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# An Evaluation of Principals' Perceptions of Georgia's Teacher Keys Effectiveness System

Denise B. Warnock

*Leadership, Technology, and Human Development*

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# AN EVALUATION OF PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS OF GEORGIA'S TEACHER KEYS EFFECTIVENESS SYSTEM

by

DENISE BRYANT WARNOCK

(Under the Direction of Jason LaFrance)

## ABSTRACT

“Teachers are by far the most important in-school factor in determining whether our students succeed and our nation’s schools improve” (Education Trust, 2009. p. 3). Quality instruction should be the objective of all educators. Accountability measures have increased the focus on instruction quality making teacher evaluation an important element in determining teacher effectiveness. A greater emphasis on accountability in the field of education calls for teachers and students to demonstrate standards of competency and performance. In light of current educational policy, the means by which teachers are observed and appraised are as important as the content and students they teach.

The purpose of this qualitative case study research was to understand the perceptions and experiences of principals’ who have implemented Georgia’s Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (TKES). The Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) developed TKES as a comprehensive teacher evaluation system to ensure consistency and comparability across districts based on a common definition of teacher effectiveness. By understanding the perceptions and experiences of principals charged with the duties of teacher evaluation, one should be able to evaluate implementation of TKES.

This study's findings showed principals perceive both positive and negative impacts resulting from their experiences with the implementation of TKES. While they acknowledged areas in which the TKES teacher evaluation system could improve, they identified positive effects as well. Responses indicated the principals participating in the study negatively perceived the change experienced as a result of TKES as inconsequential, the time required to observe in classrooms was spent inequitably, and the challenges TKES presented to school climate required an intentional focus. They acknowledged TKES' benefits to professional learning and data-driven decision-making. The implications based upon these findings are included along with recommendations for future research.

INDEX WORDS: Teacher Effectiveness, Teacher Evaluation, Principals' Perception

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KEYS EFFECTIVENESS SYSTEM

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## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Ken, and my son, Cameron. To my husband, your encouragement motivated me to begin this journey. To my son, the characteristics we share inspired me to see it through to completion.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

“Teachers are by far the most important in-school factor in determining whether our students succeed and our nation’s schools improve” (Education Trust, 2009, p. 3). Quality instruction should be the objective of all educators. Accountability measures have increased the focus on instruction quality making teacher evaluation an important element in determining teacher effectiveness. A greater emphasis on accountability in the field of education calls for teachers and students to demonstrate standards of competency and performance. In light of current educational policy, the means by which teachers are observed and appraised are as important as the content and students they teach.

While teacher evaluation has been around for almost a century, it is receiving greater attention due to federal policy changes and increased school accountability measures. As evidenced by a recent issue of *Educational Leadership*, devoted entirely to the topic of teacher evaluation, developing and implementing a comprehensive teacher evaluation system which will increase student achievement and develop quality teaching is a challenge (Scherer, 2012). Much time and attention has gone into developing teaching frameworks which identify what constitutes research-based effective classroom practices (Marzano, 2007; Danielson, 2007). Crucial to the design and implementation of the new teacher evaluation system is development of teacher and administrator expertise related to these practices. Ensuring that application of a teacher evaluation system aligns with the goals of the evaluation system is a complex undertaking. While new approaches

to teacher evaluation may differ, all models depend on the work of a school administrator.

This study considered the subject of teacher quality and effectiveness, giving consideration to the influence of policy on the teaching profession. It examined the history of teacher evaluation and how it has progressed from management models to systematic performance-based models. This study looked specifically at how teacher evaluation has evolved in Georgia. Particular attention was given to the perceptions of teachers and administrators charged with evaluating teacher performance. It also considered the role the school principal plays in teacher evaluation.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Teacher evaluation is integral to instructional improvement. A school's mission is to teach, and the agents who facilitate that mission are teachers. Thus, teacher evaluation is of great consequence. Developing a comprehensive teacher evaluation program is a challenging task.

Given the required resources and possible effects of teacher evaluation, principals' and teachers' perceptions and experiences with current teacher evaluation models, such as Georgia's Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (TKES) need to be understood. Teacher evaluation is integral to the entire instructional leadership model (Marzano, Frontier, & Livingston, 2011). Research has looked specifically at middle school teachers' perceptions of the comprehensive CLASS Keys teacher evaluation system (Henry, 2012). Because so much is at stake with comprehensive teacher evaluation models, there is an immediate need to understand principals' perceptions of other models such as TKES. Principals' perceptions of Georgia's newest evaluation



system are not known, and this study sought to determine whether principals responsible for teacher evaluation find TKES an effective means of improving teaching and learning.

### **Purpose**

The goal of a comprehensive teacher evaluation system is to ensure quality instruction and optimal student growth and learning. Principals are charged with the responsibility of teacher evaluation. As a school's instructional leader, the principal appraises teacher performance and guides instructional improvement and professional growth. A comprehensive teacher evaluation system facilitates these processes. The purpose of this case study was to understand principals' perceptions of Georgia's TKES. Instructional leadership is a focus on factors that promote and support teaching and learning, and a positive school climate focused on student learning is correlated to student achievement (Hallinger, 2005). Therefore, this case study looked specifically at how principals perceive TKES in terms of instructional leadership, school climate, and teaching and learning.

### **Significance of the Study**

Much has been written recently on the topic of teacher evaluation (Donaldson & Peske, 2010; Gabriel & Allington, 2012; Strong, 2011; Toch, 2008). Much of the recent literature focuses on specific components of the newer comprehensive teacher evaluation models, such as value-added measures and student surveys (Adams, 2009; Amrein-Beardsley & Collins, 2012). In 2012, Henry conducted a study to understand teachers' perceptions of Georgia's CLASS Keys system of teacher evaluation. Henry suggested several major areas of concern from a teacher's perspective, and he recommended replicating the study with administrators whose duties involved teacher evaluation

(Henry, 2012). However, before replication of the study with could be conducted, Georgia replaced the CLASS Keys system with TKES. Because the short-lived CLASS Keys system served as the foundation for TKES, conducting the recommended research with TKES should prove beneficial in addressing what is not known about comprehensive teacher evaluation models from the perspective of principals. This research can benefit Georgia educators and will inform the evaluation practices of administrators in Georgia. Additionally, this research can assist other states undertaking the challenge of designing and implementing comprehensive teacher evaluation models.

### **Research Questions**

The following overarching research question guided this investigation: How do administrators perceive the implementation of Georgia's TKES?

In order to answer this question, three sub-questions were developed:

- How do principals perceive TKES' impact on instructional leadership?
- How do principals perceive TKES' impact on school climate?
- How do principals perceive TKES' impact on teaching and learning?

### **Procedures**

This qualitative study utilized a case study methodology to understand the experiences and resulting perceptions of principals who have implemented Georgia's TKES. A case study design was selected because it is an effective method for developing an explanation or understanding of how and why individuals experience a contemporary event, and it allows the researcher to investigate an empirical topic by following specified procedures (Yin, 2003).

The researcher used an in depth interview strategy to collect data on the interviewees' lived experience (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Email was used to recruit a purposeful sample of volunteers. Participants were employees of Race to the Top school districts that have participated in the full implementation of Georgia's TKES as well as employees of other Georgia school districts who have participated in implementation of TKES. The first six principals from Race to the Top school districts and the first six principals from non-Race to the Top school districts who agreed to take part in the study were chosen as participants.

The researcher developed an interview protocol (Appendix A). The protocol was designed to obtain interviewees' interpretation of their experiences. Verbal responses to interview questions served as the data, and the researcher was the principal data collection instrument. One-hour interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. Interview data was analyzed and coded for themes and patterns (Creswell, 2013). Further, qualitative data interviewing analysis guidelines recommended by Rubin and Rubin (2005) were used to understand principals' experiences and perceptions. A narrative format was used to report findings.

### **Theoretical Framework**

As demonstrated in the literature review, teacher evaluation is believed to affect teacher effectiveness. A comprehensive teacher evaluation system depends on instructional leadership, school climate, and teaching and learning, and these factors are variables in Georgia's TKES. This case study research was meant to explore implementation of TKES to generate a theory based on participants' perspectives of implementation of Georgia's TKES.

## Definition of Terms

*Academically challenging environment:* A student-centered, academic environment in which teaching and learning occur at high levels and students are self-directed learners.

*Assessment strategies:* A variety of diagnostic, formative, and summative assessment strategies and instruments that are valid and appropriate for the content and student populations.

*Assessment uses:* Using relevant data to measure student progress, to inform instructional content and delivery methods, and to provide timely and constructive feedback to both students and parents.

*College and Career Readiness Index (CCRPI) score:* The new accountability system that replaces the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) measurement in Georgia.

*Differentiated instruction:* Providing the appropriate content and developing skills which address individual learning differences.

*Instructional leadership:* Facilitation of the development, communication, implementation, and evaluation of a shared vision of teaching and learning that leads to school improvement.

*Instructional strategies:* Research-based instructional strategies relevant to the content area that engage students in active learning and promote key skills.

*Learning:* Student achievement which results from teacher performance.

*Positive learning environment:* A well-managed, safe, and orderly environment that is conducive to learning and encourages respect for all.

*School climate:* An academically rigorous, positive, and safe school environment for all stakeholders which promotes the success of all students.

*Student Learning Objective Percentiles (SLOs):* Developed by the local school district, these are content-specific, grade level learning objectives that are measureable, focused on growth in student learning, and aligned to curriculum standards and are used to measure a teachers' impact on student learning.

*Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs):* Used as the student growth component of the Teacher Effectiveness Measure (TEM) for teachers of tested subjects. SGPs describe a student's growth relative to his/her academic peers—other students with similar prior achievement (i.e., those with a similar history of scores).

*Surveys of Instructional Practice:* Student surveys given in grades 3-5, 6-8, and 9-12 for both tested and non-tested teachers to reflect the direct experience of students in the classroom and provide information to inform the rating of the ten TAPS standards.

*Teacher Assessment Performance Standards (TAPS):* Assessment that measures learning growth of all students.

*Teacher Effectiveness Measure (TEM):* Student growth and academic achievement component of TKES that includes Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs) and Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) data.

*Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (TKES):* Georgia's state-wide comprehensive evaluation system for teachers of record.

*Teaching:* Teacher performance that results in student learning.

*TLE Electronic Platform:* Teacher Leader Effectiveness Division's electronic stage that principals and teachers use to facilitate the TKES process.

### **Limitations, Delimitations, and Assumptions of the Study**

Due to the nature of qualitative inquiry and the small sample size, results from the interviews may only be applicable to participants in Georgia and may not be transferrable to other populations. It was assumed that volunteer interviewees would answer truthfully and give the Georgia TKES process full support. The researcher served as the instrument in data collection; therefore, personal biases could impact the data. These biases may have included whether the researcher's presence while gathering data during the interviews affected the interviewees' responses. Also, the researcher may have had strong views on specific questions and may have read questions emphasizing a particular thought which could possibly influence participants' responses. The researcher also could have reinforced the statements of participants, leading them toward a thought pattern and limiting other responses they might give. The study was delimited to principals in Georgia.

### **Chapter Summary**

Georgia's TKES was developed to improve the quality of classroom instruction, optimize student learning and growth, and support the continuous growth of teachers. The comprehensive evaluation system requires new skills and resources from administrators charged with teacher evaluation. Principals are committing valuable resources to system processes. Currently, there is no research available to shed light on how the implementation of Georgia's TKES impacts instructional leadership, school

climate, and teaching and learning. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to develop an understanding of principals' experiences with and perceptions of TKES.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The body of literature on the topic of teacher evaluation is expanding. The literature examined in this chapter provided a basis for this study. The first part of this chapter explains the topic of teacher evaluation in terms of history, purpose, and models. The second part of the chapter examines teachers' and principals' perceptions of teacher evaluation. The last section of this literature review looks specifically at teacher evaluation in Georgia's new TKES.

#### Literature Search

Searches using keywords *teacher evaluation, teacher effectiveness, principal perceptions, teacher quality, leader quality, teacher perceptions, CLASSKeys, teacher keys effectiveness, instructional leadership, school climate, and teaching and learning* were performed against the following sources: Academic Search™ Complete, EBSCOhost, ERIC, University System of Georgia Galileo, and ProQuest. Similar searches were performed on Google Scholar, and a weekly Google Scholar alert was utilized using the key words *teacher effectiveness, instructional leadership, and school climate* to ensure that the latest publications meeting these search criteria were evaluated. Finally, a search of the ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database using keywords *teacher evaluation* and *teacher effectiveness* produced relevant dissertations. Searches resulted in 306 documents consisting of a mix of popular literature, books, theses, dissertations, and refereed journal articles.



## **Introduction**

The evolution of the teaching profession and the push for teacher quality has developed from the modern school reform movement (Danielson, 2001). The movement's initial phase began with publication of *A Nation at Risk* (U.S. National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). In the early 1990s, school reform focus evolved from a drive for more academics to a thrust for more challenging standards and high-stakes assessments. In 1996, the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future's publication of *What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future* brought attention to teacher quality. A review of the literature suggests that improving school effectiveness is an administrator's primary function and improving teaching and learning is a component of that function (Gimbel, Lopes, & Greer, 2011; Graczewski, Knudson, & Holtzman, 2009; Gray, 2010; Grissom & Loeb, 2011; Ingle, Rutledge, & Bishop, 2011; Kersten & Israel, 2005; and Rosa, 2011). More recently, evaluation models have evolved from the early management models to models based on performance and now to the system-based reform models.

## **Background**

Over the past half-decade, Congressional acts have spurred rapid changes in the teaching profession. In 2009, policy focused on teacher evaluation and the relationship between teacher effectiveness and student achievement. In that year, the U.S. Department of Education created a competitive grant program under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) to spur innovation and reform in K-12 education at the state and local levels (American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009). The Race to the Top program awarded states points for satisfying certain educational policies. One

such policy was a performance-based standard which requires an annual professional performance review of teachers. More recently, the White House's Blue Print for Reform called on "states and districts to develop and implement systems of teacher and principal evaluation and support, identify effective and highly effective teachers and principals, inform professional development, and help teachers and principals improve student learning" (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, p. 14).

A combination of research and federal and state interest in measuring teacher effectiveness galvanized support for reform of teacher evaluation systems (Hirsh, 2011; Shakman et al., 2012). In response to these federal policies, Georgia has developed new evaluation tools for teachers and leaders. In 2010, the GaDOE rolled out the Classroom Analysis of State Standards: The Georgia Teacher Evaluation System (CLASS Keys system) to assist school districts and other educational agencies in reforming teacher evaluations (Georgia Department of Education, 2009). Just two years later, the CLASS Keys system served as a foundation when TKES was developed to assist with implementation of Georgia's Race to the Top plan (Georgia Department of Education, 2012).

As the state endeavors to implement TKES, building-level administrators must work to put the system into practice. The school principal is responsible for management of all teacher evaluation activities in TKES. While the influence of a principal's behaviors on teacher effectiveness is recognized, there is a need to understand which actions by a principal related to teacher evaluation and observation positively influence teacher effectiveness (Colvin, Flannery, Sugai, & Monegan, 2009; National Governors Association, 2011). The impact of the administrators' observations given time and

process constraints is not understood (Kersten & Israel, 2005). To maximize the influence of teacher evaluation, we need a better understanding of how principals gather and use information to make decisions (Ing, 2010) as well as how teachers experience the evaluation process. We need to understand how comprehensive teacher evaluation systems influence teacher effectiveness.

### **Teacher Evaluation Purposes**

Historically, teacher performance and teacher impact on student learning has been unclear. Traditionally teacher evaluation was used primarily for employment decisions, and models were comprised of one to three 20-minute observations where teachers were rated as either satisfactory or unsatisfactory. This narrow view of the quality of the teacher's instruction did little to build on a teacher's talents or address his or her ineffectiveness at meeting students' learning needs. In their report "The Widget Effect," Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern, and Keeling (2009) identify teacher evaluation as the most important factor for schools in improving student achievement. Yet, they note the teacher evaluation models they studied fail to distinguish the varying degrees of teacher quality and, therefore, were not useful in informing meaningful decisions.

Federal and state interest in teacher effectiveness and strengthening teacher quality has spurred support for reforming teacher evaluation. In the past, teacher evaluation sought to measure teacher competence. However, the goals of newer systems of teacher evaluation are being redefined to assess teacher effectiveness for the purpose of guiding, informing, and improving teacher practice and student and teacher learning. To this end, the new evaluation systems being developed are comprised of multiple measures which include not only classroom observations but also student academic

growth and survey data. These systems are used to determine teacher performance and guide teacher growth and development.

### **Models of Teacher Evaluation**

Teacher evaluation models vary, and for at least 30 years they have wavered between authoritative supervisory models and clinical participatory approaches (Brandt, 1996; Chung, 2008; Danielson, 2001; Kersten & Israel, 2005; Peterson, 2004). The two models that stand out in a review of the literature on clinical supervision are the Hunter model of clinical supervision (Brandt, 1985) and an unnamed model offered by Goldhammer and Cogan (as cited by Goldsberry, 1984). Foundational to either approach is the assumption that the administrator's work with the teacher constitutes a continuation of the teacher's professional growth.

Opposition to the rigid applications of clinical supervision and mastery teaching ushered in the developmental and participatory models of teacher supervision offered by Hunter (as cited by Brandt, 1985), and Goldhammer and Cogan (as cited by Goldsberry, 1984). Thomas McGreal (1983) described a range of supervisory options based on teacher experience. These options ranged from self-directed professional development for experienced teachers to intense developmental supervision for non-tenured teachers and those with instructional deficiencies. Glickman and Gordon (1987) proposed a differentiated approach to developmental supervision to improve instruction. Due to the mechanical nature of the supervisory approaches and the vagueness of the developmental approaches, Wise, Darling-Hammond, McLaughlin, and Bernstein (1984) reported that teachers were the strongest advocates for a more standardized approach; they asserted that to be successful, quality teacher evaluation must suit the educational goals,

management style, conception of teaching, and community values of the school district. Wise et al. (1984) recommended providing administrators with adequate time and training, monitoring evaluators, and involving teachers. Involvement of teachers led to a participatory model. In 1996, Charlotte Danielson's *A Framework for Teaching* was published. Her framework recognized the complexity of teaching and established a common language for professional conversation, self-assessment, and reflection on professional practice.

### **Performance-Based Evaluation Models**

During the past decade, teacher performance has gained and continues to gain increased attention from the educational reform and accountability movement. Serious efforts were initiated to monitor, evaluate, and improve classroom instruction. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2001) placed a major emphasis on the impact of teacher quality on student achievement. Thus, teacher effectiveness became part of the school reform movement, and the teacher evaluation process became linked to classroom performance and school improvement goals (Reddekopp, 2007).

As noted by Toch (2008), "teacher evaluations can be powerful catalysts for teacher and school improvement" (p. 8). "Given the broad manner in which teacher effectiveness can be defined, it is not surprising that multiple methods exist. These methods include principal evaluations, analysis of classroom artifacts, teacher portfolios, teacher self-reports of practice, and student ratings of teacher performance" (Goe, Biggers, & Croft, 2012, p. 3). The more comprehensive models that improve teaching use explicit standards, multiple measures, and involve evaluator teams. Though these models are more labor-intensive and expensive, they are an investment worth making

because comprehensive models that focus on improving teachers' performance signal to teachers that they are professionals doing important work (Toch, 2008).

### **Reform Models**

A combination of research along with federal and state interest in measuring teacher effectiveness galvanized support for reform of teacher evaluation systems (Hirsh, 2011; Shakman et al., 2012). In 2009, Race to the Top grant application guidelines called for states to develop teacher evaluation systems that measure teacher effectiveness using multiple rating categories, including student growth data (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). An examination of performance-based teacher evaluation systems in five states that have implemented such systems showed that in each state studied (Delaware, Georgia, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas), teacher evaluation rubrics and scoring forms reflect most of the 10 teaching standards described by the Interstate Teaching Assessment Consortium (Shakman et al., 2012). These standards deal with content knowledge, instructional practice, professional responsibilities, and teachers' understanding of student learning.

The reason for conducting evaluations should be considered carefully when selecting an evaluation model or measure. Comprehensive models should employ multiple and reliable measures such as performance observations, evaluation of portfolios, classroom artifacts, and involve teachers. Little, Goe, and Bell (2009) suggest the following guidelines for evaluating teacher effectiveness:

- Resist pressure to reduce the definition of teacher effectiveness to a single score on an observation instrument or through a value-added model.

- Consider the purpose of the teacher evaluation before deciding on the appropriate measure to employ.
- Validity depends on how well the instrument measures what is deemed important and how it is used in practice.
- Seek or create appropriate measures to capture teachers' contributions beyond scores for student achievement gains.
- Include stakeholders in decisions about what is important to measure, and keep in mind a valid measurement may be costly.

If the quality of instruction is to improve, the process of gathering information is not more important than what is done with the information once it is gathered.

Reform models redefine not only the goals of teacher evaluation but the roles of the administrators charged with teacher evaluation. This requires the principal to be more than just a manager of the school. He or she must be the school's instructional leader.

### **Teachers' Perceptions of Teacher Evaluation**

Numerous problems associated with the evaluation of teachers have been cited in the literature, including lack of agreement on what constitutes good teaching, an emphasis on accountability rather than improved performance, limited feedback, and low benefit to teachers as a means for improving instruction (Feeney, 2007; Kersten & Israel, 2005; Nir, 2007; Odhiambo & Hii, 2012; Walker & Slear, 2011; Wang & Day, 2002). Teacher evaluation varies from model to model and school to school. Likewise, teachers' experiences with evaluation differ. Investigations into teachers' perspectives look for insight to improve evaluation practices (Wang & Day, 2002). Teachers report a missing

link between teachers' experience and the intent of the evaluation process. Research suggests making participatory roles available to teachers and cites collegial collaboration between teacher and supervisor as a means of turning the process of evaluation into a mutually beneficial and enriching experience (Feeney, 2007; Kersten & Israel, 2005; Nir, 2007; Odhiambo & Hii, 2012; Walker & Slear, 2011; Wang & Day, 2002).

Quality feedback is an essential ingredient for teacher success (Feeney, 2007; Nir, 2007; Tuytens & Devos, 2010). Teachers report a need to understand the usefulness of an evaluation system, the importance of teachers' trust in the evaluator, and the evaluator's ability to acquire knowledge, provide meaning, and offer support by mobilizing resources to enable professional learning (Tuytens & Devos, 2010). Effective communication about the characteristics of effective teaching helps a teacher set goals for professional growth.

Meaningful dialogue between teachers and administrators is possible when they are in agreement about what high quality instruction looks like. The value of communication was recognized in the research (Feeney, 2007; Kersten & Israel, 2005; Nir 2007; Odhiambo & Hii, 2012; Walker & Slear, 2011; Wang & Day, 2002). Current educational contexts require teachers to be responsive to the needs of their learners; likewise, administrators should be responsive to the needs of their teachers. If collaboration is a key ingredient for teacher support and development, then administrators need to refine their skills at studying and discussing teaching (Donaldson & Peske, 2010). Teacher evaluation conducted between 1982 and 2006 showed that the use of a performance rubric provided the constructive and meaningful feedback needed "to



promote reflection and allow teachers to plan and achieve new goals, which will ultimately lead to an increased sense of efficacy in their teaching” (Feeney, 2007).

Danielson, Dufour, Glickman, and Marzano are recognized authorities in school leadership, instruction, and supervision and were cited repeatedly in the research reviewed. Though there are consistencies among researchers about best practices in classroom instruction and the importance of instructional leadership, the inconsistent understanding of an administrator’s role as an observer of instruction seems to be an underlying issue. The analyzed research recognized an administrator’s influence on teacher effectiveness but failed to demonstrate a consistent understanding of an administrator’s role in teacher observation beyond that of summative evaluation. Research shows the purpose of observation was not consistently defined (Feeney, 2007; Henry, 2012; Kersten & Israel, 2005; Walker & Slear, 2011; Wang & Day, 2002).

### **Principals’ Perceptions of Teacher Evaluation**

School improvement is the focal point for educational leadership in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Providing effective instructional leadership is one challenge faced by school administrators. A positive relationship exists between high levels of teacher efficacy and increased student achievement as well as between principal behaviors and teacher efficacy (Walker & Slear, 2011). Facilitating professional development and leading with an instructional orientation are activities, processes, and actions associated with strong instructional leadership (Sanzo, Sherman, & Clayton, 2011). However, instructional leadership involves spending a lot of time in the classroom observing in order to achieve high levels of teaching and learning. Kersten and Israel (2005) surveyed principals, and the results showed that more thorough evaluation systems, though appreciated for their

scope, are largely impossible to use as part of the school administrator's already over-extended list of duties.

A teacher's instructional capability contributes to students' academic success, and research shows the process of teacher evaluation and observation plays a powerful role in developing and nurturing a teacher's instructional capacity (Feeney, 2007). While the influence of principals' behaviors on teacher efficacy is recognized, there is a need to understand which principal actions related to teacher evaluation and observation positively influence teacher efficacy (Colvin et al., 2009; National Governors Association, 2011). The benefits of goal setting, enhanced supervision, and communication are acknowledged in the research, but their impact given time and process constraints is not understood (Kersten & Israel, 2005).

Gaining a common understanding of teacher evaluation is time-consuming and complex (Canelake, 2012; Kersten & Israel, 2005; and Lamm, 1990). A lack of understanding and responsiveness to teacher needs is a "missing link between teacher observation and promotion of teacher learning and professional growth" (Wang & Day, 2002). Although communication is the stimulus for a mutually beneficial and enriching evaluation experience, the tenured teacher receives less feedback than non-tenured teachers (Canelake, 2012; Ing, 2010; Kersten & Israel, 2005; Wang & Day, 2002).

It is not known whether principals feel confident in their ability to make the teacher evaluation process informative and empowering as well as to identify the kind of feedback which invites dialogue and promotes change. Research consistently cites the importance of providing professional development to evaluators about how to assess instructional quality, engage teachers in reflection, and use evaluation to inform school-

wide professional development; but, little is known about whether evaluators feel they have sufficient professional knowledge to perform the tasks expected of them. To maximize the influence of teacher evaluation, we need a better understanding of how principals gather and use information to make decisions (Ing, 2010).

Developing a teacher evaluation program is a challenging task. If administrators are to conduct quality performance reviews that stress accountability, promote professional improvement, and involve teachers in the process, further research is needed. An evaluation of principals' perceptions and experiences with current teacher evaluation models, such as Georgia's TKES, is warranted to determine the feasibility given the time, fiscal resources, and professional development requirements.

### **Teacher Evaluation in Georgia**

The models employed by Georgia to gather information on teaching for the purpose of teacher evaluation have run parallel to national trends during the last quarter of a century. Both supervisory and participatory elements have been featured in Georgia's teacher evaluation programs. Since 1980, the GaDOE has worked to design performance-based teacher assessment models. Each model developed as a result of the state's efforts to refine teacher evaluation has made use of some component of a performance-based model.

### **Former Georgia Teacher Evaluation Instruments and Programs**

In the mid-1970s, public attention focused on teacher competency amid growing skepticism about the quality of American education (Lavelly, Berger, Blackman, Follman, & McCarthy, 1994). As a result, many states adopted accountability measures as minimum competency standards. "In 1980, Georgia became the first state in the nation to

require an on-the-job performance assessment for certification of beginning teachers” (McGinty, 1996, p. 41). The Teacher Performance Assessment Instrument (TPAI) was a performance-based teacher certification model which rated teacher competencies based on teaching plans and materials, classroom procedures, and interpersonal skills. The TPAI was an enormous measurement tool comprised of portfolio lesson plans and materials, interviews by three interviewers (peer, administrative, and regional consultant) to discuss the portfolio, and in-class observations by three observers simultaneously (Lavelly et al., 1994; McGinty, 1996). TPAI placed emphasis on teacher behaviors believed to be linked to student achievement (Stronge, 1997). Though the model was developed and validated by the University of Georgia, 10 years after its implementation, the use of TPAI came to an end. Even with proper administrative procedures and adequate support services for candidates, teacher performance assessment is problematic.

While TPAI was being used to evaluate non-tenured teachers, the Georgia Teacher Observation Instrument (GTOI) was being used to evaluate tenured teachers. The GTOI was an observation instrument which evaluated teachers on 15 dimensions and did not involve a portfolio. The GTOI used a simple but loose checklist. The GTOI was viewed as “more palatable to teachers and administrators, but less quantitative and less useful to justify revoking certificates” (McGinty, 1996, p. 46). The GTOI was in use in many Georgia school systems through the 2012-2013 school term.

In response to Georgia’s Quality Basic Education Act of 1985 (QBE), the Georgia Teacher Evaluation Program (GTEP) was developed in 1989. The QBE Act requires that all personnel employed by local units of administration have their performance evaluated annually by appropriately trained evaluators. Certified professional personnel who have

deficiencies are to have professional development plans designed to mitigate their deficiencies (Georgia Department of Education, 1995). The GTEP uses two instruments: the Georgia Teacher Observation Instrument (GTOI) and the Georgia Teacher Duties and Responsibility (GTDR) instrument. Administrators responsible for teacher evaluation are required to participate in state-approved training activities. Employees with deficiencies are required to have three unannounced formal observations, and employees rated satisfactorily are required to have one. All employees are evaluated using the GTDR instrument. An unsatisfactory GTDR rating renders the summative evaluation unsatisfactory.

### **CLASS Keys Evaluation System**

In 2010, the GaDOE rolled out the CLASS Keys evaluation system to assist school districts and other educational agencies in reforming teacher evaluation (Georgia Department of Education, 2009). The document cited “effective teacher evaluation as a key component of educational reform and school improvement” (Georgia Department of Education, 2009). The CLASS Keys system offered an evaluation system that served the purposes of improvement and accountability. As both a formative and summative tool, it identified a teacher’s level of performance across five strands of teacher quality. These strands were further defined and developed into performance standards and elements with rubrics that have accompanying examples of evidence and artifacts. The GTDR component was included in the evaluation system and provided ongoing positive and corrective feedback.

The CLASS Keys teacher evaluation system was described by the GaDOE (2009) as a participatory, developmental, and performance-based system. It evaluated teacher

performance using qualitative rubrics and provided support and resources for instructional improvement and standards-based practices. CLASS Keys factored the academic achievement gains of students into the teacher's annual evaluation in accordance with Georgia law and engaged teachers in the evaluation process and their own professional growth. The system supported the achievement of school and district improvement goals, allowed evaluators to give teachers more detailed feedback using the language of the elements, and allowed evaluators to use an array of evidence from multiple sources over time to review teacher performance inside and outside the classroom.

In the 2010 and 2011 school terms, some schools and systems elected to implement the CLASS Keys evaluation system. Schools who had failed to make Adequate Yearly Progress for numerous years also implemented the system as a requirement of their Needs Improvement status. Implementation was met with some resistance due to the time required to execute this comprehensive model.

### **Teachers Keys Effectiveness System**

The CLASS Keys system served as a foundational system when, just two years after it was introduced, TKES was developed to assist with implementation of Georgia's Race to the Top plan (Georgia Department of Education, 2012). As a Race to the Top grant recipient, Georgia committed to developing and implementing a teacher evaluation system that would improve the overall conditions of teaching and learning as well as improve the quality of current classroom teachers (Georgia Department of Education, 2012). To fulfill the Race to the Top commitment, the Teacher and Leader Effectiveness Division of the GaDOE worked with Race to the Top districts to pilot TKES in early

2012. Collaborative teams identified the “challenge of breathing life into Georgia's new evaluation system so that it becomes an opportunity and vehicle to provide the professional learning and growth opportunities needed to support Georgia teachers in becoming the most effective teachers possible, while at the same time providing the required once-a-year measure of teacher effectiveness” (Georgia Department of Education, 2012).

Like CLASS Keys, the TKES model serves a two-fold purpose: improvement and accountability. Like the GTEP model and CLASS Keys system, it results in either a satisfactory or unsatisfactory rating. Unlike the GTEP model, the strands are rated using a four-level rubric: ineffective, developing/needs improvement, proficient, and exemplary. Any strand rated as ineffective results in an unsatisfactory annual evaluation. Any unresolved unsatisfactory score on any GTDR item results in an unsatisfactory GTDR and an unsatisfactory annual evaluation. GTDR items are rated as satisfactory, unsatisfactory, or not applicable. An evaluator-developed and monitored Professional Development Plan for Improvement is required for teachers with an unsatisfactory rating.

The TKES Teacher Assessment of Performance Standards (TAPS) component is comprised of five domains: planning, instructional delivery, assessment of and for learning, learning environment, and professionalism and communication. Each of the domains has two performance standards, and each performance standard has six to nine indicators. A continuum of improvement rubric with four performance levels for each performance standard is provided. Unlike the CLASS Keys rubrics, the TAPS rubrics do not include examples of evidence for each performance standard. However, the documentation coversheet provides examples of portfolio documentation for professional

knowledge, instructional planning, instructional strategies, and differentiated instruction. It also provides examples of evidence for assessment strategies, assessment uses, positive learning environment, academically challenging environment, professionalism, and communication. Teacher observations, conferences, and student evidence are categorized.

In addition to rating teachers on the 10 performance standards, TKES also takes student survey ratings into consideration when rating teachers on the TAPS component. While the TAPS component comprises 50% of a teacher's overall effectiveness rating, teachers are also rated based on their students' academic growth. The value-added student growth measure comprises the remaining 50% of a teacher's overall effectiveness rating.

TKES was piloted to varying degrees statewide during the 2013-2014 school term. Trainers and evaluators were required to attend state-approved, required training sessions and any required training updates. School principals were responsible for seeing that they and their teachers met the expectations associated with TKES implementation. Yet, even though it was only partially implemented, Liz Utrup with the U.S. Department of Education has praised Georgia for taking the work of strengthening teaching and school leadership to the next level (Reinhardt, 2012).

Fifty-four school districts, two state agencies, four local education agencies, and 16 charter schools in Georgia participated in the full implementation of the Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (TKES) in the 2012-2013 school term. This participation was a component of the Race to the Top initiative; thus, data from those participants were collected and analyzed to form a report on three components of TKES. These



components were Teacher Assessments of Performance Standards (TAPS), Surveys of Instructional Practice, and Student Growth and Academic Achievement.

Georgia General Assembly Legislation (2013), House Bill 244, was signed into law on May 7, 2013. This law directed the State Board of Education, no later than the 2014-2015 school year, to adopt a new performance evaluation system for teachers and principals. House Bill 244 prioritized multiple measures of teacher effectiveness. The TKES teacher evaluation system meets these legislative requirements and was fully implemented statewide beginning with the 2014-2015 school year.

The Georgia Department of Education received a grant from the U.S. Department of Education to evaluate the first year of full implementation for participating school districts and, in 2014; they reported findings from the 2012-2013 evaluation. GaDOE (2014) reported finding that evaluators measured teacher performance using TAPS standards between 92.2% and 98.8% effective. They reported Surveys of Instruction Practice were found to be strongly positive and students consistently cited their teachers' care for their learning. With regard to the surveys, classroom behavior was a strength for grades 6-8 and 9-12 but lower for grades 3-5; however individualized attention and challenging class work were given low ratings across the three grade bands.

In the area of Student Growth and Academic Achievement, GaDOE reported finding a balance between median growth percentiles. Conversely, the student learning objectives (SLO) data was skewed to lower ratings. SLOs are district developed assessments and GaDOE attributed the lower score to the challenges districts faced building the assessments.

GaDOE's 2012-2103 evaluation report recognized the following areas of strength: Teacher Leader Effectiveness (TLE) field staff support; improved TLE platform; strengthened SLO processes, procedures, and support; updated, revised, and developed support materials; increased communication and developed processes for stakeholder feedback; and initiated sustainability processes. Finally, with regard to TKES, the evaluation reported the following recommendations: continue to strengthen communication; establish a protocol for training teachers; increase acceptance of surveys; continue to improve the platform; continue to refine SLO processes; and increase fidelity of TAPS rubric implementation. In the report, GaDOE acknowledged support for all districts in the state and sustainability as challenges.

As the state struggles with how to put the plan into action, so too must building-level administrators. The school principal is responsible for managing all teacher evaluation activities with TKES, and in Georgia, teachers must be evaluated annually. According to Reinhardt (2012), Georgia's transition to TKES has not been seamless

Although CLASSKeys research was conducted to learn teachers' perceptions and experiences, Georgia's quest for a more comprehensive system of teacher evaluation and evaluation of principals' opinions and understandings has not been conducted. The required time and fiscal requisites as well as the professional development requirements of the current teacher evaluation model, TKES, call for research into principals' perceptions and experiences. It also would be helpful to determine if the process is feasible and if the quality of the most current teacher evaluation model would be helpful in gauging both the administrators' and teachers' impact on student achievement.

## **Role of Principal Leadership**

Leadership is “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (Northouse, 2007, p. 3). For schools, that goal is to help students learn. “Instructional leadership represents the set of tasks in which principals engage in order to support and improve teaching and learning” (Odhiambo & Hii, 2006, p. 237).

School leaders are responsible for fostering the success of all students by serving as instructional leaders. As noted by Senge (2002), the school administrator is an important factor in conducting educational and instructional activities. According to standards identified in Georgia’s Leaders Keys Effectiveness System (LKES), these activities encompass facilitating the development, communication, implementation, and evaluation of a shared vision of teaching and learning that leads to school improvement as well as developing, advocating, and sustaining an academically rigorous, positive, and safe school climate (Georgia Department of Education, 2012).

### **Instructional leadership**

As instructional leaders, school principals: (a) work collaboratively with staff, analyze instructional strategies to improve classroom instruction, increase student achievement, and improve school effectiveness; (b) possess knowledge of research-based instructional best practices; (c) collaborate with staff to identify needs; (d) design, revise, and monitor instruction to ensure effective delivery of curriculum; and (e) provide the focus for ongoing professional learning (Stronge, Richard, & Cantano, 2008). Once they have a shared understanding of effective teaching, principals need to provide the critical constructive and specific feedback teachers need to improve their instructional practice

(Marzano, 2012; Donaldson & Peske, 2010). Effective principals use feedback focused on teaching practices and student achievement to help teachers develop their understanding effective teaching practices and improve their performance in relation to teaching and learning (Georgia Department of Education, 2012).

The instructional leadership of the school principal is a critical factor in a school's effectiveness. Instructional leaders understand the learning needs of individuals, organize social and interactive environments, encourage expertise, delegate tasks, motivate individual improvement, impose sanctions, and provide support for learning (Calik, Sezgin, Kavgaci, & Kilinc, 2012). A common focus on instruction enables an instructional leader to indirectly build a positive school climate through professional development and instructional goals (Hallinger, 2005).

### **School Climate**

Principals shape instruction through creation of the school's climate (Hallinger, 2005). In developing, advocating, and sustaining an appropriate school climate, a school leader: (a) incorporates the dynamics of the school community to cultivate a positive academic learning environment; (b) models and promotes high expectations, respect, concern, and empathy for stakeholders; (c) uses shared decision-making to build and maintain positive school morale; (d) maintains a collegial supportive environment through the process of change; (e) implements a safe school plan in an effective and timely manner; (f) involves stakeholders in sustaining a healthy learning environment and effective school-wide behavior management plan; and (g) communicates behavior management expectations to students, teachers, and parents (Strong et al., 2008). In their study, Calik et al. (2012) examined the relationship between school principals'

instructional leadership behaviors and teacher efficacy; they noted teacher effectiveness depends on the instructional leadership they perceive.

A principal's ability to manage change directly impacts a school's climate. Maintaining a collegial supportive environment through the process of change, such as the implementation of a comprehensive system of evaluation, can be a daunting task for a principal. Principal perceptions and, in turn, principal behaviors influence the effects of organizational change on the school climate and thus teacher and student behaviors. A school climate has also been found to have an increased influence on teacher and student outcomes (Hoy, Tarter, & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2006).

### **Teaching and Learning**

Teaching and learning form the core of education. Teaching and learning are comprised of teacher performance and student achievement respectively (Hindman, Grant, & Stronge 2010). New comprehensive teacher evaluation models incorporate an assessment of teacher performance on teaching standards and student growth on learning standards. With Georgia's TKES, these components comprise a teacher's overall Teacher Effectiveness Measure (TEM).

### **Summary of Professional Literature**

Teacher evaluation has served two purposes over the years. One purpose has been for personnel and contract renewal decisions. The other purpose has been for growth and support. Characteristics of supervisory models best fit the purpose of the former, and attributes of clinical and participatory models align with the latter. Historically, teacher evaluation has teetered between the two models and evolved to include components of each.

This review of the literature revealed a variety of systems for evaluating teachers. Current models incorporate a variety of measures such as self-reflection, conferencing, formative observations, feedback, teacher portfolios, and summative observations. The literature indicated a focus on professional performance and development as well as improved learner academic achievement. Research has looked at principals' perceptions of traditional evaluation processes; however, none of the research has looked specifically at principals' perceptions of the recent comprehensive evaluation systems (Canelake, 2012; Gimbel et al.; Shakman et al., 2012).

An examination of the literature on teacher evaluation processes, the Georgia CLASS Keys and the Georgia TKES systems, over the past quarter century suggests research on current models is limited. Many states are implementing comprehensive models as a result of the focus by current educational policy on teacher evaluation. The research on these models, however, is limited. Henry's (2012) research of middle school teachers' perceptions of the Georgia CLASS Keys teacher evaluation instrument recommended replicating the study with administrators whose duties included personnel evaluation to determine their perceptions of the effectiveness of CLASS Keys.

Georgia's new TKES is based on the short-lived CLASS Keys system. Due to the short implementation period of the CLASS Keys system, there is little research on the system. TKES was designed to meet the requirements of Race to the Top grant guidelines and, therefore, should be more lasting. Given the expectations that principals and school administrators serve as instructional leaders in their schools, there is a need to know their perceptions of the feasibility and quality of the implementation of Georgia TKES. GaDOE has examined the 2012-2013 school year implementation; however their

findings looked more at processes and did not consider perception and experiences of teachers and principals. Of special interest are the constructs of instructional leadership, school climate, or teaching and learning. A more comprehensive study of all P-12 Georgia teachers and administrators involved in piloting TKES would be valuable to the body of knowledge on current comprehensive teacher evaluation models.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODS

In this chapter, the methods for exploring the research questions that guided this investigation are described. For this study, the researcher employed a qualitative research design to understand the perceptions and experiences of principals who have implemented Georgia's TKES teacher evaluation system. The relevance of the constructs serves as a framework to understand the implementation of TKES. The focus on the study is not what constitutes teacher effectiveness, but instead the impacts of the implementation of the TKES system on the functions of a comprehensive evaluation system.

Stronge and Xianxuan (2011) identified the goal of TKES as support of the continuous growth and development of teachers by monitoring, analyzing, and applying pertinent data compiled within a system based on a fair and solid set of performance standards. These standards provide sufficient detail and accuracy so both teachers and evaluators (i.e., principals, supervisors) understand the full range of teacher performance and identify areas for professional improvement. For these objectives to be met, it would be useful to determine if the goals of Georgia's TKES correspond with the perceptions of those who are using the system to evaluate teachers. Given that there is no published data on TKES' impact on instructional leadership, school climate, and teaching and learning, there is a gap in what is known about the effectiveness of the system and an exploration is warranted.



### Design of the Study

This qualitative study investigated the perceptions of principals charged with the duties and responsibilities of teacher evaluation who have implemented Georgia's TKES. In their 2011 research synthesis, Stronge and Xianxuan provided an overview of extant research related to Teacher Performance Standards, a component of TKES. Additionally, research conducted by William Cameron Henry at Georgia Southern University in 2012 considered middle school teachers' perceptions of the CLASS Keys Teacher Evaluation System, the foundational system for TKES. However, neither of these researchers considered TKES as a comprehensive system. In Henry's (2012) conclusions he recommended further research from the perspective of an administrator. The findings shed light on the impact of TKES from the perception of principals who agreed to participate in focused interviews.

Qualitative research provides "an in-depth description and understanding of the human experience" (Litchman, 2006, p. 8). A case study is "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context" (Yin, 2003, p. 13). Since the purpose of this study was to understand TKES in the context in which it occurs, this qualitative research took the form of a case study in which the participants told how they understood and experienced TKES. This method allowed the investigator to maintain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events-such as the implementation of the TKES evaluation system. The investigation proposed to understand principals' perceptions of Georgia's TKES and benefit those who were implementing the comprehensive system. Twelve principals participated in this case study.

### **Research Questions**

As recommended by Yin (2003), the researcher's investigation of previous research made possible the development of sharp and insightful questions on the topic of teacher evaluation. This investigation was guided by the following research questions. The primary question proposed to understand administrators' perceptions of the implementation of Georgia's TKES. An understanding of principals' perceptions provided the researcher with insight about the effectiveness of the system and its implementation.

The overarching research question that guided this investigative study was: How do administrators perceive the implementation of Georgia's TKES? In an effort to answer this question, three sub-questions were developed:

1. How do principals perceive TKES' impact on instructional leadership?
2. How do principals perceive TKES' impact on school climate?
3. How do principals perceive TKES' impact on teaching and learning?

### **Researcher's Design**

The intent of a case study is to explore in depth a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals (Creswell, 2013). Case studies are a preferred strategy "when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon with some real life context" (Yin, 2003). This explanatory case study employed systematic interviews.

The researcher employed a semi-structured interview protocol in an effort to understand what is experienced and known about Georgia's TKES as an evaluation system. Interviews of persons involved in the event are one source of evidence a case study may provide (Yin, 2003). In this research, interviews were helpful in obtaining

interviewees' explanations and understanding of their experiences. The semi-structured in-depth interview that was used was a responsive interview approach that relied heavily on interpretive constructionist philosophy mixed with a bit of critical theory (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

The researcher was a Georgia high school principal with 22 years of experience as an educator, having worked 15 years as a teacher and 7 years as a school leader. The researcher was a credentialed TKES evaluator and had participated in both a pilot and full implementation of TKES. To protect against potential bias and ensure coding validity, the researcher examined preconceptions and maintained awareness of how feelings might have slanted the research. Furthermore, the researcher conducted a pilot study, complete with field notes and personal reflection, to ensure interview questions were formulated to assess the clarity and viability of the survey instrument, offset bias, and establish the validity of the questions prior to conducting the principal interviews.

### **Sampling**

Stratified purposeful sampling was used to identify subgroups and facilitate comparisons (Creswell, 2013). Participants selected were the first six principals from Race to the Top school districts or initial full implementation pilot school districts and the first six principals from non-Race to the Top school districts or non-initial pilot districts who responded to an email sent to schools whose district superintendent agreed to allow the researcher to conduct the study. The small sample size facilitated the researcher's in-depth inquiry with the participants.

Permission to implement this research study was obtained from the Internal Review Board (IRB) of Georgia Southern University. Consent to survey was obtained

from the participating principals. Consistent with IRB expectations, a signed informed consent form was required of all study participants. Confidentiality was particularly important since participants' statements could cause them embarrassment if they became known. To protect the identity of participants, the researcher removed identifying information such as names and addresses as soon as the data were tabulated. General descriptions such as Georgia High School A Principal were used in reporting data.

### **Data Collection**

As recommended by Yin (2003), the researcher's data collection process involved using several sources of evidence, creation of a data-base, and maintaining a chain of evidence. A semi-structured and open-ended interview process was used to ascertain participants' demographic data, experiences, and understanding of the implementation of TKES. Telephone interviews facilitated gathering of rich data based on the dimensions of instructional leadership, school climate, and teaching and learning. The interview protocol is presented in Appendix A. The open-ended interview process allowed categories to emerge from the data as the interviews progressed. The goal of understanding the principals' perceptions of implementation of TKES was the first consideration when the interview protocol was developed. Once the questions were developed, a 30-minute time limit was established.

Data from each interview was transcribed from an audio recording to capture the words and ideas of the participants (Lichtman, 2006). The recordings were destroyed after a transcription service transcribed each interview. The transcription service signed a third party confidentiality agreement with the researcher in order to further guarantee confidentiality. Transcriptions of interviews will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the

researcher's residence for 3 years after the interviews but with no identifying information regarding persons who participated. The researcher has sole possession of and access to the transcripts. Any current or future reports of this research made available to the public will not include participants' names or school names and school districts.

The pilot study established face validity. Digital audio recordings were transcribed verbatim and, to further establish credibility, components of member checking were used. Member checking involved "taking data, data analyses, and interpretations, and conclusions back to the participants so they can judge the accuracy and credibility of the account" (Creswell, 2013, p. 252). After comparing the transcribed interviews to interviewer notes and conducting initial coding, the researcher took data and data analysis reports to the interviewees. The participant interviewees were asked to review the reports to ensure construct validity before conclusions were made. To further strengthen validity, direct quotes from participants were presented in the data analysis to demonstrate how concepts and themes were identified in the data.

Interview questions provided focus and guided the 30-minute interviews. Questions were divided among interviewees' experience and background and their perceptions of the intent and impact of TKES. Though interview questions were designed to develop a depth of understanding with regard to theoretical propositions, concluding interview questions were open-ended to determine if unplanned concepts or themes emerged. During the interviews, the researcher memoed, wrote ideas, impressions, insights, and thoughts in relation to the study. The researcher used memo notes, informative descriptions, and reflective passages to create field notes. A summary of the field notes were drafted for use in the data analysis.

## **Data Analysis**

Words characterize qualitative research. In case study research, data analysis entails giving meaning to data parts. “Qualitative study capitalizes on ordinary ways of making sense” (Stake, 1995, p. 72). New meanings are about cases are reached through analysis of occurrences until something can be said about them.

Creswell (2013) developed spiral schemata for analyzing qualitative data. Using this design, the researcher’s analysis started at the bottom, during data collection, proceeded upward through stages of reflection and memoing, comparing and categorizing, and to arrive arriving at propositions and ultimately a written account of the findings. Memo writing assisted the researcher in making a conceptual bridge from the raw data to abstractions used to explain the phenomena of interest (Creswell, 2013). The researcher used memoing to write down thoughts and question related to the transcripts being examined. As suggested by Charmaz (2006), the researcher used memoing between data collection and coding to help grasp thoughts, comparisons and connections, and devise questions and directions.

After the transcripts were read and reviewed, the researcher began coding the data into meaningful segments for interpretation. In qualitative inquiry, code is most often a word or phrase that symbolically assigns a cumulative, prominent, essence capturing, and or suggestive quality for a portion of language-based data (Saladina, 2009). Coding is a process of identifying themes or analytic categories, it is the “transitional process between data collection and more extensive data analysis” (Saladina, 2009, p. 4).

Code is most often a word or phrase that symbolically assigns a cumulative, prominent, essence capturing, and or suggestive quality for a portion of language-based data (Saladina, 2009). The researcher selected and applied coding and analytic procedures described by Saldana (2009). The search for meaning involved a search for patterns. “A pattern can be characterized by similarity, difference, frequency, sequence, correspondence, causation (Saladina, 2009, p 6).

In this research, the data consisted of interview transcripts. Word processing software was used to create a database and organize the data files for analysis. The transcribed text was read thoroughly and checked against the researcher’s field notes and summary. Memoing and margin notes were used to form initial codes. Then, the entire interview transcript was coded for data. The data was arranged in matrix organized by interview questions and coded for patterns. Concepts and themes developed from the data.

The data was described in terms of codes and themes which were aggregated to establish themes and patterns. The themes the researcher identified in the coding process provided structure for the findings. A direct interpretation of the data was developed and used to determine naturalistic generalizations made from what was learned from the research. Narrative tables and figures were used to present an in-depth picture of the case. Theoretical propositions which led to the case study were followed in the findings of the study. Interview findings were reported in a traditional narrative format.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Capturing the context, personal interpretation, and experience of the participants required a qualitative methodology. The limitations of this study were in the choice of

the qualitative case study methodology. In qualitative inquiry, protocol and procedures must be consistent. “The goal of reliability is to minimize the errors and biases in a study” (Yin, 2004, p. 37). The pilot study helped identify and address potential bias which may have resulted from the researcher serving as an instrument. The case-study protocol, which included a database, ensured replication of the interview protocol and ensured procedural consistency. In case study research, the researcher develops naturalistic generalizations from analyzing the data and generalizations that are learned from the case can be applied to populations (Creswell, 2013). Due to the small sample size, the data from this study may only be applicable to schools in Georgia and may not be transferrable to other populations.

### **Chapter Summary**

The researcher conducted an interpretive case study to understand principals’ experiences and perceptions of the implementation of Georgia’s TKES for teacher evaluation. The researcher used semi-structured interviews to make known these experiences and perceptions. Participants were comprised of 12 principals representing school administrators charged with the duty and responsibility of teacher evaluation in Georgia. Interview data was analyzed according to established protocols and procedures, and a narrative discussing the problems, methods, findings, and conclusions was developed by the researcher.



## CHAPTER IV

### REPORT OF DATA AND DATA ANALYSIS

“There are things known and there are things unknown, and in between are the doors of perception.” (Huxley, n.d.) The purpose of this qualitative case study research was to understand the perceptions and experiences of principals who have implemented Georgia’s TKES. The GaDOE developed TKES as a common and comprehensive teacher evaluation system to ensure consistency and comparability across districts based on a common definition of teacher effectiveness. By understanding the perceptions and experiences of principals charged with the duties of teacher evaluation, the researcher was able to evaluate the implementation of TKES. This qualitative study focused on principals from Race-to-the-Top, full implementation, piloting school districts and non-piloting school districts. This chapter explores the perceptions and experiences that came into view as the qualitative interview data was collected through interviews with the principals and analyzed as described in Chapter III.

In this chapter, the results of the interviews with 12 principals are presented by the researcher as the source of information. As the researcher examined the data, information was separated into emerging themes and codes to form major concepts. The concepts fashioned the basis of the analysis in an attempt to answer the research question and sub-questions. Findings from the content analysis of interview transcripts, transcribed from digital audio recordings, are presented. A thematic analysis was used to explore the qualitative data collected in the case study. The first section of this chapter describes participants’ school settings. The second section presents the data analysis for each research sub-question. A summary of the investigation’s findings concludes this chapter.

## **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this investigation. The primary question proposed to understand administrators' perceptions of the implementation of Georgia's TKES. An understanding of principals' perceptions provided the researcher with insight about the teacher evaluation system and its implementation.

The overarching research question that guided this investigative study was: How do principals perceive the implementation of Georgia's TKES? In an effort to answer this question, three sub-questions were developed:

1. How do principals perceive TKES' impact on instructional leadership?
2. How do principals perceive TKES' impact on school climate?
3. How do principals perceive TKES' impact on teaching and learning?

## **Research Design**

This study used qualitative data collection in the form of a case study which employed phone interviews with 12 principals. The investigator employed purposeful sampling to identify six principals from Race-to-the-Top and piloting school districts that had fully implemented Georgia's TKES comprehensive teacher evaluation system and six principals from non-piloting school districts that had fully implemented Georgia's TKES comprehensive teacher evaluation system. Interviews were designed to answer the overarching research question regarding principals' perceptions of TKES implementation as well as the sub-questions regarding concepts of instructional leadership, school climate, and teaching and learning. The interview protocol is presented in Appendix A.

The researcher first explored the sub-questions about instructional leadership, school climate, and teaching and learning. Interview questions 1 and 2 were designed to

allow principals to provide an overview of their experience with TKES. Interview questions 3 through 7 were designed to explore instructional leadership; interview questions 8 through 13 were designed to explore school climate; and interview questions 14 through 17 were designed to explore teaching and learning. The concluding interview questions 18 through 22 were designed to provide principals with an opportunity to share additional information regarding TKES that may not have been gleaned through questions posted earlier in the interview.

The interviews were digitally recorded by the researcher. A verbatim transcript was created by a professional transcription service. The transcription service signed a third party confidentiality agreement with the researcher in order to guarantee confidentiality and data security. The researcher checked the accuracy of the digital audio recordings and the corresponding transcripts to ensure they were without errors. Field notes were made during and following each interview and compared to transcripts to explore and validate the interview data collected.

Transcripts were read multiple times to get an overall conceptualization of the participants' perceptions. Answers to each interview protocol question were arranged in a table to aid in examining the data. After reviewing the tabulated transcript information numerous times to identify patterns in responses, the transcriptions were coded using a preliminary coding list generated from the literature review and then open-coded to further analyze the data. Creswell's (2013) spiral schemata was used to discover themes across participants' responses. Data was described, classified and interpreted based on context and comparisons. This procedure was carried out for indicators of instructional

leadership, school climate, and teaching and learning based on the predetermined framework for this study.

After coding, the original transcripts were read an additional time and important statements were identified. These statements were evaluated for deeper levels of meaning and categorized based on their meaning. The developing themes are reported in the findings that follow in this chapter and are the basis for the findings that answer the study's research questions.

### **Participants**

The participating principals included six high school principals, three middle school principals, and three elementary school principals. Of the high school principals, two were from Race-to-the-Top and full implementation piloting school districts and four were from non-piloting school districts. Of the elementary and middle school principals, two were elementary school principals and two were middle school principals from Race-to-the-Top and full implementation piloting school districts and one elementary school principal and one middle school principal from non-piloting school districts. Each principal and school district was assigned a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality.

Table 1 shows the interview schedule for each participant. Letters of invitation were sent to principals throughout the state via email. The participants were selected through a purposeful selection process in order ensure an even division between principals from Race-to-the Top and full implementation piloting school districts and principals from districts that had fully implemented TKES but had not participated in the initial piloting. Care was taken to select principals from various grade levels within the two categories. Interviews were conducted at a mutually agreed upon time over the

course of one week. The researcher developed and followed the interview protocol designed to answer the study's research questions. To clarify answers when necessary, the researcher posed follow-up questions.

Table 1

*Interview Schedule*

Participant	RT3 School or TKES Initial Pilot Participant	Interview Date
Georgia Middle School A	Yes	March 10, 2015
Georgia Middle School B	No	March 10, 2015
Georgia High School A	Yes	March 11, 2015
Georgia High School D	No	March 11, 2015
Georgia Elementary School C	Yes	March 11, 2015
Georgia High School B	No	March 11, 2015
Georgia Middle School C	Yes	March 12, 2015
Georgia High School E	No	March 12, 2015
Georgia Elementary School A	Yes	March 12, 2015
Georgia High School F	No	March 13, 2015
Georgia High School C	Yes	March 15, 2015
Georgia Elementary School B	No	March 16, 2015

*Note.* Names of participants and schools have been replaced with pseudonyms for confidentiality purposes.

Table 2 presents the characteristics of the participants in the study. Participants' years of experience in education ranged from 15 to 30 years. Their years of experience

as a principal ranged from 1 to 15 years. All participants held at least an Education Specialist degree and half had obtained a doctorate in education.

Table 2

*Participants' Characteristics*

Pseudonym	School Level	Years as Educator	Years as Principal	Highest Degree
Mrs. Smith	Middle	24	1	Specialist
Mr. Hill	Middle	24	5	Specialist
Dr. Lee	High	30	5	Doctorate
Dr. Clark	High	21	10	Doctorate
Mr. Williams	Elementary	26	7	Specialist
Mrs. Woods	High	23	3	Specialist
Mrs. Nelson	Middle	30	7	Specialist
Mr. Johns	High	17	7	Specialist
Dr. Green	Elementary	17	7	Doctorate
Mr. Fisher	High	15	9	Doctorate
Dr. Hall	High	19	5	Doctorate
Dr. Harris	Elementary	22	7	Doctorate

Included in this section are descriptions of the physical settings of the nine districts included in this study. Subsequent sections are organized by common themes that materialized as the data were analyzed and categorized by the researcher. Sections

are arranged by findings for the research question and each sub-question as supported by the interview responses.

### **Georgia Elementary School A**

Located in the north central part of Georgia, Elementary School A is located in one of Georgia's largest counties, home to approximately 155,000 residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). This school is one of several elementary schools in this district and enrolls approximately 400 of the district's approximate 27,000 students. Georgia Elementary School A is the smallest participating school in the study and is in a Race-to-the-Top school district. The school failed to meet the state's average elementary school College and Career Readiness Index score by approximately 16 points (Georgia Department of Education, 2015).

### **Georgia Middle School A**

Located in northwest Georgia, Georgia Middle School A is located in a mid-sized Georgia county, home to approximately 28,000 residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). This school is the only middle school in this school district and enrolls approximately 1,000 of the district's approximate 4,500 students. This school's district was a Race-to-the-Top school district and the participant discussed the TKES training provided by GaDOE as well as improvement made to TKES over the past three years. The school exceeded the state average middle school College and Career Readiness Index score by approximately 5 points (Georgia Department of Education, 2015).

### **Georgia High School A**

Located in eastern part of the state, Georgia High School A is located in a small Georgia county, home to approximately 16,000 residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014).

This school is the only high school in the district and enrolls approximately 800 of the district's approximate 2,000 students. This school district piloted the implementation of TKES along with Race-to-the-Top school districts but the participant did not reference the TKES support GaDOE provided Race-to-the-Top districts. The school failed to meet the state high school College and Career Readiness Index score by approximately 10 points (Georgia Department of Education, 2015).

### **Georgia Elementary School B**

Georgia Elementary School B located in the southeastern part of the state in one of Georgia's larger mid-sized counties which is home to approximately 71,000 residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). One of seven elementary schools located in this district, Georgia Elementary School C has an enrollment of approximately 800 of the district's 10,000 students. The participant shared the district is in the second year of TKES implementation. The school failed to meet the state elementary school College and Career Readiness Index score by approximately 15 points (Georgia Department of Education, 2015).

### **Georgia Middle School B and High School B**

This mid-sized county is home to approximately 23,000 residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Georgia Middle School B is one of two district schools serving students in grades 6-8 and Georgia High School B is one of two district schools serving students in grades 9-10. Both participants reported to be in their second year of implementation. Of the district's approximate 4,500 students, these two schools enroll approximately 700 and 80750 students, respectively. Both schools failed to meet the state average College and



Career Readiness Index score by approximately 5 points (Georgia Department of Education, 2015).

### **Georgia Elementary School C, Middle School C, and High School C**

This small county, with approximately 13,000 residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014), is home to Georgia Elementary School C, Georgia Middle School C, and Georgia High School C. The elementary school is one of two schools serving students in grades K-4, and the middle and high schools are the only schools in the district serving students in grades 5-12. Of the district's approximate 2,000 students, the elementary, middle, and high school enroll approximately 500, 450, and 450 students, respectively. All schools in this school district piloted the implementation of TKES along with Race-to-the-Top school districts. The participants shared having received the TKES training and support provided to Race-to-the-Top school districts by GaDOE. The elementary and middle schools failed to meet the state's average College and Career Readiness Index score by approximately 5 and 4 points, respectively, and the high school was within a half point of the state average (Georgia Department of Education, 2015).

### **Georgia High School D**

Georgia High School D is located in a mid-sized county with approximately 28,000 residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Both a city school system and a county school system exist in this county. Georgia High School D serves approximately 500 of the 1,600 students served by the city school system. This participant reported to be in the second year of TKES implementation. The school exceeded the state high school College and Career Readiness Index score by approximately 5 points (Georgia Department of Education, 2015).

### **Georgia High School E**

Georgia High School E is located in the southeastern part of the state in one of Georgia's smaller counties which is home to approximately 11,000 residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). This school is the only high school in this district and enrolls approximately 600 of the district's approximate 2,000 students. This participant disclosed his school district is in their second year of TKES implementation. The school failed to meet the state's average high school College and Career Readiness Index score by only 2 points (Georgia Department of Education, 2015).

### **Georgia High School F**

Georgia High School F is located in a mid-sized county with approximately 55,000 residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). While it is one of two high schools located in the district, it was the largest participating school in this study, enrolling approximately 3,000 of the district's 12,000 students. This participant shared that his school district is in their second year of TKES implementation. The school exceeded the state high school College and Career Readiness Index score by approximately 12 points (Georgia Department of Education, 2015).

### **Data Collection**

Data for this study were collected from 12 participants using an open-ended interview protocol. The researcher developed this protocol based on a literature review of teacher effectiveness and teacher evaluation systems. The semi-structured interviews lasted an average of 24 minutes. The shortest interview lasted 9 minutes and the longest interview lasted 52 minutes. So that the participant could speak freely about his or her experiences with implementation of Georgia's TKES, interviews were conducted at a

time and location convenient to the participant. The researcher made sure each participant's confidentiality was protected since the nature of the questions could be viewed as having an impact on a participant's job.

The researcher guided the participants through the interview process and only deviated from the interview questions to add clarity to the questions asked. The researcher attempted to create a safe environment for the participants and ended each session with an opportunity for the participant to add to his or her responses or provide information regarding his or her perceptions which the researcher may not have addressed in the research questions. The data from this study was captured on digitally recorded audio interviews that were based on the research questions. Appendix B illustrates the correlation between the research questions and the interview questions.

### **Data Analysis**

The 12 participants were the single source of data for this study. The data are presented in logical order based on the themes that prevailed during the interviews and subsequently during the researcher's analysis of the transcribed interviews. The researcher created a tabular arrangement of the data and color-coded common words and phrases from the participant responses in order to make a manageable coding scheme to analyze the data (Yin, 2003). The common phrases were the initial codes developed by the researcher from the first examination of the data. From this initial analysis, the researcher chose to organize, categorize, and subdivide codes in order to outline major patterns and themes. From this additional analysis, the researcher was able to conduct a second examination of the data and identify major patterns. The codes were reanalyzed, and a number of codes remained distinct while others were merged. For the third

examination, the researcher employed a constant comparative method in developing the codes and themes as suggested by Creswell (2013). Table 3 illustrates the initial codes from the first data examination, the major themes which emerged with the second data examination, and the relationship to the research question and sub-questions in the third data examination.

Table 3

*Code Map: Three Examinations of Data Analysis*

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(First Examination: Initial Codes/Surface Content Analysis)

1. Training and learning to navigate the platform	1B. Morale is down
1. TLE platform issues and changes	1B. Fear of unknown
1. Conversations about instruction	1B. Focus on school climate
1. Time consuming	1B. Students feel empowered
1. TEM Score	1B. Frustrated
1. SLO validity	1B. Overwhelmed
1. Ongoing changes	1B. Challenging
1. Concern for staying the course	1B. Too much change
	1B. Students a voice
	1B. Student surveys
1A. Helps teachers improve	1C. Shows the importance of looking at data
1A. Not equitable use of time to meet needs of novice and at risk teachers	1C. Better understanding among teachers of what constitutes good teaching
1A. Time in classrooms	1C. Better understanding of the importance of common assessments
1A. Better understanding of research-based instructional practices	
1A. Aligned to standards	
1A. Curriculum checks and balances	
1A. More forms of evidence of quality instruction	
1A. Benefits professional learning	

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(Second Examination: Pattern Variables)

- 1. Platform issues
- 1. TEM Score
- 1. Constant change
- 1A. Time in classrooms
- 1A. Standards-based evaluation
- 1A. Improved professional learning

- 1B. Frustration and overwhelmed feelings
- 1B. Challenges of change
- 1B. Students having a voice
- 1C. Importance of a variety of assessment practices
- 1C. Importance of data-driven instructional decisions

(Third Examination: Application to Research Questions)

How do Principals Perceive the Implementation of Georgia's Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (TKES)?

Research Question 1 and Research Sub-Questions 1, 2, and 3.

RQ#1: Perception of Implementation

RSQ#1: Impact on Instructional Leadership

RSQ#2: Impact on School Climate

RSQ#3: Impact on Teaching and Learning

Common Themes Among All Participants

- A. Change Has Been Made to Seem Inconsequential
- B. Time Constraints are Inequitably
- C. Professional Learning Is Benefited
- D. School Climate Is Challenged
- E. Data Is Useful to Teaching and Learning

Codes and pattern discoveries were organized by research question in the code map (Table 3). "1" designates the overarching research question (1) and 1A, 1B, and 1C designate research sub questions.

### Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of principals regarding the implementation of Georgia's TKES. The researcher conducted a qualitative investigation in the form of a case study. Participants were interviewed individually at a time of their choosing using a semi-structured sequence of interview questions (Appendix A) designed to answer the research questions. Participants were drawn from nine Georgia school districts that had implemented Georgia's TKES as their teacher evaluation system. To protect their identity, the participants are identified by pseudonyms. The interview questions guided the discussion of their perceptions of the

implementation of TKES in their particular schools. Data collected from the interviews were used by the researcher to answer each interview question.

For this section of the chapter, the researcher presents the findings from the interviews. Next, the researcher provides the context for the data analysis from the interviews, then the researcher answers the research sub-questions regarding the impact of TKES implementation on instructional leadership, school climate, and teaching and learning. Last, the researcher presents the findings corresponding to the overarching research question regarding principals' perceptions of implementation of TKES.

### **Theme Development**

The themes developed naturally through answers to the interview questions. After identifying key words, phrases, and statements in the interview transcripts, the researcher grouped them according to the research question answered. Themes were formed using Creswell's (2013) data analysis spiral to identify and group similarities among participants' responses. The conceptual framework also contributed to development of themes. Of the 264 interview responses, 72 expressed negative impacts of the TKES implementation and 192 expressed positive impacts of the TKES implementation.

### **Impact on Instructional Leadership**

Participants perceived TKES to positively impact their Instructional Leadership. Fifty-two of the sixty interview responses related to instructional leadership conveyed a positive impact on instructional leadership. Discussion regarding instructional leadership led to three key themes. This included time spent observing in classrooms, standards-based evaluation, and improved professional learning. TKES is based on two measures:

the Teacher Assessment on Performance Standards (TAPS) score and the Teacher Effectiveness Measure (TEM) score. Classroom observations and documentation of teacher practice, which includes student surveys, form the basis for the TAPS score. Responses to interview questions 3 through 7, which were designed to answer research sub-question one, centered on the TAPS component of TKES.

### **Time spent observing classrooms.**

To assess teacher effectiveness, four 10-minute classroom walk-throughs and two 30-minute classroom observations are required annually for each teacher. All 12 principals interviewed discussed the observation requirement. This generated two categories based on the perceptions and experiences shared by the principals. Each participant shared his or her opinion with regard to the time required to meet this obligation. Principals discussed the advantage of the required time spent in classrooms, and 7 discussed their opinion as to whether their time in classrooms was spent equitably.

### ***Advantage.***

All 12 principals acknowledged being in all classrooms more often as a result of TKES' observation requirements. Comments which conveyed this theme as advantageous were: "time well spent," "I prefer being in classroom with teachers and students as opposed to being in the office doing paperwork," and "more observations give me the opportunity to see growth." It was also noted that more time in the classroom gives a more objective picture of the instruction consistently taking place.

Elementary School Principal B stated:

I think it (TKES) is an instrument which truly to drives instruction for the leader, because when I get the data back from conducting walk throughs, and formative

observations, I look for what I saw as the strengths and the weaknesses. Then, I look at our professional plan and we have been covering during that time frame and I look to see if there is alignment. TKES gives me, the instructional leader, feedback on where to develop next steps for professional learning to support instruction.

The participants consistently communicated the importance of supporting teacher needs. While all 12 of the participants discussed being in classrooms more as a positive outcome, the rigid determination about visits and the allocation of time was an issue for 10 participants who expressed concerns that the TKES process is time consuming.

***Disadvantage.***

Five of the participants, on the other hand, expressed concern that being required to spend the same amount of time in all classrooms does not allow them to determine the best use of their time in classrooms. Comments such as, “there is less time available to monitor implementation for induction and at-risk teachers” and “it takes away from where I really need to be,” illustrated a negative perception and supported the predominate opinion that administrators need flexibility with regard to time spent in classrooms. In discussing his impression of TKES in terms of instructional leadership, High School Principal D stated he leans toward feeling neutral or feeling that the requirement for classroom observation does not help. He stated:

I don't think it enhances instruction, if anything it hinders it when it takes time away from where I really need to be. We have master teachers that know what they are doing and I have spent as much time in their classrooms, as I have spent



in classrooms of novice or a teacher on a professional learning plan. This is not equitable in my opinion.

While no participant discussed being in disagreement with the two observations and four walk-throughs for teachers scoring below proficient, 5 principals communicated wanting the ability to lessen the number of observations required for teachers who have demonstrated TAPS scores at the proficient and exemplary levels. Two participants suggested placing teachers scoring at proficient or higher on a 3-year rotation for the four walk-throughs and two observations; one specifically referenced the rotation of the GTEP evaluation model and suggested that periodically having 4 walk-throughs and 2 observations for those teachers would help ensure they sustained those levels of performance.

#### **Standards-based evaluation.**

All 12 participants remarked on the benefits of the 10 standards which form the basis of TKES' TAPS component. Participants often referenced the standards when discussing TKES' impact on their knowledge of research-based instructional practices and their ability to monitor effective delivery of curriculum and instruction. Ten participants spoke of the standards in terms of providing a coherent focus and having a better understanding of research-based practices. While 4 principals shared that they were strong instructional leaders prior to the TKES implementation, 3 principals discussed being led to develop a deeper understanding of research-based practices in order to effectively implement the TKES system. Nine principals discussed the use of feedback and providing specific feedback in terms of the standards when conducting

observations. One in particular noted feeling that she could not conduct the conferencing components of TKES without a solid understanding of the standards.

Responses from 4 participants pointed out how the broad nature of the standards requires more forms of evidence to demonstrate quality instruction. Participants' comments articulated a system of checks and balances with regard to curriculum. When asked about TKES' impact on her ability to monitor curriculum implementation, High School Principal B stated, "Having to score teachers on 10 specific standards as opposed to the GTOI's three broad standards helps me take a closer look not only of how teachers are teaching, but what they are teaching."

Middle School Principal A identified the standards as one of TKES' strong points. He noted the benefits of being able to "link the things you are working on, such as common assessments, back to standards like assessment strategies and differentiation."

When discussing the standards, Elementary School Principal B shared:

TKES had made observations become more deliberate, intense and focused.

When I look at those standards and look at the rubrics to see how they are aligned, it makes me go in with a laser lens focus as I look at each standard and look at what the teachers are actually implementing in their classrooms in terms of those standards.

Principals are no longer just the inspectors of effective teaching; they are the builders of teacher capacity. Participant responses showed the standards-base fostered coherence and articulation. Further examination of participants' responses put forward the standards-base provided principals and teachers with a common understanding of what are acceptable practices and what is needed to improve practice. These findings are

consistent with those reported in TKES research conducted by GaDOE. The 2012-2013 TKES Evaluation Report, reported districts “like the standardization of the TKES performance standards across the state and the uniformity and consistency of them” (GaDOE, 2014, p. 23).

### **Improved professional learning.**

All 12 participants indicated TKES has had a positive impact on their ability to provide focus for ongoing professional learning. Nine stated the TKES process has helped them gain an understanding of their professional learning needs. Seven referred to the data generated from the walk-throughs and how it has strengthened their ability to focus on the common needs of most teachers and the specific needs of some. High School Principal F shared that he plans his staff’s professional development from observation data and conferencing discussions. Elementary Principal B discussed how it helps her pinpoint where an individual staff member’s professional learning plan may need to go further than the plan of his or her colleagues.

While most of High School Principal D’s responses related to instructional leadership did not convey a positive perception, he did share that being in proficient and mastery level teachers’ classrooms more has helped him identify more of the professional development needs of developing teachers. High School Principal A talked about his own professional learning and effectively expressed the feelings of most participants when he stated:

Through TKES I’ve been able to see our group weaknesses, our department weaknesses, and our weaknesses as a school learning team. We have been able to

see some areas where I have got to get better. I am making sure I understand what professional learning they need.

Participants' responses consistently conveyed a modern approach to professional learning and professional learning communities. They all communicated the importance of being able to work collaboratively with teachers to improve professional practice.

### **TKES' Impact on School Climate**

Participants communicated a negative perception of TKES implementation on School Climate. While half of the sixty-six interview responses related to school climate appeared to convey a positive perception, initial coding illustrated the negative themes embedded within those responses. The orientations that facilitate school climate are enveloped in the context of the school setting. In addition to organizational processes and structures, school climate relates to norms and values, interpersonal relations, and social interactions. Research sub-question 2 proved the most challenging to address. Discussions regarding school climate generated three connected themes: (a) teachers' feelings, (b) principals' challenges, and (c) student and teacher voices.

#### **Teachers' feelings.**

The implementation of TKES has occurred at a time when Georgia's school accountability measures were undergoing change. The TKES system aligns teacher evaluation measures with student assessment. The continual and ongoing changes of these measures have made them unfamiliar and thus unpredictable processes. This perception of teacher's feelings was consistent with the CLASS Keys research discussed in the review of literature. In his conclusions, the researcher noted, "both the purpose and the process of the CLASSKeys teacher evaluation system were confusing and unclear to

a majority of participants' (Henry, 2012, p. 106). Participants' in this study referred to teachers' fear of the unknown and being overwhelmed by change.

***Fear of the unknown.***

When discussing the implementation of TKES or specifically the concept of school climate, five participants spoke of teachers' fear the unknown. It is important to note that participants from Race-To-The-Top (RT3) districts and full implementation pilot schools spoke of this less as current phenomena than did participants from non-pilot schools. Middle School Principal A brought 3 years of experience in an RT3 district to his present position in a non-pilot school. When asked about TKES' impact on school climate, referring to his experience at the non-pilot school, he spoke to the value of preparation when he stated: "I think if we had been properly prepared for it, I don't think it would have had the negative impact in the beginning. But again, the fear of the unknown made that worse."

High School Principal F shared that it is important to "take it slow so that teachers are comfortable with the process." Also speaking to the role that teachers' fear plays in implementation, High School Principal B stated: "I believe when I recognize our teachers' fears and then can show them how the things we are doing align to these standards, it helped to relieve their fears. I have to stay aware!" Of the 6 of the participants that shared being mindful of teacher's feelings with regard to change, only 4 participants spoke specifically of how they address teachers' feelings.

***Overwhelmed by change.***

All but 2 participants referred to the many changes in education facing teachers in Georgia at this time. When discussing TKES' impact on school climate, High School

Principal D, shared his teachers are “Teachers are thinking, well, this will go away too.” The researcher found it interesting that the participated added, “The rumor mill has it that that's what's going to happen.” This comment conveyed the principal’s uncertainty.

Embedded in responses to various questions throughout the interview were mentions of teachers’ worries and concern for teachers feeling stressed and overwhelmed. High School Principal C concisely expressed the concerns of seven participants when he stated:

I think they are stressed out about all the legislation we keep hearing about. They are worried about their retirement, worried about more tests and measures, and now our math curriculum is changing again, they are worried about curriculum changes too.

At various points in the interviews, participants referenced curriculum and accountability changes. High School Principal C made reference to all the state is throwing at educators and Middle School Principal A shared, “teachers are worried that this is something else. You have to keep talking them off the cliff and reassuring them.” The later comment and High School Principal D’s comment about what is rumored, demonstrated principals too are challenged by change.

### **Principals ‘challenges.**

Principals are on the front line when school reform measures are implemented. Principal participants conveyed facing new challenges with the implementation of TKES. They acknowledged the affects of change on their own morale. The evaluation system has required them to redefine their priorities and realign their focus.

***Principal morale.***

When asked about TKES' impact on their morale personally, seven participants responded either negatively or in terms which indicated improvement. Nine participants acknowledged TKES' implementation being difficult in the beginning; those who were able to point to the benefits of implementation expressed improvement. Middle School Principal A shared, "I don't like having to juggle so many things." While another 3 participants spoke of learning to manage the process, having a timeline, and sticking to a schedule, which suggested the importance of organization. Though he acknowledged having adjusted, High School Principal C, a full implementation pilot participant stated, "It has just added to our stress. I would be fine with just using TAPS and grading teachers using all the evidence we can gather." Participant comments such as these opposed findings from GaDOE 2012-2013 TKES Evaluation Report (2014), which reported principals had no concerns around TKES implementation and were looking forward to implementing 100%.

Two other participants referred to all the changes" when discussing their own morale. High School Principal D stated: "I'm getting tired of the changes just like everybody else and it seems that just like the curriculum changes every time we think we are there . . . . Before we can stick with something it changes again!" Participant comments such as this strengthen thematic and content analysis findings related to change and school climate.

***Required school climate focus.***

When asked how TKES had impacted their ability to promote a positive school climate, eight participants responded negatively. Four participants acknowledged being

more aware and more focused on trying to promote climate. In this regard, Middle School Principal B responded:

School morale is directly related to teacher morale, so if the teachers are feeling good about what's happening - and that doesn't mean that they feel good because they're getting all good scores - but they understand the process and why things are happening, I think they're going to be more positive which, in turn, will have a more positive effect on the school.

With regard to promoting a school climate, Elementary School Principal B stated: “We took baby steps to ensure staff members felt comfortable with the process and made sure we matched negative comments with positive comments.” Middle School Principal C shared TKES had “positively impacted an academic learning environment.” And High School Principal C discussed welcoming conversations and the positive commentary teachers have enjoyed after walkthroughs. While communication was not a focus of this research, the ability to be heard emerged as a theme within the context of climate.

#### **Student and teacher voices.**

A component of TKES principals must consider when assessing teacher effectiveness is the Survey of Instructional Practice taken by the students. Five participants noted how teachers feel anxious about the surveys whereas a couple of participants pointed out students feel empowered by them. Though High School Principal A’s response was not representative of other participants, he made the following comments about the surveys and the role of student voice:

I really like the surveys, more-so than even the teachers. The kids are going into the surveys and seriously looking at evaluating the teacher. They're not beating



the teacher up because they don't like them. Four of the teachers that are the most challenging and have the most demands are the ones the kids have the best things to say about. That is probably not what the teachers expect. If it has improved the climate anywhere, it's improved the climate of the students because they feel, not empowered, but they feel ownership and investment because all of a sudden they're being asked questions about things important in education. Anyway, education belongs to them so they should be getting asked the question. I think it has helped in that I think teacher-wise it's put more of a spin on relationships.

On the other hand, High School Principal C shared an experience wherein a group of seniors who did not want to take the survey tried to negatively influence a teacher's evaluation. He explained he was able to help the students understand that when they rate a good teacher at a level one, the administrators do not buy into it because other evidence is able to show the teacher is a good teacher.

Though comments about the surveys were the most diverse, 5 participants acknowledged wanting to know students' perceptions. High School Principal D stated:

I do like the student perception surveys but they can be dangerous. I feel like, we do a pretty decent job of explaining the purpose of those surveys to teachers and to students. We explain the purpose is to provide a better experience on standards 3, 4, 7, and 8. I would say that part, having a standardized system in place that forces a student survey of teacher practice; I think that part is good.

The researcher noted one participant who spoke of the importance of student voice and student surveys in teacher evaluation also referenced teacher voice and the importance of the teacher surveys used in Georgia's Leader Keys Evaluation System (LKES). Georgia's

TKES employs a teacher survey to evaluate school administrators. Additionally, the researcher noted that participants from non-RT3 and non-pilot districts did not make reference to the student surveys as did the participants from RT3 and full implementation pilot districts. The latter group has had more TKES experience.

### **TKES' Impact on Teaching and Learning**

Participants perceived the implementation of TKES to have a most positive impact on teaching and learning. Fifty-eight of the sixty interview responses related to teaching and learning were positive. This finding oppose CLASS Keys research which concluded, teachers' perceived no discernible increase in student learning as a results of the comprehensive evaluation system (Henry, 2012).

Teaching and learning is at the heart of education and the focus of the TKES system. Discussion regarding teaching and learning led to two key themes. These themes, which easily emerged, included the usefulness of data to teaching and learning and the importance of a variety of assessment practices.

#### **Usefulness of data to teaching and learning.**

Multiple forms of data are involved in the TKES evaluation process. The TAPS score incorporates process and perception data, and the TEM score employs student achievement data. With the exception of a single participant who shared that prior to TKES his school was proficient in the use of data to support teaching and learning, all participants credited TKES with improved data driven decision making in their schools.

Eight participants identified data-driven decision-making as one of TKES's most beneficial aspects. Positive comments such as "TKES makes you do the data," "With TKES you have to analyze the data and you have got to have those data meetings,"

“Data-driven classrooms are seeing success while teachers who do not choose to use data to drive instruction are not,” and “Anytime you dig deep into the data and drill down, you start helping children individually,” conveyed participants’ perceptions of the benefits of TKES to teaching and learning. High School Principal D shared that the report feature helps you see strengths and weaknesses to support student achievement. He commented:

TKES has made me better as an administrator. It has really improved our school in the area of Response to Intervention. TKES shows how our students are responding to our interventions and what should be our next steps. I think this is huge and demanded in education today. High School Principal A comment, “TKES is a great growth model for young teachers,” which concurred with finding from the TKES 2012 Pilot Evaluation Report (GaDOE, 2012) which reported, “TKES is a wonderful tool for new teacher growth” (GaDOE, 2012, p. 23). High School Principal A also shared TKES has helped him “become better for sake of teachers and students.”

When asked about TKES’ impact on student achievement, Elementary School Principal B stated:

When you look at different pieces of data, if you are seeing improvements through the evaluation process and what you expect to see when visiting classrooms, whether it's walk through or formative, I think you can see correlation between, or look for correlation, between what you're seeing and student achievement results. For my school, the data has really given our staff reasons for celebration. It has shown our teachers they are doing the right things and the right work. And we need to keep doing it.

Just as it is important to determine whether students are learning what is intended, it is important to evaluate whether instructional goals and standards are being met. Participant responses suggest participants show the TKES process was shown to provide both teaching and learning data.

### **Importance of assessment.**

Two of the 10 TAPS standards, Assessment Strategies and Assessment Uses, deal with assessment and rely on the use of data. Seven of the participants discussed the importance of assessment in the TKES evaluation process, and five participants mentioned these standards specifically. Middle School Principal A shared:

With TKES, you have to analyze your data and you have got to have those data meetings. You have got to be able to go through that process. If you do not go through that process, you don't address TKES standards 5 or 6 at all. Whether it is once a month or after that unit test, if you do not do that process you do not address standards 5 and 6 at all. If you are going to address 5 and 6 you have got to do the data.

When asked how TKES has impacted teaching and learning in their schools, participants consistently shared that data collected through the TAPS process shows what is actually going on in their classrooms. The terms common assessments, formative assessment, and differentiated instruction were commonly used in responding to questions about teaching and learning. For example, Middle School Principal B stated:

TKES emphasizes looking at your data and how you build the common assessments. It allows teachers to see why we have those common assessments.

With regard to differentiated instruction, we are predominately whole group in our instruction practices; we need to shift to small group.

When asked about TKES' impact on teaching, his ability to analyze teacher practice, and teaching and learning in his school, Elementary School Principal B shared the following comments about TKES' assessment standards which are characteristic of what was said by all but two participants:

There are two standards on assessment, assessment strategies and assessment uses. TKES allows me to look at those standards and make sure that what we're doing is aligned to what teachers are supposed to be doing when they look at student work. Based on the data we gathered, our professional development and our collaborative planning sessions are centered on those two assessment standards.

Nine participants also referred to the importance of balanced assessment in the teaching and learning process. Middle School Principal B shared, "With TKES standards, we have gone through assessment uses and realized that we have got quality assessments but we have had to ask ourselves if we are really using that data to inform instruction." High School Principal B asserted, "The use of assessment data correlates with improved teacher practice and increased student achievement."

### **Open-Ended Questions**

There were seventy-eight responses to open-ended questions. Forty-eight responses communicated negative impacts of the TKES implementation, twenty four responses related specifically to questions regarding negative consequences and concerns, and twelve responses related specifically to positive benefits. In addition to the themes

from the research sub-questions noted above, an additional three themes emerged from the open-ended questions which concluded the interview. The concluding questions provided participants the opportunity to share information they felt relevant to the TKES implementation. These three themes were TEM scores, platform issues, and conversations about instruction.

### **Teacher Effectiveness Measure (TEM)**

The review of literature presented in Chapter Two demonstrated that most current research on comprehensive teacher evaluation systems are concerned with value-added measures. All participants expressed concern about the TKES TEM score and Student Learning Objectives (SLO). As stated previously, the TEM score employs student achievement data and is based on a student growth calculation. While 1 participant discussed recent changes assessment changes in Georgia, no participant expressed specific concerns for the validity of the student growth percentile measures.

Student growth is based on End of Grade (EOG) and End of Course (EOC) assessments in tested subjects, all 12 participants expressed concern about the validity of the Student Learning Objective (SLO) assessments. Participants, who compared the EOC and EOG assessments to the SLO assessments, commented that they are not comparable. Whereas the EOG and EOC assessments are summative assessments developed by and determined to be valid at the state level, the SLO assessments involve pre- and post-test assessments which are developed at the district level. Nine participants expressed concern that the differing measures are not fair to teachers. Another TEM score concern expressed by 5 participants was that this value-added measure should not carry the

weight of 50% of a teacher's evaluation measure. Along with TEM calculations concerns were TLE navigation concerns.

### **TLE Platform Issues**

Teachers and principals are required to use the TLE Electronic Platform to facilitate implementation of TKES. When asked about concerns related to TKES, 7 of the participants shared concerns for issues related to the platform. GaDOE uses the TLE platform to monitor implementation of the TKES process. The TLE platform also provides many resources intended to promote professional growth of teachers and school leaders. The most common TLE platform concerns identified were platform changes and navigation issues. Two participants shared problems which resulted from teachers being able to advance prematurely through the required activities. They discussed the challenges involved in correcting the unintended progression.

While 5 participants had good things to say about the resources available on the platform, 4 participants relayed being overwhelmed by all that is offered. High School Principal B suggested a clearer indexing of resources and materials. While the materials available on the TLE were discussed, the researcher was surprised that no participant mentioned the requirement of uploading resources onto the platform. Evidence artifacts uploaded to the platform are one way teachers communicate their effectiveness and conferencing is another.

### **Instruction-Focused Conversation**

The TKES evaluation process requires three conferences annually. Half the participants discussed conferencing with their teachers individually and in small and whole groups, and each spoke favorably of the exchange. Four participants spoke

favorably of conversations they had with their teachers following observations or during professional learning activities. Elementary Principal C referred to himself as a relationship leader and spoke specifically about how the TKES process lends itself to meaningful conversations about teacher practices and student performance between administrators and teachers and among colleagues.

### **Overarching Research Question**

Themes which emerged from participants' responses to the three research sub-questions and the concluding open-ended questions contributed to the framework for determining the answer to the overarching research question, how do principals perceive the implementation of Georgia's TKES? Participants' responses indicated that while the processes involved in TAPS are important, employing the TKES evaluation system is challenging. They articulated ways in which the system could be improved. Each participant shared good things about the TAPS component of the TKES process and its contributions to instructional leadership and teaching and learning. The six participants from RT3 or full implementation pilot districts appeared more at ease with the system's implementation than the other six participants. Recommendations for improvements and acknowledgement of benefits were demonstrated in the responses to the three concluding interview questions.

### **Potential Improvements**

#### **Offers flexibility.**

As previously stated, participants conveyed that TAPS processes are a huge responsibility. The researcher heard that while classroom observations were identified as an important component of the TKES process, participants were concerned about the



equitable use of their time. A few participants suggested being given the flexibility to determine which teachers would be best served by the time spent by the principal in classrooms. Since the interview protocol did not specifically ask about walk-throughs and observations, the research cannot be sure others felt the same way. Had they been asked specifically about the walk-throughs and observations, they may have indicated flexibility would help sustain implementation of the TKES evaluation process.

### **Sustain initiatives.**

It was previously mentioned that Georgia educators have faced a plethora of change. The TKES evaluation system is one of many changes Georgia teachers have experienced in recent years. In the past ten years, Georgia core curriculum has undergone four changes and the two most recent changes have occurred simultaneously with the TKES implementation. Along with the curriculum changes, Georgia changed its assessments in 2014 and the new assessments are more technology dependent, require constructed and performance-based responses, and the SLO require district development and GaDOE approval. Revision of the Georgia School Standards also occurred in 2014. As discussed in the literature reviewed, in 2010 Georgia's roll-out of the brand new CLASS Keys Evaluation System came to an abrupt halt as a result of Race-to-the-Top grant requirements.

Participants noted that, coupled with curriculum and assessment changes and legislative issues concerning educators, implementation of TKES has made school climate of greater importance to school principals. Eight participants identified challenges and acknowledged the negative impact of change on teacher and principal morale as well as a need to be more attentive to school climate. Participants expressed a

need to stay the course without additional change in other areas and slowing down the change process as possible solutions to challenges presented by implementation of TKES.

### **Notable Benefits**

As a planned and managed process, participants noted the benefits of the implementation of TKES. All participants shared TKES benefits to professional learning, not just when asked specifically but throughout the interview. All participants also discussed the benefits of the standards-based system.

#### **Professional growth.**

This study noted the benefits to participants' instructional leadership and their teachers' instruction. A correlation between these concepts and students' academic achievement was also identified. For the most part, participants in this study felt TKES strengthened their instructional leadership skills and enabled them to participate with their teachers in an ongoing learning process. Seven felt the TAPS process deepened their understanding of research-based instructional practices and enabled them to provide specific feedback to teachers and engage in meaningful conversations about teaching and learning.

#### **Standards-based.**

Nine participants, in one way or another, spoke positively about the 10 standards that form the basis for the TAPS process. Five participants discussed how the standards-base enabled them to narrow their focus at different times. Eight shared how the TKES process identifies individual teacher learning needs. Four participants elaborated on their ability to tie the professional learning plans of individuals, departments, small groups,

and school-wide to specific standards to promote the professional growth of all teachers. The standards were recognized as the basis used to generate useful data.

### **Data-driven decision-making.**

All 12 participants discussed TKES' positive impact on data-driven decisions whether they were relating them to instructional leadership, instructional strategies, assessment strategies, differentiated instruction, or professional growth. Seven participants spoke of their own use of data gathered from the TKES process. Nine participants spoke confidently about the impact of TKES implementation on teacher instructional practices and 5 participants shared that they anticipated improved student achievement as a result.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented the data gathered through interviews with principals who have implemented the TKES evaluation system. It described various themes that developed through the interviews and how the themes related to the overall evaluation of the implementation of Georgia's TKES. The next chapter returns to these findings and gives further interpretation as to their meaning for educators involved with Georgia's TKES evaluation system. The interpretations lead to recommendations regarding future opportunities for researching the implementation of TKES.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

The intent of this chapter is to summarize research finding from this qualitative study. The purpose of the study was to explore principals' perceptions of Georgia's TKES teacher evaluation system. The overarching research question that guided this investigative study was: How do administrators perceive the implementation of Georgia's TKES? In an effort to answer this question, three sub-questions were developed:

1. How do principals perceive TKES' impact on instructional leadership?
2. How do principals perceive TKES' impact on school climate?
3. How do principals perceive TKES' impact on teaching and learning?

Chapter I presented an introduction to this study and a short synopsis of teacher evaluation and Georgia's TKES evaluation system. While there is research that examines teacher evaluation, none focus specifically on principals' perceptions of the implementation of a comprehensive system like Georgia's TKES. Georgia's principals' perceptions are important as Georgia implemented TKES statewide. This research proved beneficial in addressing what is not known about comprehensive teacher evaluation models from the perspective of principals. This research will benefit Georgia educators and inform the evaluation practices of administrators in Georgia. Additionally, this research will assist other states undertaking the challenge of designing and implementing comprehensive teacher evaluation models.

Chapter II provided a broad overview of what is known about teacher evaluation. The researcher outlined the models of teacher evaluation and what is known about

principals' and teachers' perceptions of teacher evaluation. It also looked specifically at teacher evaluation in Georgia. The chapter concluded with a review of literature on the role of principal leadership.

Chapter III described the methodology for this study. The case study examined principals' perceptions of the implementation of TKES. Twelve principals from nine Georgia school districts were purposefully selected to participate in semi-structured phone interviews. The interview protocol allowed the researcher to collect the rich data needed for data analysis. The researcher followed Creswell's (2013) spiral schemata for analyzing qualitative data. Applied coding and analytic procedures described by Saldana (2009) were also employed. The rationale for employing the methodology, data collection and analysis, and the reporting of data are also provided in Chapter 3.

Chapter 4 presented a narrative of the study's findings. After the interviews were transcribed the data was described in terms of codes and themes which were aggregated to establish themes and patterns. The data were analyzed for each research question and the themes the researcher identified provided structure for the findings.

The remainder of this chapter will discuss finding based upon the research questions above in relation to prior research findings regarding teacher evaluation. How the finding of this study support or oppose the current literature will be discussed. Conclusions and implications and recommendations obtained from this study will be presented.

### **Discussion of Research Findings**

The intention of this study was to determine how principals' experienced and perceived the implementation of TKES. In answering this question, the participants

overall described TKES experience as a mostly positive experience. They described their perceptions of the impact of TKES implementation on their instructional leadership and teaching and learning in more positive terms than they described its impact on school climate.

### **Instructional Leadership**

As their school's instructional leader, the participants had put the TKES system into practice and were responsible for management of all TKES teacher evaluation activities. In the discussions about TKES impact on their instructional leadership, participants commonly described the system as a good model for teacher growth and improvement. These findings support Stronge, Richard, and Cantano's (2008) assertion that as instructional leaders, principals engage in tasks for the purpose of supporting and improving teaching.

The participants spoke of varying levels of implementation training. The 6 participants from Race to the Top and full implementation pilot schools spoke of more support than did the other 6 participants. In general terms, participants shared their experiences were a learning process.

In the review of literature, Donaldson and Peske (2010) discussed the need for principals to refine their skills related to teaching in order to provide teachers support and development. Participants shared TKES has deepened their knowledge of research-based practices and enabled them to look closer at the teaching occurring in their schools. The principals frequently referenced the standards in a positive manner which suggested they concurred with the research conducted by Wise, et al (1984) in which the teacher participants advocated for a standardized approach.

The standards were often referenced when participants discussed TKES' impact on the knowledge of research-based instructional practices and their ability to monitor effective delivery of curriculum and instruction and provide meaningful feedback. In this study participants' responses expressed having a better understanding of research-based practices and a more coherent focus as a result of the TKES standards. These findings align with Toch's (2008) assertion of the use and importance of explicit standards to focus and improve teacher performance.

Research findings showed the teacher conferencing component and administrator teacher exchanges which resulted from observations and professional learning activities benefited from the standards base. Implementation of the TKES evaluation system and resources were shown to have increased and improved professional learning. Findings also suggested TKES provided the focus for ongoing professional learning advocated by Stronge, Richard, & Cantano (2008).

Research by Calik et al. (2012) illustrated the importance of instructional leaders understanding the learning needs of individuals and providing support for learning. One participant expressed the feeling of many participants when he discussed being able to see weaknesses at different levels so that he could help improve performance of individuals and small groups as well as at the whole group level. These findings also showed TKES has facilitated the ongoing professional learning advocated in the literature by Strong et al. (2008). Study findings also revealed the standards base has enabled principals to provide the feedback and support Marzano (2012) and Donaldson & Peske (2010) suggested to improve teacher performance in relation to teaching and learning.

While participants recognized TKES benefits to professional learning, they shared concerns for the number of walk-throughs and observations required for all teachers regardless of their performance level. Research conducted by Kersten and Israel (2005) suggested the need to understand the impact of the administrators' observations given time and process constraints. In this study, negative responses associated with TKES impact on instructional leadership were often related to the disadvantage of being required to spend the same amount of time in all classrooms. Though it was noted that more time in classrooms provided a more objective picture of consistency in instruction, findings supported the predominate opinion that administrators need flexibility with regard to time spent in classrooms. While TKES implementation was shown to benefit professional learning the time constraints are inequitable. Concurring with Calik, et al. (2012), participants' responses demonstrated their belief that as instructional leaders they understand the learning needs of individuals and can organize for individual improvement and support of learning.

### **School Climate**

The impact of TKES implementation on school climate was more negative than its impact on instructional leadership. A principal's ability to manage change directly impacts a school's climate. Agreeing with Hallinger (2005), participants recognized a common focus on instruction and professional learning enabled them to build a collaborative school climate. However, the participants in this study shared being forced to be more aware of school climate due to challenges associated with TKES implementation.



Along with the implementation of the TKES system, both school's accountability measures and student assessment measures are undergoing change. In Georgia, school accountability is based on the College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI) which has changed each of the past three years and will continue to change in coming years as new index measures are factored into the CCRPI score. At the same time, the structure of state student assessments have changed and teachers are trying to prepare students for more constructed response and performance based assessments rather than the traditional multiple choice assessments previously administered. Responses related to TKES impact on school climate frequently referred to these continual and ongoing changes in Georgia. Participants expressed concerns for teachers' feelings as well as their own. Participants in this study suggested the degree and amount of change has been made to seem inconsequential and as a result school climate is challenged.

In light of ongoing curriculum and assessment changes, the researcher found principals were aware of their need to maintain a supportive collegial environment through this change process. While findings in GaDOE's examination of the 2012-2013 TKES outcomes did not acknowledge the role other educational changes have had on TKES' implementation, principals in this study noted their heightened attention to school climate. Participants' responses confirmed awareness that their behavior influences the effects of organizational change and thus teacher and student behaviors.

### **Teaching and Learning**

As stated previously, teaching and learning is at the heart of education. While TKES impact on school climate was neutral, participants perceived its impact on teaching and learning most positively. This study's findings supported Walker and Slear's (2011)

assertion that a positive relationship exists between high levels of teacher efficacy and increased student achievement. Participants agreed that the use of assessment data correlates with improved teacher practice and increased student achievement.

Participants discussed improved data-driven decision making at their schools as a result of TKES implementation. The use of multiple forms of data in the TKES process to assess teacher performance was shown to be a benefit. Participants commented on using data to see strengths and weaknesses to support student achievement. Findings also proved the TAPS standards promoted teachers' use of multiple forms of data to assess student performance. Yet, while teaching and learning were shown to benefit from the use of the TAPS data and student assessment data, value-added measures were not shown to be beneficial.

### **Other Impacts**

In investigating principals' perceptions of TKES implementation, concerns with the system's TEM score surfaced throughout the interviews. As discussed by both Adams (2009) and Amrein-Beardsley and Collins (2012) contemporary teacher evaluation research focuses on value-added measures and student surveys. With the TKES evaluation system, the TEM score which is a value-added student growth measure comprises 50% of a teacher's overall effectiveness rating. Almost half the participants expressed concerns with the weight the TEM score carries. At one point or another, every participant expressed concerns for the TEM scores calculated using district developed SLO data. Findings from this research support recommendations made by

Little, Goe, and Bell (2009) which suggest evaluation system resist assessing teacher effectiveness through a value-added model.

Implementation of the TKES model was also challenged by issues related to the TLE electronic platform which facilitates the TKES process. Participants recognized the benefits of the resources available on the platform and the use of the stage to manage processes, however changes and navigation issues were expressed as concerns. This finding counters those of GaDOE's 2012-2013 TKES Evaluation Report.

### **Summary of Research Findings**

In this study, the researcher found the following from interview data collected from the 12 Georgia principals who participated in this research. Principals' perceptions of TKES implementation on instructional leadership show participants perceive TKES to have a strong positive impact on instructional leadership. Specifically findings related to instructional leadership were:

1. All 12 participants discussed being in classrooms more as a positive outcome of TKES implementation.
2. Ten participants viewed time constraints as impractical and inequitable.
3. All 12 participants recognized the benefits of standards-based evaluation and specifically the TAPS component.
4. All 12 principals indicated TKES' implementation has had a positive impact on their ability to provide focus for ongoing professional learning.

Participants had a negative perception of TKES impact on school climate. Finding related to school climate specific were:

1. Ten participants acknowledged teachers' fear of the unknown and being overwhelmed by changes related to education in Georgia.
2. Eight participants responded negatively when asked about the impact of TKES' implementation on their personal morale.
3. All participants acknowledged being more aware of school climate and four participants shared strategies to promote school climate as a result of TKES' implementation
4. All participants discussed the student survey component; five noted teachers feel anxious about the student surveys while seven articulated the value of the surveys.

Participants perceived TKES to have a strong positive impact on teaching and learning.

Specific findings related to teaching and learning were:

1. Eight participants identified data-driven decision making as one of TKES most beneficial aspects.
2. Eleven participants credited TKES' implementation with improved data-driven decision making in their school.
3. Seven of the principals discussed the importance of assessment in the TKES evaluation process and five discussed how the data from the standards-based evaluation system enabled them to narrow their focus and improve teaching and learning.

Additional findings with regard to other impacts of the TKES implementation were:

1. All participants commonly expressed concern about the TEM value-added measure which accounts for 50% of a teacher's evaluation score.

2. All participants discussed the TEM SLO measure and shared validity concerns and incomparability of the SLO to the TEM student growth percentile measures.
3. Seven participants stated that the TLE platform changes and navigation issues are of concern.
4. Six participants discussed how the TKES process and specifically the conferencing component lends itself to meaningful conversations about teacher practices and student performance between principals and teachers and among colleagues.

### **Conclusions**

This qualitative investigation sought to evaluate the implementation of Georgia's TKES through a case study. The researcher, a Georgia high school principal, was strongly impacted by the findings of this study. For too long teacher evaluation in Georgia has failed to promote the growth and development of Georgia's teachers. The professional growth needs of novice teachers and teachers in need of development have often been overlooked. Through interviews with participating principals, the researcher became increasingly aware of Georgia's principals' commitment to quality teaching and learning.

The researcher in this study drew the following conclusions from the study findings.

1. Participants perceived an inherent belief in TKES' implementation that change is inevitable, the pace at which one experiences change is of no importance, and the depth and extent of change has been made to seem inconsequential.

2. Participants perceived that the time required to observe in classrooms is insufficient for assisting novice and teachers in need of additional support.
3. Participants perceived the need for heightened awareness of school climate due to the initial negative impact of TKES' implementation.
4. Participants perceived that TKES has had a positive impact on their ability to provide focused professional learning which meets both common and specific needs of teachers.
5. Participants perceived improved data-driven decision-making as a result of TKES' implementation.
6. Participants perceived the validity of the SLO components of the TEM to be questionable, not comparable to student growth, and therefore the value-added measures are unfair to teachers.

### **Implications and Recommendations for Practice**

The findings of this study present significant implications for practice since Georgia's TKES has been fully implemented as the state's teacher evaluation system. The findings have unintended consequences in the areas of: (a) importance and effect of extensive change; (b) the divergent observation needs of developing and proven teachers; (c) the impact of uncertain processes on school climate, and (d) the validity of value-added measures. These findings illustrate that teacher evaluation in Georgia needs further refinement.

The present study suggests several areas of concern regarding the function and understanding of the TKES teacher evaluation system. These finding will add to the body of literature concerning comprehensive teacher evaluation systems in general and

Georgia's TKES specifically. Additionally, this study contributed to the general knowledge of principals' perceptions on the topic of teacher evaluation in Georgia.

Based on the findings from this study, the following implications should be considered. Understanding the issue of teacher evaluation and its effects may help schools and school systems improve teacher evaluation. For example, to alleviate stress resulting from implementation, GaDOE should make clear to both teachers and principals/evaluators the implementation expectations for a given year to improve teachers' and administrators' understanding. An understanding of which components or requirements will be delayed in the refinement process will lessen teachers' fear of the unknown and make change more manageable.

TKES may continue to present challenges in its implementation due to issues with the TLE platform. Change is again at the center of platform issues. Participants noted that they were encumbered by frequent platform changes and had difficulty navigating the abundance of resources available. A more intentional release of resources over time may prove more beneficial in the beginning.

TKES is a comprehensive teacher effectiveness system which supports teacher growth for novice, developing, and proficient teachers alike. Many of the principals participating in this study noted TKES' contributions to teachers' as well as their own professional growth. Yet, due to the time-consuming requirement of four 10-minute walk-throughs, two 20-minute observations, and pre-, midyear, and summative conferences for all teachers, a principal's time is spent inequitably on proficient and exemplary teachers rather than where needed for novice and those with professional development needs. Allowing principals to lessen the number of walk-throughs and

observations required for proficient and exemplary teachers would make the process more reasonable.

Finally, the value-added measure will prove to be a greater concern now that TKES has been fully implemented statewide once teachers and principals alike see the effects of the TEM score on their evaluations. Even though curriculum and assessment of student growth measures in tested subjects have undergone recent changes, the assessments have been proven valid across the state whereas student learning objectives developed at the district level are considered more subjective. Once teachers and administrators realize the effects of the differing measures, the value-added components of the TKES system may face more scrutiny. Phasing in the value-added measures as validity becomes legitimate should lessen concerns.

These concerns suggest the TKES system requires improvement in some areas. These include: (a) the importance and effect of extensive change; (b) the divergent observation needs of developing and proven teachers; (c) the impact of uncertain processes on school climate; and (d) the validity of value-added measures based on data collected from participants in this study.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

After an analysis of previous research on teacher evaluation and a review of the conclusions from this study, the researcher recommends the following for further research:

1. To determine the effects of the implementation of Georgia's TKES, replicate the study with teachers who are evaluated using the system.



2. Research best practices for assisting administrators in organizing processes when implementing comprehensive evaluation systems like TKES.
3. Research best practices for promoting school climate in the process of implementing a comprehensive teacher evaluation system.
4. Conduct a study of the value-added measure TEM component of the TKES teacher evaluation system.
5. Conduct a larger qualitative study of all P-12 Georgia teacher evaluators, principals, and assistant principals using the TKES system.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

The researcher, a Georgia High School Principal, was impacted by the findings from this study. Teacher evaluation in Georgia has not sufficiently supported teacher growth and development. Teachers in need of support were often overlooked when their evaluation was determined either satisfactory or unsatisfactory on three broad standards.

The development of TKES redefines what constitutes effective teaching in Georgia. This new definition stresses the importance of instructional leadership and gives emphasis to concepts and skills proven to promote teaching and learning. Yet despite the positive impacts of TKES, factors related to school climate are challenged by the implementation.

When coupled with accountability and student assessment changes in Georgia, implementing a comprehensive teacher evaluation system like TKES has proven to be a daunting task. As implementation of TKES continues, the overlapping effects of change and rigid time constraints may obscure the benefits of the system. Judging from the

present study findings, attention to TKES implementations effects on teachers will need to be addressed so as not to compromise fidelity in implementation.

Now that the system has been fully implemented statewide, there will likely be a heightened awareness of the weight of the TEM score and the comparability of the measures which comprise the score. Without some adjustments, such as those recommended by participants in this study, TKES could meet a fate similar to TPAI. This would prove unfortunate given the participants in this study expressed commitment to instructional leadership and the advancement of quality instruction to support student achievement.

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## APPENDIX A

### Interview Protocol for Teacher Keys Effectiveness System Research

**Denise Bryant Warnock**

The purpose of this research is to evaluate the implementation of Georgia's Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (TKES) using the perspectives and experiences of school personnel who have implemented the system.

Interview questions will explore participants' perceptions of TKES by focusing on three areas of importance within a school. The first area of focus will be the impact of TKES implementation on instructional leadership. The second area of focus will be on how TKES implementation has impacted school climate and professional relationships between administrators and teachers. The third area of focus will be on TKES impact on teacher practices and student achievement.

#### Background Questions:

1. How long have you been in education?
2. What is your level of certification, e.g. L5?
3. How long have you been in this position?
4. What did you teach prior to becoming a school administrator?
5. What motivated you to move from the classroom into leadership?
6. Do you hold GTEP evaluator credentials in addition to your TKES evaluator credentials?

#### Research Questions:

#### Initial Questions:

1. How has TKES been implemented in your school?

2. Walk me through your experience with the teacher evaluation process under the TKES framework?

#### Area One: Impact on Instructional Leadership

3. What is your impression of TKES in terms of instructional leadership?
4. How has TKES impacted your knowledge of research-based instructional best practices?
5. How has TKES impacted your ability to ensure effective delivery of curriculum?
6. How has TKES impacted your ability to monitor instruction?
7. How has TKES impacted your ability to provide focus for ongoing professional learning?

#### Area Two: School Climate

8. Have you seen a difference in school climate since implementing TKES?
9. How has TKES impacted your ability to cultivate a positive academic learning environment?
10. How has TKES impacted your ability to work collaboratively with your staff?
11. How has TKES impacted your ability to promote school morale?
12. How has TKES impacted your ability to maintain a supportive collegial environment through a process of change?
13. How has TKES impacted your morale personally?

#### Area Three: Teaching and Learning

14. How has TKES impacted teaching and learning in your school?
15. How has TKES impacted your ability to analyze teacher practice to improve instructional delivery?

16. How has TKES impacted your ability to analyze student performance to increase student achievement?

17. How has TKES impacted your ability to improve school effectiveness?

Concluding Questions:

18. What has been most beneficial about TKES within your school setting?

19. Can you identify any negative consequences resulting from the implementation of TKES?

20. What concerns do you have regarding TKES?

21. If you could change TKES, what would you keep, what would you delete, and what would you add?

22. Is there anything else about TKES you would like to add?



## APPENDIX B

### Correlation of Interview Questions to Research Sub-Questions

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Research Question: How do principals perceive the implementation of Georgia's Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (TKES)?

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Research Sub-Question:

Correlating Interview Research Question:

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How do principals perceive TKES impact on instructional leadership?

1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21

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How do principals perceive TKES impact on school climate?

1, 2, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22

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How do principals perceive TKES impact on teaching and learning?

2, 4, 5, 6, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22

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## APPENDIX C

### COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

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### DEPARTMENT OF LEADERSHIP, TECHNOLOGY, and HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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#### INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

You are invited to take part in a research study regarding Georgia's Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (TKES).

My name is Denise Bryant Warnock and I am a Doctoral candidate in Georgia Southern University, College of Education, Department of Leadership, Technology and Human Development. I am conducting research on Georgia's Teacher Keys Effectiveness System, the teacher evaluation model currently used by school systems in Georgia.

1. As a participant, you will be asked to participate in a 60-minute interview regarding the Georgia Teacher Keys Effectiveness System and your experiences with it.
2. Discomforts and Risks: Due to the sensitive nature of the topic of teacher evaluation, there is a slight risk you might experience some emotional discomfort as you discuss your experience with Georgia's Teacher Keys Effectiveness system.
3. Benefits:
  - a. The benefits to participants include the chance to have your views and perceptions concerning Georgia's Teacher Keys Effectiveness system heard and examined in a setting which guarantees confidentiality and anonymity.
  - b. The benefits to society include the benefit of your experience added to the literature and knowledge on the topic of teacher evaluation in Georgia.
4. Duration/time required from participants: 60 minutes.
5. Statement of Confidentiality: Data from each interview will be transcribed from a digital audio recorded interviews and the recordings will be destroyed after a transcription service transcribes each interview. The transcription service will sign a third party confidentiality agreement with the researcher in order to further guarantee confidentiality. Transcriptions of interviews will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the researchers' residence for 3 years after the interview but with no identifying information regarding persons participating. The researcher will have sole possession of and access to transcripts. Any report of this research that is made available to the public will not include

participants' names, and individual schools and school districts will not be identified.

**Right to Ask Questions:** Participants have the right to ask questions and have those questions answered. If you have questions about this study, please contact the researcher named above or the researcher's faculty advisor, whose contact