaluation.

As stated in chapter four, the site visit was not limited to the school. Often it manifested itself in a visit to a principal led parent night, an athletic competition, a school improvement meeting or any other event in which the principal’s leadership would be on display. The superintendents in this study indicated that the point behind their visits to a school or its sponsored event was to gain an up-close view of principal’s leadership.

As detailed above, the site visit was cited by seven of the eight participants as a major practice in terms of collecting data and evidence regarding principal performance. Superintendents also indicated that the collection and review of principal constructed documents and presentations represented a second, major evidence collection practice.

*Response to research question two: Review of principal constructed documents.*

In collecting and subsequently reviewing principal constructed documents all superintendents indicated that this practice helped them to gain a more complete sense of the principal’s ability to lead the school. Often times superintendents reviewed the principal’s monthly newsletter, postings to the school website, the school calendar,
principal constructed observations of teachers and various communications between the principal and the school community.

Similar to the site visit, superintendents reviewed principal created documents in hopes of obtaining a fuller sense of the principal’s leadership. Maxwell talked about this in the context of reviewing school websites. During district leadership meetings, Maxwell often began by projecting a school’s website to a screen and then reviewing the site with the district leadership team. During this review Maxwell hoped to see correct dates, updated information and clear, concise presentation of significant items. Maxwell stated that he valued reviews like this because they provided a glimpse into the principal’s communication skills.

In addition to reviewing a school’s webpage, principal constructed teacher observations were also requested and reviewed by all participants. While reviewing these documents superintendents hoped to ascertain what principals valued regarding curriculum and instruction. The participants indicated that these documents were particularly helpful when gauging the principal’s efforts to improve and refine instruction.

To that end, the participants hoped to find observations that adequately pointed out teacher successes, but also highlighted areas of teacher growth. If such commentary were missing the superintendents would view the evaluation with a concerning eye, wondering if the principal was sufficiently helping teachers grow via the teacher evaluation process.
In this way, a review of principal produced documents represented a second data gathering practice utilized by superintendents to gain insights into a principal’s leadership. The third data collection practice common to the participants of this study consisted of soliciting insights and feedback from those who worked closely with the principal. Similar to the site visit and review of principal produced documents, obtaining feedback from those who worked closely with the principal represented a third practice by which superintendents attempted to gain evidence and insights into a principal’s leadership.

Response to research question two: Feedback from those close to the principal.

The third practice superintendents utilized to obtain evidence of principal performance resides in gathering feedback and commentary from working closely with the principal. In this way the superintendents frequently entered into conversations with various constituents groups to gather insights into the principal’s leadership.

More often than not, the superintendent entered into these conversations on an informal basis. As an example, Morris stated that he could learn about a principal’s leadership simply by attending a sporting event. To this end Morris stated that while he attended such events,

Without even asking, many times a parent will come up to you and let you know that they are very pleased with something the principal has done…or they may let you know that they are unhappy with something that is going on.
As Morris’ comments indicate, superintendents considered feedback from teachers, students, parents, assistant superintendents, curriculum coordinators and community members as important evidence of principal performance. As cited in chapter four, some superintendents established specific systems designed to capture this feedback, such as Fred’s 360-degree survey instrument. Other superintendents purposefully positioned themselves in areas where they would likely encounter this feedback such as at a school site visit, parent council meeting or other school event.

The point is that regardless of how the feedback was obtained, via a specifically designed systematic survey or simply by attending school-wide events, it was clear that all superintendents engaged in the practice of seeking out the thoughts and opinions of others regarding a principal’s performance. In this way the superintendents were able to collect many different viewpoints of the principal’s leadership. These viewpoints and assertions, once verified, in turn yielded evidence of principal performance and thus contributed to a superintendent’s evaluation of a principal.

In closing, the three data gathering practices described above were most frequently utilized by this study’s participants. Again, those practices were the site visit, the collection and review of principal produced artifacts and the collection and review of feedback from those who worked closely with the principal. These three practices represented the primary ways in which superintendents gathered data necessary for principal evaluation and thus constitute the response to question two.
Research Question Three: What level of Consistency Exists Between the Principal Evaluation Practices Advocated in the Literature and the Principal Evaluation Practices Actually in Use?

As documented in chapter two, five commonly cited evaluation practices and techniques were cited. Those techniques included:

- rating scales/checklists
- 360-degree feedback/peer evaluation
- management by objective
- principal assessment centers
- principal portfolios

Generally speaking, what occurred in the field regarding the use of superintendent evaluation practices also occurred in practice. From a general perspective it is accurate to say that consistency between the literature and practice existed in some areas. However, as this section of chapter five will detail, consistency did not exist in all areas.

Response to research question three: Rating scales and checklists

As a remainder from chapter two, Green (2004a) claims that rating scales and checklists represent the most popular way for evaluating principals. Green goes on to state that,

Their use dates back to the early 20th century, when modern techniques of industrial management were first introduced into education. Typically, a school district will adopt a form that lists expectations, the form will be made available
to the principal, and then the principal’s immediate supervisor will complete the
form and discuss it with the principal. (p. 21-22).

MacPhail-Wilcox & Forbes (1990) also describe rating scales and checklists. In
their description they write,

Checklists and rating scales are the oldest and most widely used formal models of
administrative evaluation. These instruments assess traits, behaviors, processes
and outcomes that administrators are expected to demonstrate. [They] require
evaluators to make judgments about parts or all of an administrator’s
performance. Depending upon the types of items and rating scales, evaluators
must make high- or low-inference judgments … Most checklists and rating scales
require appraisers to assign a single rating to performance at the end. Often these
global judgments are made on a scale that ranges from outstanding to poor, or
excels to unsatisfactory. (p. 56).

While Green (2004a) may claim that rating scales represent the most popular way
for evaluating principal, only a certain aspect of the scale was popular among this study’s
participants.

That consistency resided in the formulation of a list of responsibilities the
individual was expected to meet as he or she fulfilled the duties of principal. As
indicated above, the literature advocated for such a list and after reviewing the six job
description provided from this study’s participants, all maintained a list of competencies. However this is where the consistency ends.

In the literature, rating scales and checklists were praised for their ease of use and subsequent efficiency. Normally the rating scale would list the responsibilities of the principal and then ask the superintendent to rate the principal’s performance according to a predetermined scale. The rating scales found in the literature often had areas in which the superintendent could check off the degree to which the principal met each expectation. Ordinarily the ratings available to the superintendent would be something like,

1. exceeds the expectation
2. meets the expectation
3. meets the expectation some of the time
4. seldom, if at all meets the expectation

While such a system would certainly be easy to complete, the participants in this study also recognized that such a system provided little, if any actionable feedback. Green (2004a) also recognized this limitation when he wrote, “The problem with rating scales, even though they remain in wide use, is that principals do not find them especially helpful for improving performance” (p. 22).

As a consequence the participants in this study certainly developed a list of expectations for the principals, but they did not simply provide a rating of the principal’s competency according to a predetermined scale as representative of a completed
evaluation. Rather the participants in this study preferred to provide more detailed feedback via written summaries and individual meetings with the principal where his or her practice was discussed.

In closing, the consistency between literature described rating scales and actual practice resided in the fact that a list of expectations was advocated for and subsequently developed. The manner in which a principal was judged to have met these competencies was, however, all together different as will be discussed below.

_Response to research question three: 360-degree feedback and peer evaluation_

According to the literature, 360-degree feedback is utilized when the superintendent or evaluative designee acquires data from multiple constituent groups regarding the principal’s performance. The data is gained in hopes of forming a complete picture of the principal’s performance as perceived by the various constituents. Typically, a principal will solicit insights from students, parents, teachers, building staff, fellow administrators, the superintendent, school board members and other community stakeholders.

The idea behind 360-degree feedback is that a principal who receives feedback from multiple perspectives will obtain a more accurate view of his/her work (Dyer, 2001). Dyer goes on to state,

… 360-degree feedback allows the leader to gather data about themselves from multiple sources in their circle of influence. The fundamental premise is that data gathered from multiple perspectives are more comprehensive and objective than
data gathered from only one source. …the raters are usually superiors, peers, subordinates, parents, community members, and students. (p. 35-36).

In further describing the use and value of 360-degree feedback, Green (2004a) maintains that,

The principal is a mid-level manager in a complex bureaucratic organization. At the same time, the principal is the leader of a community comprising diverse groups with their own agendas. The use of 360-degree feedback is a response to the increasingly broad range of constituencies found in a school community. The premise of 360-degree evaluation is that information that is collected from multiple perspectives will be more valuable than information collected from only a single perspective. (p. 24).

With regard to this study, 360 degree feedback, captured via survey instruments was utilized in some form by four of the eight superintendents, Fred, Lionel, Morris and to a limited extent, Bernard.

When employing surveys associated with 360 degree feedback, the four mentioned superintendents collected data from various constituents; however teachers and parents were the most frequently surveyed groups. The culled data was then shared with the principal and often played a role in the superintendent’s evaluation of the given principal.
As mentioned in chapter four, Bernard did not mandate that his principals construct and then employ surveys. Yet he was extremely complimentary of an elementary principal within his district that independently chose to do so. As Bernard’s interview went forward it was clear that he saw the value in such instruments especially with regard to informing practice.

It is also important to note that Morris and William did not have a formalized survey instrument developed, but expressed a desire and interest in developing one in the future.

Given these findings it is fair to say that 360-degree feedback as advocated in the literature was consistently employed in some form by four of the eight participants of this study. Furthermore two superintendents expressed an interest in developing a future instrument.

While consistency existed between the literature and practice regarding 360-degree feedback, there was no consistency with regard to peer observation.

As a reminder, the literature cited peer observation as an opportunity for principals to receive feedback exclusively from other principals, not necessarily representatives from various constituent groups (Gil, 2001).

To acquire such feedback Gil (1998) describes the peer evaluation process as the following,

Each principal has an initial conference with the superintendent followed by a group goal-setting session. The group selects a common focus based on predetermined criterion. … The peer groups use an array of approaches to
observe, learn and provide feedback to each principal. These include classroom observations, analysis of student work, formal interviews with key staff and parent leaders, and regular meetings to solve problems and exchange ideas. … At the end of the first year, group conferences with the superintendent address these two questions: What did we learn? What difference has it made (if any) on my leadership ability to improve student learning? (p.29).

In this way principals can evaluate their work in the context of district wide goals and initiatives that both their peers and the superintendent feel are necessary for the continued success of the school and district. Again, the major difference between 360 degree feedback and principal peer evaluation is that 360 degree feedback seeks to obtain feedback from potentially every constituent group affected by the principal’s leadership (Dyer, 2001; Green, 2004a; Lashway, 1998). In contrast, principal peer evaluation provides feedback gained almost exclusively from fellow principals (Fontana, 1994; Gil, 1998, 2001).

Despite this difference, Gil (2001) reports that peer evaluation provides very similar benefits when compared to 360-degree feedback. According to Gil,

Among the reported strengths are

- valued interactions with other principals, which led to new relationships and friendships
- support and assistance in dealing with difficult issues
- diverse perspectives and varied expertise
• meaningful evaluation established through learning and cooperative efforts (p. 31).

Despite the advocacy of principal peer evaluation in the literature, the practice was not employed by the participants of this study. Therefore the consistency between peer evaluation in the literature and in practice could not be obtained. However, while no superintendent consulted for this study reported to engage in peer evaluation, all participants engaged in the next evaluative technique, management by objective.

Response to research question three: Management by objective.

As a reminder the literature described management by objective (MBO) as originating in the business sector and later adapted for use in evaluating school principals against a set of mutually established criteria (Green, 2004a; Lashway, 1998; MacPhail-Wilcox & Forbes, 1990). This practice is very closely aligned with superintendents who utilized principal goals and the degree to which the goals were completed as an evaluative tool.

The literature described multiple steps that must be followed in order to successfully implement management by objective (Simpson, 1993). Simpson elaborates on the MBO process when he states,

The following four steps are required to establish MBO:

1. The desired goals and direction for an organization during a particular period are determined by management (i.e., the overall objectives and priorities are established).
2. All key managerial, professional, and administrative personnel are required, permitted and encouraged to contribute their maximum effort to achieving the overall objectives.

3. The individual objectives of all key personnel are blended and balanced to achieve the organizational goals of the firm.

4. A control mechanism is established to monitor progress on objectives and feed the results back to those accountable at all levels. (p. 382-383).

From an educational standpoint, Green (2004a) describes the adaptation of MBO to the evaluation of a principal as follows,

In the case of principals, management by objective consists of setting measurable goals at the beginning of the evaluation period, along with incentives for reaching those goals. At the end of the evaluation period, the principal and the evaluator review the progress that was made toward reaching those goals. (p. 22-21).

Since the particulars of MBO were discussed in detail in chapter two, there is no need to repeat those details here other than to say that MBO from an educational perspective basically consists of goals being established at the start of a school year with progress evaluated at the conclusion of the school year.

As indicated in chapter four, the utilization of goals and their subsequent completion as an evaluative tool existed among all eight participants. Not only was this
practice mentioned during the interviews, but it was also evidenced by the various superintendent authored evaluation reports consulted during this study. Therefore, it is entirely accurate to say that there was a great deal of consistency between the MBO process as advocated in the literature and the actual implementation of the process among the participants of this study. In short, as indicated in chapter four, goal establishment and subsequent attainment was the most preferred evaluative method employed by superintendents in this study.

Response to research question three: Principal assessment centers.

The literature described principal assessment centers as locations providing simulations where principals were confronted with activities designed to duplicate challenges and issues they would likely face on a typical day (Green, 2004a; Lashway, 1998; MacPhail-Wilcox & Forbes, 1990).

While at the center the principal normally encounters the simulations over a one-to three-day time period as designated by the assessment center. Of the various assessment centers currently in operation, many cite the NASSP sponsored centers as the most comprehensive (Dunn, 1999; Green, 2004a; Lashway, 1998; MacPhail-Wilcox & Forbes, 1990).

In nearly all centers, as the principal addresses the simulated challenges, trained observers watch the principal with the intent of providing meaningful feedback regarding the principal’s ability to address each situation. This feedback can then be provided to the principal, or district evaluator. Green (2004a) further describes the assessment center approach to evaluating the skills and competencies of a principal when he writes,
The purpose of assessment centers is to determine a principal’s strengths and to identify specific areas to be targeted for improvement. …assessment centers use simulations. The principal’s performance in the simulations is evaluated by independent assessors who have been trained in the procedures and rubrics used for the assessment. …the day [at the assessment center] is supposed to resemble what a principal really does.

Despite the apparent value of such centers, no participant in this study claimed to have utilized them. While participants were never questioned as to why they did not utilize assessment centers, a few reasons do seem plausible. First, it could be that the participants were unaware that assessment centers existed. Second, the high cost associated with the centers could decrease their viability.

As indicated in the literature, the cost associated with the assessment centers is a major disadvantage (Lashway, 1998). After accessing the NASSP website, the cost for instituting an assessment center within a local district totaled roughly $7780.00 (NASSP website, 2007).

Clearly cost could represent a significant barrier to a district interested in the assessment center practices, especially in today’s economy. Not surprisingly, while the use of assessment centers was cited in the literature as a productive way to evaluate and improve principals, no participant consulted for this study reported utilizing this approach.

*Response to research question three: Principal portfolios.*
The literature described portfolios as a relatively new way to evaluate principals. Despite the uniqueness of the portfolio process, many authors felt it held great promise for further developing the abilities of a principal (Brown et al., 1998; Green, 2004a, 2004b; Lashway, 1998, 2003; MacPhail-Wilcox & Forbes, 1990; Marcoux et al., 2003). Green (2004a) describes the principal portfolio this way,

A principal’s portfolio is a self-assessment of attributes, skills, and goals based on personal reflection and professional dialogue. It uses authentic evidence to communicate a portrait of leadership and a plan for growth. Portfolios are particularly suited for the evaluation of complex skills and elusive personal attributes. (p. 33).

Furthermore, the documents and artifacts contained within a portfolio are normally obtained by the principal (Brown et al., 1998; Green, 2004b). Items included in the portfolio are purposeful in that they are intended to provide concrete evidence of the principal’s behaviors and actions as a leader, normally in relation to previously established goals. Green (2004b) expounds upon this point when he writes,

For example, if a principal wants to show how implementing a new activities program has improved school wide discipline, then a brief description of the implementation process coupled with a summary of trend lines for various discipline data would be the appropriate evidence. Or, if a principal wishes to depict how restructuring parent and faculty councils has improved school climate,
then a data summary from school climate surveys would be appropriate evidence.

(p. 2).

While portfolios were not wholly cited as an evaluation practice by the participants in this study, there were certain aspects of the portfolio process that were incorporated to district evaluations of principals. The most prominent aspect was the generation of artifacts as a means to measure the degree to which principal goals had been satisfied.

As stated above, all of the participants in this study utilized goals as a way to gauge principal performance. Yet in utilizing goals, the participants of this study felt that simply stating whether or not you met your goals was not enough. To obtain a more accurate view regarding the degree to which a goal was satisfied, superintendents often required specific evidence. Morris talked about the importance of evidence when he discussed a principal who had established the goal of improving communication.

In working toward satisfying the communication goal, Morris would routinely require that this principal forward him updates to the school website. In this way Morris viewed the updated website as evidence of work toward the established goal.

Similarly, a principal working in Fred’s school district was in the process of better incorporating student effort into the formal report card system. As the principal and her staff worked toward this goal, Fred required that all parental updates and information related to the achievement of this goal be forwarded to his office. In this way the
forwarded documents became the evidence Fred considered when attempting to
determine the degree to which the principal satisfied the stated goal.

In closing, in terms of evidence collection, there was a great deal of consistency
between what was advocated in the literature and what was done among the eight study
participants. However, the findings of this study did not support the notion that portfolios
as described in the literature were fully implemented as an evaluation tool. Rather the
collection of evidence as a means to measure the degree to which goals were established
represented the most apparent similarity.

Discussion of Findings

As the findings for this study emerged, it became apparent that the data provides
insights into many different aspects of principal evaluation. What follows is a discussion
of the key findings and their potential impact on the principal evaluation process. As a
reminder, the findings themselves were directly related to three research questions.
Those questions were,

1. What types of criteria and evidence does a superintendent consider when
evaluating the effectiveness of a principal within his/her school district?
2. When evaluating a principal’s performance, what processes and practices does a
superintendent utilize to acquire the aforementioned evidence?
3. What level of consistency exists between the principal evaluation practices
advocated in the literature and the principal evaluation practices actually in use?
As the above questions were considered, some of the more interesting findings to emerge centered on the complexity of the principal evaluation process, the time constraints felt by those directly involved in the process and the need for practical evaluative guidelines and practices. Consequently these findings will be discussed in-depth below.

*Complexity of Principal Evaluation*

On the surface, evaluating a principal may seem like a pretty easy task. All one has to do is review the expectations for the principal and then determine the degree to which a principal is meeting those expectations. Yet consider for a moment a few of the items mentioned in the MPEAL document. Item I-A under MPEAL (603 CMR 35.00) reads,

The administrator facilitates the development of a shared mission and vision. [The administrator] demonstrates an understanding of the importance of mission and vision, based upon a well developed philosophy and develops a collaborative vision that provides direction for the school or district.

One would be hard pressed to disagree with this expectation. Without question we all want principals who can collaboratively develop a mission and vision that will ultimately guide the work of a school. Furthermore, we all would agree that having such a mission grounded in a well developed philosophy makes perfect sense. The complexity arrives when we consider how we are to measure or evaluate the degree to which a principal has created such a mission and vision.
Let’s pick this apart a little further. As stated above the principal is supposed to demonstrate an understanding of the importance of mission. How does a principal do this? Does the principal merely state that he or she believes a mission statement is important, and does such an assertion satisfy this criteria? We would be hard pressed to say that such an assertion would be good enough for our evaluation standards. Then what will satisfy the expectation?

Certainly some type of evidence related to the principal’s work with the mission statement would be more revealing of the principal’s understanding. Perhaps a revised mission statement that was constructed by a principal-led committee of students, parents, teachers and administrators, would produce stronger evidence of the principal’s mission belief. But is this enough?

The expectation also states that a school’s mission statement has to provide direction for the school as led by the principal. How does one consider the degree to which the principal instills the mission statement into the school culture such that it directs the behaviors of school community members? It’s one thing to have written the document, but is the document producing behaviors consistent with its contents? We then would have to look at the behaviors of the community members to indeed determine if those behaviors are consistent with the mission statement. The questions then turns to what behaviors are mission related and which behaviors are not?

As one can surmise these questions can go on and on, especially considering that we are talking about one expectation from a document that contains roughly 25 similar expectations.
The point of this discussion is not to criticize MPEAL (603 CMR 35.00) or authors who have dutifully promulgated best practices for principals. Rather the point is that engagement in comprehensive principal evaluation that yields vital, helpful information regarding a principal’s practice in light of MPEAL is incredibly detailed and focused work. This work is much more intense than simply reviewing a principal’s work in light of established expectations, although that is part of it.

With regard to the expectation about mission, the central question becomes, is the principal causing the mission to be the guiding force of all human behaviors in the school? So in essence when evaluating the degree to which a principal has fostered the mission such that it drives people’s behavior, the evaluator must look closely at the behavior of others to see if in fact those behaviors are consistent with the mission statement. It is in looking at these behaviors and the degree to which they are consistent with the mission that will determine to a large degree whether the principal has satisfied item I-A under MPEAL.

Furthermore, in addition to looking at the behaviors of others to ascertain how well the principal has inculcated the mission within a given school, other factors will also have to be considered when attempting to determine a principal’s overall effectiveness.

Those factors might include divergent student needs, available resources, parental involvement, community involvement, standardized test scores and a host of other factors that will impact principal performance. All of these items will play a role in the degree to which a principal is truly effective. It is in managing all of these factors in an attempt to obtain an in-depth look at a principal’s performance that the complexity resides.
Therefore it is imperative that we identify and recognize this complexity and then develop ways in which we can evaluate principals in light of the complexity. Some proposed solutions to addressing this complexity will be discussed later in the *implications for practice* section of this chapter.

**Time Necessary for Thorough Principal Evaluation**

As one may infer given the complexity inherent in meticulously evaluating principal performance, the findings for this study highlighted the need for superintendents to devote more time to principal evaluation. Not surprisingly, six of the eight superintendent participants in this study cited time as a concern regarding principal evaluation.

Perhaps Bernard expressed this concern best when he stated, “It would be great if there was more time to do this [principal evaluation] and be able to acquire more information from more sources, but that’s hard to do with all of the things you’re doing.”

It is no wonder that time is something most superintendents would desire as a way to enhance their principal evaluation mechanisms, especially given the fact that both the literature and State of Massachusetts claim that principals must simultaneously satisfy multiple responsibilities in order to be effective.

While it seems highly unlikely that the responsibilities of a superintendent are likely to decrease, we are left with a few choices, two of which will be discussed. First, we can evaluate principals according to the Massachusetts specifications (once every two years for professional status administrators, once a year for non-status administrators) and
agree that those evaluations will not be as in-depth as we would perhaps like. Or we can allow for a dispersion of principal evaluation among a team of reviewers.

The possibility of team-based evaluations will be discussed later in this chapter, but the point here is to indicate that time provided to effectively evaluate a principal is a concern that must be addressed if we are to evaluate principals in a much more detailed manner.

Given that time is an issue, it is not surprising that the need for practical advice on how one actually implements evaluation practices under the given conditions was a finding of this study, particularly with the newer superintendents. This finding will be discussed below.

Practical Evaluative Guidelines and Practices

“I’d be interested to see what other people are doing out there. What have you seen in your research that can help my practice?” While these statements are not directly attributable to any of this study’s participants, they do adequately reflect the sentiments of Maxwell and William and potentially other superintendents outside this study who are also engaged in principal evaluation practices.

During the interviews, both William and Maxwell expressed a sincere desire to know what others were doing regarding principal evaluation. Their desire for more information relative to principal evaluation was not a result of their failure to evaluate principals, as they were both engaged in the practice. Rather it appeared their desire for information resulted from their recognition of the existing limitations within their current
evaluation practices, especially when one considers the complexity of the principalship and the time constraints both participants expressed.

As a result of these conversations, it became apparent that superintendents were well versed in what principals should be doing, but less clear on how they as evaluators should be reviewing the work of their principals.

Thus it is clear that superintendents would benefit from published guidelines and practices that could ultimately help them perform principal evaluations. The key here is to recognize that both William and Maxwell were requesting more information on how to effectively evaluate principals in their districts given the expectations of principals and the current time constraints they both felt.

Hopefully this request for assistance will be answered by those in the field best equipped to provide a response, namely veteran superintendents and the Massachusetts Department of Education. In this way we can ensure that principal evaluation practices provide the best summative and formative experiences for all involved.

It is also important to note that principal evaluation as it currently takes place needs to be addressed if it is to ensure that principal growth is maximized and expectations are thoroughly met. Perhaps one of the areas to refine includes the site visit and the information a superintendent hopes to gain by visiting a school.

Generally speaking, throughout this study the participants provided superficial answers when describing the site visit and the school culture. Perhaps superintendents could gain more information regarding the principal’s leadership if they interacted more
deeply with the members of the school community as a means to effectively gauge the type of leadership provided by the principal.

Such refinement should encompass a more detailed reflection and analysis of what exactly a superintendent should look for when evaluating the work of a principal. Consider from a moment the school site visit. During such visits we need to ask ourselves, is enough for a superintendent to walk through the school and simply take note of what people say and do and then discuss this with the principal? Perhaps the superintendent needs to delve more deeply into exactly what is taking place at a school and in the classrooms, particularly with an eye towards teaching and learning.

During such a site visit, the superintendent might be wise to look deeply at the behaviors associated with teachers teaching and students learning. Specifically, a superintendent would get a better glimpse of the principal’s overall leadership impact by talking with the teachers about the manner in which they teach and the perceived expectations the principal holds for their instruction. Such conversations would prove tremendously valuable for the superintendent who is attempting to gauge the principal’s performance as an instructional leader.

As an example, the site visit might require that a superintendent take time to meet with a group of teachers to discuss student work. During this discussion the superintendent could look to identify the underlying conceptions contained in the work, the manner in which the teachers taught the concepts and the intended meaning the teachers hoped the students would acquire after exposure to the given content.
Such a conversation would be a clear indicator of what the principal allows the instruction to look like. This information could prove very helpful for the superintendent who is trying to determine the principal’s ability as an instructional leader.

Consider for a moment that while conversing with teachers it becomes apparent that a majority of teachers believe students who simply memorize and recite a series of important facts are appropriately educated. It would be logical to infer that the principal supports this type of instruction simply because he or she allows it to take place. Such a conclusion would be of considerable value to the superintendent who is attempting to gauge the degree to which a principal is an effective instructional leader.

Furthermore by meeting and actively engaging in focused conversations with teachers regarding teaching and learning, the superintendent could gain deeper insights into a school’s culture than by simply walking through classrooms, hallways and the cafeteria.

During such discussions the superintendent would be encouraged to ask teachers questions about their instructional practice. Questions could include, what are the school-wide curricular issues you are addressing? Are you addressing these issues independently in your own classrooms or are you taking a school wide approach in hopes of improving upon the identified issues? If you are tacking a school-wide approach, what does it look like? How is the principal leading the approach?

The astute superintendent might also ask the teachers what type of professional development the principal has provided as a way to support the school community’s efforts to collectively address the identified issues. This question would certainly provide
much deeper insights into the intellectual culture of the school as opposed to simply walking through a school and discussing whatever happens to present itself.

The point is that a refined principal evaluation practice needs to delve more deeply into exactly what the teachers are doing as a result of the principal’s leadership. Such an inquiry would provide a much deeper look at the principal’s performance and more importantly the impact that performance is having on the teaching and learning taking place in the school.

The suggested refinements above are essential if we believe that principals have a significant degree of influence over student learning within a given school. We owe it to our students to engage in this work.

Limitations of the Study

As with any research there are limitations and this study is no exception. The primary limitations include the study’s small sample size, homogeneity of participant districts, use of convenience sampling, the reliance on superintendent perceptions and the threat of internal researcher bias. Each of these limitations will be discussed in detail below.

Sample Size

As indicated throughout this dissertation the participants in the study totaled eight. While a sample of this size satisfies the criteria of Boston College’s dissertation requirements, the small sample size limits the applicability of the findings. Specifically a small sample size such as this forbids the construction and application of broad generalizations. While the findings of this study are indeed valid, they may or may not
be applicable across Massachusetts or the nation. Thus the small sample size does
represent a limitation of this study with regard to broad application of its subsequent
findings.

Homogeneity of Participant Districts

The participants in this study originated from fairly homogenous districts as
indicated via the tables located on pages 122 and 132. Due to this fact, the applicability
of the findings is again limited. It is possible, though unlikely that principal evaluation as
conducted in the districts associated with this study could be different compared to
districts of a different demographic. As a result the findings of this study may or may not
have relevance to districts with different demographics.

Use of Convenience Sampling

As stated throughout this dissertation, convenience sampling was utilized to
solicit and secure participants for this study. Specifically superintendents were solicited
as a result of past affiliations they had with the researcher, mutual connections within the
education field or proximity of the participant’s district to the researcher. What resulted
were superintendent participants whose districts were located in a somewhat concentrated
area, relatively close to Boston, Massachusetts and Boston College.

Two primary limitations arise from the utilization of convenience sampling. The
first potential limitation is that all of the superintendents, by way of their direct or indirect
affiliation with the researcher may be coming at this problem from a similar vantage
point. Thus the presence of diverse viewpoints among the participants may not be
present.
Secondly, because proximity to the researcher played a role in who was ultimately invited to participate in the study, other superintendents were excluded from the study simply because they lived too far outside the Boston area. Again the potential limitation is a lack of diverse perspectives on behalf of the participants.

Reliance on Superintendent Perceptions

As the title of this dissertation suggests, this study was concerned only with the perceptions of superintendents. There was no check on the superintendents’ perceptions to see if what they perceived to be happening with regard to principal evaluation was actually happening. While interviewing principals within the participant’s districts would have allowed for verification of participant perception, such an approach was outside the aims of this study. As a consequence the findings presented can only be attributed to superintendent perception and nothing more.

Internal Researcher Bias

As with any research, the threat of internal bias always exists. Any researcher will bring his or her own experiences and practices to bear on research they are conducting. As a consequence it is possible, although highly unlikely, that the internal views of the researcher in some way influenced the findings of this study. The hope is that the sustained focus on the research questions and the piloted interviews allowed for the researcher’s personal viewpoints to have little if any bearing on the findings of this study.

Implications for Practice
As the data from this study emerged, several current practices may have to be reviewed as we collectively attempt to refine the principal evaluation process. Among the implications are the reliance on principal supplied data for satisfying principal evaluation techniques and addressing the time constraints currently felt by superintendents evaluating principals. These implications will be discussed in detail below.

Reliance on Principal Supplied Data

As indicated in the previous chapters a good portion of the data collected for principal evaluation is collected by the superintendent either through direct observation of the principal or via conversation with others close to the principal. However, all of the participants also indicated that the principal will collect and present evidence of goal completion that factored into superintendent evaluation of a principal.

While the utilization of goals and the subsequent collection of pertinent evidence to determine the degree to which a particular goal was achieved is certainly advocated in the literature, what raises a concern is the fact that the evidence collected is often done by the principal being evaluated.

So in essence, the evidence used to judge a principal, is in many cases supplied by the principal. Why would a principal in this circumstance ever present evidence indicating failure to achieve a goal, since doing so could increase the likelihood that he or she would receive a critical evaluation?

Consider for a moment that a principal has established the goal of enhancing teacher collaboration within his or her school. As evidence of this enhanced
collaboration, the principal brings complimentary letters written by teachers and artifacts that are identified as being created by multiple teachers in a collaborative effort. How does a superintendent know that the presented items were indeed the result of collaboration and were not fabricated or massaged to appear that way?

It must be noted that this study found no evidence to suggest that principals were fabricating evidence to make it appear as though they were effectively satisfying goals. Yet what the study did find was that the potential exists where a principal could do just that.

Thus the implication for practice centers on the scrutiny with which a superintendent reviews principal supplied evidence. In cases where principals are supplying evidence of their own performance, it is incumbent upon the superintendent to verify that what is being presented is indeed an accurate depiction of the principal’s true abilities.

This will help ensure that principal evaluations are valid, and that an accurate judgment of the principal’s true ability and performance is obtained.

*Addressing the Time Issue*

As the findings of this study indicate, concerns were raised by six of the eight participants regarding the time necessary to complete an in-depth evaluation of a principal. As indicated earlier in this chapter, the options are somewhat clear; we can continue with a broad evaluation of principals that perhaps touches upon all of the aspects as outlined in MPEAL (603 CMR 35.00), but does not provide for an in-depth analysis of
principal behavior. Or we can consider evaluating principals in a different way that allows for a more thorough review of their performance, perhaps via a team approach.

The members of the team would originate from the central office staff and would be responsible for the review and evaluation of one to three principals. As an illustrative example, consider a hypothetical district with five elementary schools, three middle schools and one high school. Under these circumstances the need to evaluate up to nine principals in a given year could exist.

Now consider that the central office staff consists of the superintendent, two assistant superintendents and three curriculum directors, for a total staff of six central office personal. Under the two person team approach, the central office could produce three, two-person teams. In the hypothetical district described above, each of the teams would work exclusively with three principals, thus ensuring that all nine principals are evaluated.

The benefits of a team-approach to evaluating a principal as described above are numerous. First it is conceivable that by spreading the evaluation load among the various teams, the teams will be able to perform an in-depth analysis of the principal’s performance. This approach would potentially allow for the creation and diffusion of more specific and pertinent recommendations simply because the evaluators would only be focused on a few principals rather that nine.

Second, the team approach allows for further comprehensive discourse among evaluators. With just a superintendent reviewing principal performance, there is conceivably little room for dialogue with a third party about what has been observed in
the principal’s performance. In this way dialogue among evaluators could potentially increase, hopefully leading to a more thorough and in-depth evaluation of the principal’s work. This thorough evaluation should hopefully enhance the possibility that a principal will significantly grow from the evaluation process.

Third, by spreading the evaluation duties among the various central office staff, the team approach would allow the superintendent to focus on those principal’s most in need. In this way those principals most in need of help will be provided that help by the superintendent, the person who should be the best equipped to provide the needed assistance.

The potential negatives of the team approach reside in the need to train multiple people in the logistics of evaluating principals. While this training may initially come with an increased time and financial commitment, the long term impact should outweigh this concern, especially if future evaluators are trained in house.

The other downside of the team approach is that the superintendent would not get to evaluate each administrator each year. This could certainly pose a concern if all of the principals in a given district were in need of extensive attention. Yet this concern would be mitigated with the proper training of evaluators so that all evaluators can work with principals of various abilities.

In sum, the team approach to evaluating principals might prove effective as a means to enhancing the formative aspects of the evaluation process and should reduce some of the time constraints facing a superintendent who currently evaluates all
principals in a district. For these reasons it is an approach that ought to be considered by those in the field.

Implications for Policy

As the data from this study was examined one noteworthy policy implication emerged. This implication deals directly with the expressed desire of some participants, most notably William and Max, to have access to proven evaluation practices. These participants were very clear in terms of what they valued in their principals, yet they expressed a desire for knowledge relative to the best practices of how they should acquire the needed information to effectively evaluate a principal.


When considering the literature concerning principal evaluation, there was an enormous amount of literature focused on describing what principals should be doing in order to enhance effectiveness. There was also literature that described some of the ways in which a superintendent could go about evaluating a principal, but as William and Max indicated, some superintendents are still actively seeking knowledge with regard to the practices they should use to evaluate principals.

Clearly this study illuminated some very effective ways in which superintendents can and do evaluate principals. Among those practices were the site visit, the various survey instruments and the establishment and subsequent fulfillment of mutually agreed upon goals. Given that these practices are currently practices in the field, how we ensure that all superintendents, especially newer superintendents like William and Max are provided with this information is crucial.
Thus in addition to providing the expectations for principal behaviors as described by MPEAL (603 CMR 35.00), perhaps the state would be doing superintendents a service if it published and disseminated appropriate ways to engage in principal evaluation practices.

Considering that this study identified commendable ways to evaluate a principal, it is conceivable that more, similarly useful way to evaluate principals exist. Therefore it would be in the best interests of all if those practices were identified and then disseminated to all superintendents across the state. In this way we can help ensure that all superintendents are evaluating principals in the best, most efficient and productive manner possible.

Thus the implication here is that more should be done to identify and then disseminate principal evaluation practices. This is something the state is best positioned to accomplish and thus should be carried out at that level.

Implications for Research

As the data from this study was examined, several areas for further research emerged. Those areas included examining what principals feel are the most notable characteristics of principal evaluation, contextualizing best principal practices in terms of positively effecting student achievement and contextualizing principal evaluation procedures.

Principal Perception of Evaluation

As has been noted several times, this study dealt exclusively with superintendent perceptions regarding the manner in which they evaluate principals. In conducting this
research, superintendents were the only individuals who had a voice in describing how it is that they evaluate principals. The logical next step would be a research study focused on principal perceptions of the evaluation process, specifically in the areas in which they feel the process is strongest and areas in which they would welcome improvement.

Such a study would be extremely valuable as the field looks to identify and construct principal evaluation mechanisms that effectively serve the summative, formative and accountability aspects inherent in principal evaluation.

*Contextualizing Principal Best Practices*

While there has been a tremendous amount of literature written with regard to the types of principal behaviors that best influence student achievement, often this research is of a general nature and not always considerate of the actual location and setting a principal might find him or her self working in. Perhaps the field of education would be better served if research of principal practices was done in a more specific, localized fashion. In this way research could seek to identify the best 5-10 best practices for principals in terms of the various settings and locations they occupy.

For example, research into principal best practices at underperforming schools, high performing schools, urban schools, rural schools, elementary schools, secondary schools, etc. could be of particular benefit. Without question there are universal practices that will benefit any school, but it is also likely that specific principal practices exist for various localized situations. Should the researchers in the field identify these practices, superintendents could then incorporate them into their evaluation techniques, thus ensuring that the best practices for a given location exist.
Contextualizing Principal Evaluation Procedures

In addition to providing specific research on principal practices given the various contextual settings they might inhabit, the same could also be done for principal evaluation practices.

In reviewing the data generated for this study it was apparent that superintendents face different challenges when evaluating principals at the various stages of their career. To highlight this point Bernard stated, “I evaluate a rookie principal differently from a veteran.” In this way research into evaluating principals at their various career stages could prove beneficial in developing effective principals, simply because the evaluation practice could become more pertinent to the challenges a principal may encounter at a given point in their career.

Concluding Statement

This dissertation began with the contention that everyone in our society is evaluated or judged in someway during their lifetime and career. Principals are no exception. What hopefully emerged from this study is a clear sense of the actual practice of evaluating principals and the inherent worth associated with this endeavor.

Without question our school systems represent our collective investment in the future and they need to be constantly examined to ensure that they are providing the best preparation for our students and subsequently our world. Principals are on the front lines of this endeavor and therefore their actions must be evaluated and reviewed to ensure that all is being done to equip our students for the challenges that lie ahead.
In that regard it is incumbent upon all of us to ensure that our principal evaluation practices allow two outgrowths to emerge. First our principal evaluation systems must ensure that principals are effectively meeting the responsibilities associated with the role. In this way, measuring principal practice against documents like the Massachusetts Principles of Effective Administrative Leadership and Marzano et al.’s (2005) 21 responsibilities can provide indicators of productive principal behaviors.

When these responsibilities are being met, we must acknowledge the success and highlight the work of successful principals as a model for others. When the responsibilities are not being fully met, we must work to improve principal performance such that our students are not deprived of the high quality education they are entitled to.

Second, we must also ensure that our principal evaluation practices encourage and promote growth among our principals. In this way we ensure that principal stagnation is eliminated and that principals are constantly urged to refine their practice in ways to better serve our students, schools and communities.

Principals are like any other person in that they can always grow and improve their practice. Our principal evaluation mechanisms ought to be geared toward this reality to ultimately help our principals hone and refine their craft such that our students receive the benefits of a high functioning principal within their school.

Should these two outgrowths permeate our principal evaluation systems, our students and schools will be in a more advantageous position when it comes time to meeting the challenges currently facing our communities, states, nation and world. Based upon the data associated with this study, it appears that we should engage in further work
regarding principal evaluation. In this way we can ensure that our principals represent some of our best educational leaders and that our students are continually provided with a world-class education that will prepare them, and our society, for the challenges that lie ahead.
Appendix A

Superintendent Interview Questions

1. When evaluating the work of a principal, what types of data, evidence or information do you consider? (EDI)

2. When you evaluate a principal, what types of data, evidence or information provide you with the best picture of a principal’s work? (EDI)

3. When evaluating a principal, what types of data, evidence or information do you view as irrelevant to the process? (EDI)

4. When evaluating the work of a principal, how do you acquire the “data” to make evaluative decisions? (MT)

5. Of the “data gathering techniques” you have just described, which do you think are the most beneficial? (MT)

6. Of the “data gathering techniques” you have just described, which do you think are the least beneficial? (MT)

7. What do you feel are the hallmarks of your principal evaluation system? (EDI and MT)

8. In what ways would you like to strengthen your principal evaluation system? (EDI and MT)
Appendix B

Consent Letter

Boston College Consent Form

Boston College, Lynch School of Education

Informed Consent for Participation as a Subject in
Principal Evaluation: A Qualitative Study Investigating the Manner in which Public School Superintendents Perceive they Evaluate Principals

Investigator: Jacob A. Conca
Adult Consent form
Date Created: 12-12-07

Introduction

You are invited to participate in a research study exploring the ways in which superintendents evaluate principals. This study is designed to shed light on the process of principal evaluation as it is perceived through the eyes of local superintendents. The primary aim of this study is to uncover superintendent perceptions of principal evaluation in terms of what works, what doesn’t work and how the process can be improved or enhanced.

To illuminate these concepts superintendents will be interviewed regarding the principal evaluation techniques currently employed within their district. Where applicable, superintendents will be asked to provide access to principal job descriptions and documents describing the principal evaluation procedure.

You were selected as a possible participant via a recommendation from one of your colleagues in the education field and thus identified as someone who could provide knowledgeable insights pertinent to this study. Please take the time to read this form thoroughly so that you may ask any clarifying questions before agreeing to participate in the study.

Purpose of Study:

Again, the purpose of this study is to explore superintendent perceptions of principal evaluation. In particular, this research will be centered on three guiding research questions. Those questions are:

1. What types of criteria and evidence does a superintendent consider when evaluating the effectiveness of a principal within his/her school district?
2. *When evaluating a principal’s performance, what processes and practices does a superintendent utilize to acquire the aforementioned evidence?*

3. *What level of consistency exists between the principal evaluation practices advocated for in the literature and the principal evaluation practices actually in use?*

It is important to note that all participants in this study will be superintendents of Massachusetts school districts. The expected number of study participants is eight.

**Description of the Study Procedures:**

If you agree to participate in this study, we would ask you to engage in the following two activities:

1. **Participate in an Interview**
   
   As part of your participation you will be asked to partake in a 45-60 minute interview geared towards exploring the aforementioned research questions. The expected venue for the interview will be the superintendent’s office, unless the researcher and superintendent agree on another, more suitable venue. The interview will be audio taped and then later transcribed by the researcher solely for the purposes of addressing the research questions.

2. **Furnishing of Documents**
   
   Additionally, should you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to provide documents related to the evaluation of a principal. Specifically, principal job description documents along with documents that describe how a principal is evaluated within your district are of most interest.

**Risks/Discomforts of Being in the Study:**

As with all studies there are potentially inherent risks; however the risks associated with your participation in this study are minimal as your identity and place of employment will be securely protected. Thus, there are no foreseeable or expected risks to you and/or your district. It must be stated however that all studies do potentially contain unknown risks.

**Benefits of Being in the Study:**

Again, the purpose of this study is to gain greater insights into the practice of principal evaluation. Once the study is completed and conclusions have been made, you will be offered a copy of all findings. The primary benefits of these findings could include the following:

- The results can assist superintendents as they reflect upon their own principal evaluation procedures, thus providing a knowledge base for those wishing to improve principal evaluation within their district
• Ideas and contentions that could assist superintendents as they look to further develop the capabilities and proficiencies of current principals through formative evaluation mechanisms
• The identification of ways to further support and enhance current and future principal leadership
• Potential improvement of schools as a result of better principal leadership
• The creation of enhanced educational opportunities and higher performing schools as a result of more effectively evaluating and supporting the work of current principals

Payments:
For agreeing to participate in this study you will receive a $25 dollar gift certificate to a local restaurant or establishment of your choice.

Costs:
There is no cost to anyone who participates in this study.

Confidentiality:
All records and documents obtained for this study will be entirely confidential. In any report detailing the findings of this study, absolutely no identifying information will be provided. All information that could potentially identify a participant will be kept in a locked file.

All electronic information will be coded and secured using a password protected file. In particular, audio tapes of superintendent interviews will contain pseudonyms to protect those involved. Furthermore, the audio tapes will only be accessible to the researcher. At the conclusion of the study all materials gathered will be destroyed. Documents will be shredded and audio tapes will be permanently disabled.

Access to the records will be limited to the researcher; however, please note that the Boston College Institutional Review Board and the internal Boston College auditors may review the research records.

Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal:
Should you agree to participate in this research study, your participation is voluntary. If you choose not to participate, it will not affect your current or future relations with Boston College or the colleague who recommended you for participation in this research.

Since your participation in this study is voluntary, you are free to withdraw at any time, for whatever reason. Simply inform the researcher that you no longer wish to participate and all information you have provided will be immediately destroyed.

Contacts and Questions:
As indicated at the top of this document, the researcher conducting this study is Mr. Jacob A. Conca, doctoral candidate at Boston College. Should you have questions or
desire more information concerning this research study you may contact Mr. Conca via the following:

   Home phone:    774-293-1270
   Cell phone:    508-298-2805
   Email:         ejconca@charter.net

If you believe you may have suffered a research related injury, contact Mr. Conca using the information above to receive further instructions.

Lastly, if you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact: Director, Office for Human Research Participant Protection, Boston College at (617) 552-4778, or irb@bc.edu.

**Copy of Consent Form:**

   You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records and future reference.

**Statement of Consent:**

   I have read (or have had read to me) the contents of this consent form and have been encouraged to ask questions. I have received answers to my questions. I give my consent to participate in this study. I have received (or will receive) a copy of this form.

**Signatures/Dates**

   Study Participant (Print Name):  ________________________________

   Participant Signature:   ________________________________  Date _______
References


Bottoms, G. (2003). *Good principals are the key to successful schools: Six strategies to prepare more good principals*. Atlanta: Southern Regional Education Board.


English, F. (2000). Psssst! What does one call a set of non-empirical beliefs required to be accepted on faith and enforced by authority? [Answer: a religion, aka the


http://www.principals.org/s_nassp/bin.asp?CID=40&DID=26755&DOC=FILE_PDF


