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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PRINCIPAL LONGEVITY AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT IN MIDDLE SCHOOLS IN SOUTH CAROLINA

by

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for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in

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DEDICATION

I am proud to dedicate this work to my loving family. I have been blessed in my life to have a loving family who each has touched my life in so many ways. I appreciate the love, care, support, and guidance each of you have placed in me over the years. Your love has brought me through so many late nights and long weekends. You all have helped me know that education is the single thing in life that will take me the farthest and I am proud to dedicate this work to you. Your belief in me, and your support of me has been instrumental in me finishing this journey. Your love will carry me the rest of my life. Thank you for your support.

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Thank you to the many educators, students, and supporters who have inspired me in more ways that can ever be imaginable. The support each person has provided to me throughout this process has been exceptional and is much appreciated. I have never been one to take on projects without being able to use them to better myself and the work I do for others and this process has afforded me additional opportunities. Your flexibility, understanding, and support have allowed me to complete this journey.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine if there is a relationship between the longevity of a middle school principal and student achievement. Three research questions guided the research to determine if there is a relationship. To complete the study, the researcher used data collected from the South Carolina Department of Education including PASS scores in reading and mathematics, ESEA index, gender of principals, poverty index of schools, and school size to determine the relationships. Data were collected using the South Carolina School Report Card for 2012.

Middle Schools in South Carolina were used for the study. The results showed that while a relationship does exist between principal longevity and student achievement, it is a weak correlation. In conducting a regression of variables, again longevity is a weak indicator of student achievement. Following an analysis of the data, suggestions for future studies include additional years of data, more analysis of various grade levels, and other variables for determining predictor values for variables related to Longevity.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In hopes of creating a strong character-based society, education pioneers fashioned an American educational system that focused on religious development for the country's young men. Clergy who sought to provide character-building opportunities for students in their townships directed the first schools in America. Fast-forward over 200 years to our modern-day school systems; the focus shifts from building character to assessing students' ability to function in a technologically advanced, global economy. Although many factors added to the urgency of raising student achievement, perhaps the strongest has been in the passage of legislation. Federal and state legislator's continuous push for higher academic outcomes and closing the achievement gap has guided much of the decision making in education over the last twenty years. In addition to challenging students, legislators challenge push administrators to acquire and assimilate current, exceptional technology into their programs by providing ongoing professional development and preparing students for a today's demands. As schools focus on enhancing student achievement both nationally and globally, school administrators focus their efforts and actions on plans on raising student performance and proficiency. The ideals of the early American schools were to serve specific purposes such as religious teaching. Schools advanced to include skills based approaches for basic and vocational skills. All of the early efforts of education have evolved to the education system of today. Schools must now work to provide all students with the opportunities to participate in rigorous academic and technological activities and assessments. School leadership must

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employ skills that aid in the strengthening of student achievement results. Student success in the academic areas and meeting proficiency standards remains central in the work of legislation for schools and in programmatic development. School leaders must continue to work to meet the challenges of providing a strong education to all students. Today's schools are realizing the need to focus on student achievement and raising it to meet the demands of laws and expectations of society.

Today, states find themselves working to develop new accountability systems that encourage growth among all student learners. These "value added" systems seek to encourage the best educators to work to accelerate student learning and achievement. In South Carolina, a new plan to incorporate a statistical manner of assessing progress of student achievement will be used to assign teachers and principals letter grades A-F. The plan met resistance from groups of teachers, administrators, and even the South Carolina State Board of Education. The move pushed for by South Carolina State Superintendent of Education, Dr. Mick Zais, has created a concern for educators and heightened attention to retaining educators in positions. Consistency in leadership and maintaining successful school leaders could be impacted in the new accountability systems.

Background

Leadership in American schools has changed dramatically over the last ten years. Increased focus on student achievement continues to be the centerpiece of legislation of school policy. While the federal government continued mandates through *No Child Left Behind*, states like South Carolina continued to implement legislation including the Education Accountability Act, and in 2012 the Elementary Secondary Education Act

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Waiver. The increased demand on schools to produce results is forcing school leaders to become more focused on raising student achievement. The mission of schools in today's American educational system must include a vision of a trajectory of higher student achievement for all learners. Not only are districts and schools more focused on student achievement, but federal and state educational agencies are also implementing policy that merges high stakes testing results to staff assignment and funding. These policies and expectations have created the need for strong, sustained leadership in schools to the forefront of the discussion regarding student achievement. Leithwood and Riehl (2003) presented several vital indicators of successful educational leadership. The pair maintains that successful, progressive school leaders focus on implementing the best instructional practices and tiers of improvement. School leaders also work to support future needs for leaders, document effective leader studies, and present empirical research methods of how leaders with various leadership styles affect student achievement.

Hoyle, Bjork, Collier, and Glass (2005) recognized the challenges facing many school leaders today. These challenges include changing demographics in schools including disabilities of students, the socioeconomic impact of communities on schools, cultural impact, and educational programs provided to students and families. Leaders who understand the many facets of student achievement may experience higher rates of success in student achievement over time. Using data from empirical research of successful school leaders, Leithwood and Riehl (2005) illustrate four areas in which leaders should focus their efforts to raise student achievement. The four areas include: enhancing teaching and learning to be needs based, implementing learning communities in which learning is designed for a specific purpose, providing students with

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opportunities and habits that will instill success. Each of these can affect the student's opinion of school, and, utilizing families to bridge the gap between school and home.

While each of these areas might be essential to a school leader's success, one must take into account the administrator's longevity in a position. Newly hired principals either inherit a system in which all of these areas function well or find themselves in a situation in which the school is not functioning within these successful areas. On the other hand, principals who have longevity in a certain position are likely to have a firmer grasp on his/her stakeholders' academic and behavioral needs and expectations. The administrator has a firm grasp on the best practices necessary to move the school forward. Although some researchers suggest a longer tenure will be positive on the results of the school, others feel the opposite. It is important to note that some schools may not see increases in student achievement with a longer serving principal. To better understand this phenomenon, there is some need to determine the relationship of longevity prior to determining whether there is a demand for principals to remain in their position for any length of time.

As society's expectations for our graduates continue to evolve, so will the expectations of successful school leaders; however, Hargreaves and Fink (2003) assert that under certain conditions, school leaders can enjoy success:

> Sustainable leadership matters, spreads and lasts. It is a shared responsibility, that does not unduly deplete human or financial resources, and that cares for and avoids exerting negative damage on the surrounding educational and community environment. Sustainable leadership has an activist engagement with the forces

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> that affect it, and builds an educational environment of organizational diversity that promotes cross fertilizations of good ideas and successful practices in communities of shared learning and development (p. 3).

Principals who create a strong central vision paired with strong goals will likely see strong results in the area of student achievement. Schools where stakeholder groups develop and implement programs and activities based on the vision and goals of the school will likely show greater success in student achievement. Furthermore, an administrator's ability to recognize the various leadership skills necessary to enhance teaching and learning will permeate throughout the school (Kiwi, 2008). Finally, an effective principal recognizes the tremendous power self-reflection has on both current educational vision and processes and how future work may influence others (Heathfield, 2008).

Leadership in schools has undergone many changes and movements over time. Today's school leaders understand the requirements of student achievement and utilize data to make decisions about schools. This movement has grown out of many years of legislation that requires this focus. Over the years federal and state legislation has directly impacted academic decisions; perhaps one of the most influential pieces of legislation came with the reauthorization of the *Elementary Secondary Education Act* known as *No Child Left Behind* (2002). One major component of *No Child Left Behind* is its stipulation to annually assess all students and showcase proficiency. The overarching goal of the *No Child Left Behind* legislation is to afford each learner in the American public school system with the opportunity to be proficient in mathematics and reading.

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The *No Child Left Behind* legislation does not call for a common standardized test for all states, but it forces each state to develop its own testing program for assessing mathematics and reading. While the federal government required states to implement an accountability assessment program, it did not require consistent standards nor did it require identical testing instruments among the states. The *No Child Left Behind* federal mandate insisted that students in grades three through eight by 2005-2006 must be tested under federal accountability policies. Additionally, the legislation requires that states also test the area of science at least once at the elementary, middle, and high school levels (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). South Carolina students are required to take tests annually in grades three through eight in the areas of mathematics, reading, science, social studies, and writing. The testing program is known as the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards Test. Policies stipulate that schools must show increased performance over time to meet the accountability measures (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). The law also required schools and districts to make provisions for poor-performing schools and districts. Under the law, the states may take over schools and districts in order to remedy poor performances. Efforts to correct poor performance include; replacing curriculum, ousting the leadership, or replacing the staff. None of these examine the effects of consistent leadership on student achievement.

In addition to mandating that all students take high-stakes assessments, *No Child Left Behind* presents schools and districts with additional challenges. In 2002-2003, each state distributed report cards that included both ratings and subgroup performance data. Additionally, teachers had to become "highly qualified" in their subject and grade-level certifications. *No Child Left Behind* further stipulates that schools and districts receiving

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Title I funds must adhere to the rules and policies regarding performance and growth over time. Specifically, the law mandates that all students meet the proficiency standard by the 2013-2014 school year (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). Soon after its implementation, schools and districts faced challenges with respect to raising student achievement. In December 2003, an opinion poll on the legislation indicated that approximately 50% of principals saw the legislation as destructive to public schools (Public Agenda, 2003). In addition, the law provides increased challenges to district and school leadership through strict accountability measures for the nation's most at- risk schools. As scores were compared locally, statewide, and nationally, the law forced districts to be more open with their stakeholders (Education Trust, 2003). Monitoring these accountability measures and utilizing the results are intended to increase student achievement in schools through understanding the measurements (West & Peterson, 2003).

Statement of the Problem

As they begin their administrative duties, newly hired principals are compelled to create an environment that increases student achievement. To better understand the stakeholders' needs, the principal should examine both summative data such as standardized tests and formative data such as grades, class records, and teacher observation to make determinations about strategies to advance student achievement. To ensure success, newly hired principals should also scrutinize various factors regarding school demographics, community involvement, teaching qualifications, as well as the community at large (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson 2005). The principal over time will enact measures to strengthen student achievement results. Having

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a principal in place working toward improving student achievement will raise student achievement.

In South Carolina, principals have the opportunity to access a variety of information about schools and districts. The South Carolina Department of Education website posts district/school report cards as well as other testing, community, and district data for schools throughout the state. Additionally, newly hired principals may find themselves in need of non-published information; they should conduct interviews and meetings with community partners, parents, faculty/staff members, and students prior to the beginning of the school year. One of the most critical challenges facing new or existing principals is raising student achievement over time. A principal's ability to ascertain the school's needs, goals, and programs is essential to positively impact student achievement.

The South Carolina State Department requires new principals to participate in comprehensives professional development sessions where they learn about the laws, practices, and issues related to school-based leadership known as the Principal Induction Program under South Carolina law, SC 59-24-80. The program managers disseminate information to the principals concerning new techniques that will augment leadership practices and legislation that impacts funding and pedagogical choices in terms of programs, services, and assessments. Using both this training and post-secondary training, the principal begins by building an understanding of the history of the school, the performance of the students on standardized tests, and the challenges the school has faced from the required state and federal legislation (Lovely, 2004). Building strong

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leadership skills over time in the same school may create a network and system that would allow for a higher performance on high-stakes testing.

To better understand the complexities of leadership roles, the researcher used the years a principal is in the middle school during the 2011-2012 school year to determine if there is a relationship between longevity and student achievement. It should also be dually noted that while the principal serves as a central role in schools, other factors might contribute to student achievement including poverty, gender of the principal, and school size. According to Fullan (2001) a leader needs five years to affect significant change in a school. A majority of principals stay in a position for between five and ten years (NAESP, 1998). Noting that consistency in leadership could be invaluable to increasing student achievement, this study examined the correlation between principal longevity and student achievement. In their study, Weinstein et al. (2009) maintain that achievement goals become unattainable due to increased turnover thus affecting student achievement in the school.

Specifically the goal of this study is to determine if there is a relationship between the longevity of the principal and student achievement among middle schools in South Carolina. The research intended to determine if the time a principal is in a school has any impact on student achievement. The research determines if a correlation exists between longevity and Elementary Secondary Education Act Waiver compliance and student achievement scores in reading and mathematics. Because the building-level principal's primary role is to provide academic leadership that ensures student growth, the study observes principal time in school and its relationship to student achievement and the Elementary Secondary Education Act waiver score for middle schools.

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A principal's ability to understand the many facets of school leadership and its impact on student achievement is a mammoth undertaking; therefore, a primary part of a principal's job is to think outside the box. Having a global view takes a tremendous amount of time and reflection. Another key task is an administrator's ability to understand the amount of time necessary to efficiently affect positive change with regard to creating a learning-centered school. With legislation across the country focusing on increasing student achievement, examining both consistent leadership patterns and the length of time it takes to make effective change toward raising student achievement in schools is vital.

Increasing school accountability measures coupled with legislative mandates such as the Elementary Secondary Education Act is forcing states to report data related to student achievement and use the data to make determinations about school leadership. School principals must implement activities to meet the objectives of the accountability measures. States must examine the information reported to the public to determine how data contained on the report cards are related.

Understanding the role of the principal in impacting student achievement is a requisite for raising it. Schools who lack consistent leadership often lack focus, which negatively impacts student achievement. Leaders need to understand how consistent focused leadership will impact student achievement over time. Schools with short term principals will likely lack skills and offerings to support student achievement levels expected by current legislation.

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Significance of the Problem

With the passage of the Education Accountability Act of 1998 (EAA), South Carolina provides a strong focus for public schools to produce results. While the EAA calls for a boost in the overall performance of South Carolina schools, the United States Congress passed the *No Child Left Behind* (2002) legislation which requires school administrators and teachers to enrich students' educational opportunities and increase student achievement. Over the years, the EAA has provided guidelines for school districts to produce results that showcase strong systemic student growth as evidenced on the state standardized testing program. In South Carolina, the Palmetto Achievement Challenge Tests were implemented in 1999; in 2008, legislators changed the test to the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards (PASS). The EAA also mandated the South Carolina Department of Education to provide South Carolina schools and districts with a school report card, which is calculated largely from student achievement scores on the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards test. The *No Child Left Behind* (U.S. Department of Education, 2002) required the addition of an Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) rating to be published. The Adequate Yearly Progress rating was based on student achievement within subgroups. Schools had to have all students within a subgroup meeting the requirements for Adequate Yearly Progress or they received no credit. In 2012, the United States Department of Education allowed states to apply for waivers from the stringent requirements of No Child Left Behind (U.S. Department of Education 2012).

Schools are graded through test scores, which are also used to calculate the adherence to the *No Child Left Behind* components for reporting AYP (U.S. Department

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of Education, 2002). Since the chief public recognition of school progress is measured using the standardized testing program, Palmetto Assessment of State Standards (PASS), it is imperative for principals to work to raise student academic achievement. Principals must use the data to influence leadership practices to ensure strong growth and academic achievement of students. The school report card also contains additional data that are used to highlight other pieces of information related to school and student performance.

Consistency in leadership is essential to creating environments in which student achievement is successful. The ever-increasing role of analyzing student achievement performance data to enhance education is paramount to the success of school principals. In most areas of the United States, principal longevity remains at around 4.5 years for a new principal (Fuller & Young, 2009). Ever changing requirements from legislators and mounting pressure from the public, school principals are under immense pressure to produce results. Programs such as the federal funded Race to the Top (U.S. Department of Education, 2010) initiative even calls for the removal of the principal for lack of student achievement improvements. All of these factors are leading to shortage of qualified leaders to lead the most at-risk schools.

This study is significant since it provided information related to variables from the South Carolina School Report Card. This study examined the new ESEA Waiver compliance index and how measuring the number of years a principal is in their school related. Finding out if there is a relationship could provide the opportunity for new research examining these variables. The study also provided the relationship between the number of years a principal is in the school and its relationship to student achievement. Additionally this study examined the relationship of other factors including gender of the

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principal, poverty, school size, and the ESEA waiver and their relationship to longevity. Little research has been done in the area of middle schools in South Carolina to understand the relationship of principal longevity and student achievement. This study added to the body of research by examining data from South Carolina middle schools.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between the number of years a principal serves in a school and indicators of achievement reported on the South Carolina School Report Card for middle schools. The sample consisted of principals from South Carolina public schools that were identified as middle schools by the South Carolina Department of Education. The study was conducted to better understand the relationship between the number of years of experience of the principal in the school and student achievement scores on the PASS math and reading subtests. The researcher also examined the relationship between principal longevity and the ESEA waiver rating of middle schools. Additionally, the study consisted of an examination of how the gender of the school principal, the enrollment of the school, and the school's level of poverty influenced the relationships between principal longevity, student achievement, and ESEA ratings.

Conceptual Framework

School leadership is ultimately responsible for driving student achievement under the *No Child Left Behind* (2002) legislation. Under this legislation and subsequent procedures, a principal can be removed from the school if the school experiences periods

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of no growth for more than two years. Using the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards tests, principals must continually examine their influence on student test scores.

In the age of accountability, principals use data to guide their decision- making processes; this, in turn, enhances student achievement. Burt (2012) asserts three principal practices that boost student achievement: the importance of using data to make informed decisions, the role of the principal in the overall effectiveness of the school, and programmatic changes, curriculum adjustments, or other such strategies that may raise student achievement.

This quantitative research study encompassed a set of research questions to understand the data and its implications. The researcher used thorough reviews of information and literature to understand the background for the study. Next, the researcher collected and synthesized testing data from the South Carolina State Department of Education. Indicators reported on the State of South Carolina School Report Card were used to determine statistical connections between principal tenure and student achievement for the study.

The researcher uses correlational and regression methods to examine the correlation of principals' years in the middle school during the 2011-2012 school year to determine if there are relationships. In order to complete this study, information was collected from the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) School Report Cards. Schools considered to be a middle school by the South Carolina Department of Education during the administration of the 2012 Palmetto Assessment of State Standards test were used. The school report card contained a vast amount of data that was

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examined during the study. The pivotal variable – a principal's years in a particular school – and its relationship to the number of students scoring met and exemplary on the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards tests was examined. While there are additional factors that may impact student achievement, for the purpose of this study, only the principal's years at a school was examined as the focus variable. The literature suggested other variables, which were examined as control variables in the regression portion of the study. The researcher used the Elementary Secondary Education Act index, poverty level, gender of principals, and school size as control variables in regression. These factors were used to determine if there was a relationship between longevity and student achievement when these factors were taken into consideration. While other factors are important to understanding student achievement, the researcher determined that after reviewing the literature, these variables had been researched by others and noted as possible explanations for success in student achievement.

As a principal enters the position at a school, he/she uses the skills already attained through post-secondary education and job-related experiences to initiate changes and raise student achievement. Principals each bring a skills to the position. Some principals have previous experiences and training to aid them in specific tasks. Principals make decisions about remaining in their position for a multitude of reasons. Regardless, when in the position of principal, student achievement must be a major focus. Examining student achievement and implementing changes to raise student achievement must be a focus of a successful principal. Over time the principal must make determinations about activities and programs that will positively impact student achievement.

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In conceptualizing raising student achievement, leaders must see all of the variables as contributing factors of student achievement. Various factors contribute to Student Achievement. All work together in tandem to provide circumstances for student achievement to produce results. All of these external factors have an effect on student achievement in schools.

When the school principal makes student achievement his/her chief priority, he/she needs time to implement strategies and ideas. Working in tandem with the principal's implementation of strategies will be the other factors associated with longevity and student achievement. These may include variables such as gender of the principal, amount spent per student, or other data sets collected and analyzed. When the principal utilizes data over time to make decisions to enhance teaching and learning; student achievement should show positive results. Principals serving schools where student data is analyzed and used to make decisions about progress will over time increase student performance and achievement.

Limitations

While longevity of the principal is a factor to be considered, there are numerous other factors that may account for student achievement levels. This study addressed the area of principal longevity in the school. Other factors may contribute to the number of years a principal is in the school such as demographics, funding, or employment changes. By not including these factors (other than the three control variables in this study), the study will be limited to only specific data sets. Not including the other factors may limit the true predictability of the items included in the regression. Participation in this study

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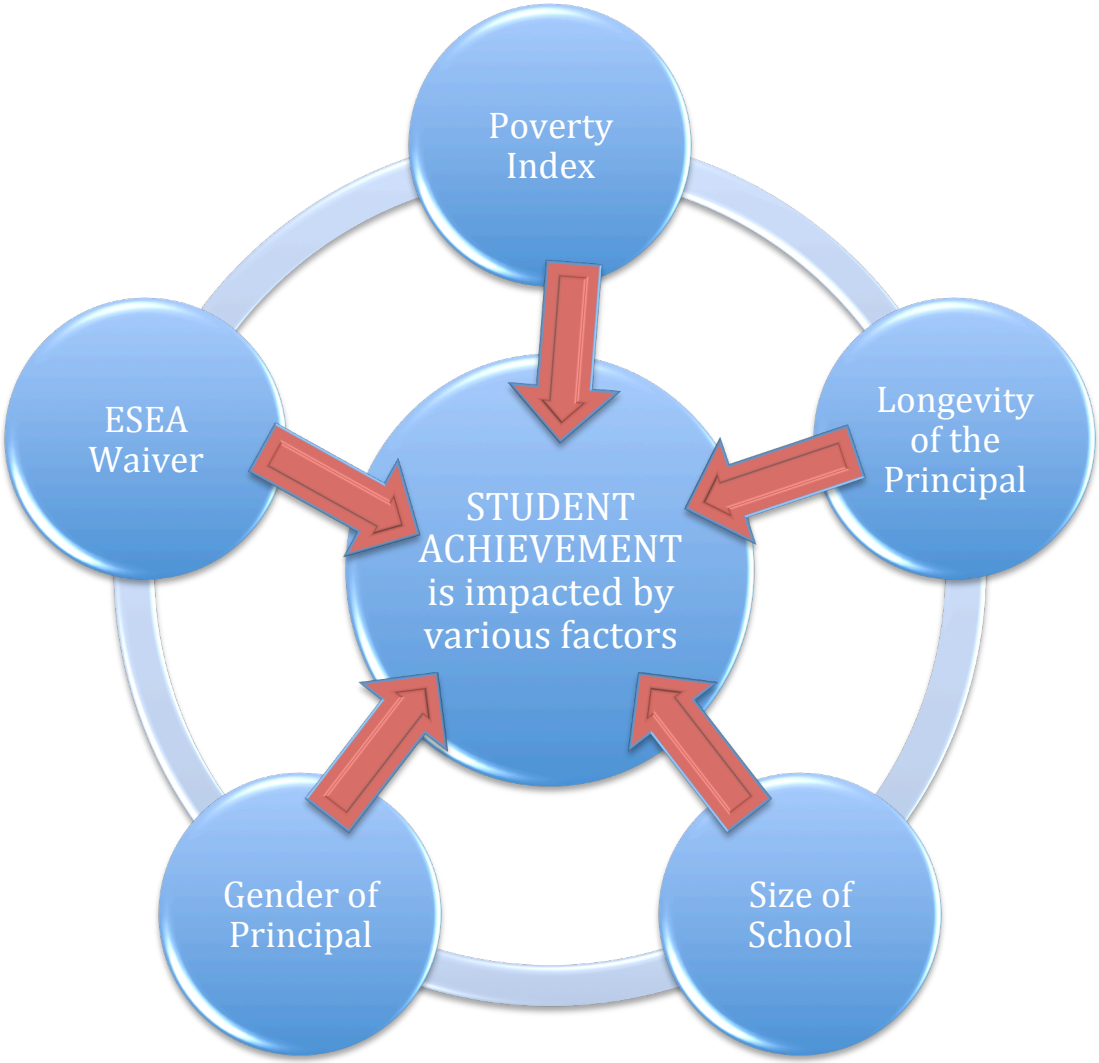

Figure 1.1: Conceptual Framework

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also includes only South Carolina middle schools; therefore, replicating this study across different types of schools could produce different results.

This study's data were limited to only one administration of the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards subtests in reading and mathematics. The data were limited to one year because at the time the study was conducted, only one year of data related to the ESEA Waiver rating was available from the South Carolina Department of Education. Replication of this study using different years of data may suggest different results. Additionally, this study only includes two subtests; reading and math. South Carolina students in grades 3-8 are also assessed in the areas of science and social studies. These areas were not included in the study since the federal reporting guidelines do not utilize social studies and science as a major indicator. This study included the areas required by the United States Department of Education. Using only one year of data for both the test scores on PASS as well as one collected year of principal's years at school may be a limitation of the study since it will not allow the researcher to analyze multiple years or identify trends over time. Additionally it limited the ability to check the data to determine whether over time the same results would be applicable.

This study does not seek to identify schools where the principal has not enacted any measures of changing student achievement nor does it take into account other factors such as programmatic changes, institutional advancement, or gains in student achievement over time. There may be changes and movement in student achievement, which are not accounted for by only examining one year of student achievement data. It

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would be expected that changes in leadership would likely result in changes in the school. Principals will over time implement new programs and activities, which could affect student achievement. In some cases of schools included in the study, principals may have made significant changes during their time in the school, few changes, or no changes. The specific measures of implemented in the school are not included as a part of this study.

Research Questions

The following research questions were used to conduct this research:

1. Is there a relationship between principal longevity and student achievement on the 2012 reading and math subtests of the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards test?
2. Is there a relationship between principal longevity and middle school ESEA ratings on the 2012 South Carolina School Report Card?
3. Is there a relationship between principal longevity and student achievement on the 2012 reading and math subtests of the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards test and on the ESEA rating on the 2012 South Carolina School Report Card when controlling for principal gender, school enrollment, and poverty?

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Significance of Study

This study could prove helpful to school and district leaders. The information collected through this study is significant for several key reasons. Knowing how the experience of a principal is sharpened and deepened over time, the principal may realize the importance of instituting initiatives that will change student achievement. The study does not intend to seek an understanding of this information, however, only seeks to determine if there is a relationship. Secondly, the research provides information to districts about the relationships that exist between principal tenure and student achievement in South Carolina middle schools. Finally, this study will provide information about some of the new data provided to the state using the new ESEA waiver rating system. Since no study has yet been produced that examines the ESEA waiver ratings, this study could provide one avenue to examine the data for the state. The purpose of this study was to determine if there was a relationship between principal longevity and student achievement.

Methodology

To complete the study, the researcher chose to use a quantitative, correlational method. Data were collected from the South Carolina Department of Education for all middle schools. The study included use of; the principal's number of years at the school, students who scored Met and Exemplary on the reading and math PASS tests, gender of the principal, school size, and the poverty level of the school. The sample for the study includes all principals in the state of South Carolina in which their school was identified

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as a middle school by the South Carolina Department of Education during the 2011-2012 school year.

The study examines the school report card for each school in South Carolina considered by the South Carolina Department of Education to be a middle school (schools who receive the middle school report card) during the administration of the 2012 Palmetto Assessment of State Standards test. The data examined and utilized for the study included the years principal at school, the percent of students Met and Exemplary on PASS in reading and mathematics, and the ESEA waiver percentage. These data were utilized to complete the statistical tests for the study. The middle school ESEA waiver ratings were used to determine the relationship between longevity of principals the ratings received by middle schools. Finally, principal gender, school enrollment, and the poverty index for South Carolina middle schools were used as control variables in order to determine if poverty could explain the expected relationships between principal longevity, student achievement, and ESEA ratings.

Definition of Terms

No Child Left Behind **:** A bill signed into law in 2002 by George W. Bush set requirements for public schools in the state of South Carolina for grades kindergarten through twelve. The legislation provides expanded local control of education, as well as providing states with more flexibility and accountability. The bill also provides more opportunities for parents to be informed of and seek options for their students. By 2014, all students in the United States would be proficient in reading and mathematics.

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Palmetto Assessment of State Standards-PASS: Administered each spring, all South Carolina students in grades 3-8 take the reading and mathematics assessments. The state administers the test to select groups in the areas of science, social studies, and writing. The test is the only items used for federal accountability guidelines with regard to assessment for *No Child Left Behind* requirements.

Reading subtest: This is a test in the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards system that assesses student proficiency in reading.

Mathematics subtest: This is a test in the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards system that assesses student proficiency in mathematics.

Not Met: This is a term given to students who do not meet grade level standards requirements on the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards subtests. A student scoring Not Met does not meet requirements of the *No Child Left Behind* legislation and is not progressing as an acceptable rate. This term is used by the South Carolina Department of Education for accountability purposes.

Met: This is a term given to students who meet grade level requirements on the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards subtests. A student scoring Met is meeting the grade level requirements of the *No Child Left Behind*. This term is used by the South Carolina Department of Education for accountability purposes.

Exemplary: This is a term given to students who exceed the grade level requirements on the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards subtests. A student scoring Exemplary is exceeding the grade level requirements of the *No Child Left Behind* legislation. This term is used by the South Carolina Department of Education for accountability purposes.

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Adequate Yearly Progress- AYP: This is a measure of how schools progress towards ensuring that all students are proficient in reading and math by 2014 under the *No Child Left* Behind legislation.

Elementary Secondary Education Act Waiver: This is the approved document from the United States Department of Education exempting the state from nearly twenty provisions in the *No Child Left Behind* law.

Longevity: For this study, it is the amount of time that a principal has served as principal of the school included in the study.

High Stakes Testing: These are tests required by legislations given to student annually.

Middle School: A school receiving a middle school report card from the South Carolina Department of Education in 2013.

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CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

In order to better understand the area of school leadership and the areas surrounding the role of the principal and his/her effect on student achievement, the researcher reviewed existent literature. The researcher used books, educational journals and magazines, and additional research studies to compile this literature review. In reviewing the literature, the researchers carefully analyzed the themes, statistical analyses, and summations of the sources in terms of their implications on research, offerings of information toward understanding the research topic, and support the organization as presented in this chapter.

In the era of accountability in American Schools, school leadership has become a major focus. The need for each school to have and retain a strong leader has become especially important with the development and implementation of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (2002) and its focus on raising student achievement in public schools. South Carolina was ahead of the game. In 1998 it passed legislations that correlated the importance of strong leadership being key in a school's success. In the passage of the Education Accountability Act (1998) and specifically in the South Carolina Code of Laws, Section 59-24-5, the General Assembly stated, "the General Assembly finds that the leadership of the principal is key to the success of the school, and support for ongoing, integrated professional development is integral to better schools and to the

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improvement of the actual work of teachers and staff." The extensive requirements for principals present challenges to attracting quality candidates to the field. In addition, as more pressure is placed on principals to increase achievement, the more trials they face (Anderson, 2002). Long hours, continued mounting paperwork, strong focus on instructional programs, and more demands from non-instructional related tasks have imprisoned principals (Monoz, 2003).

A focus on attracting and sustaining strong leadership is vital to the success of South Carolina schools. In 2009, the South Carolina Department of Education projected that the average age of a principal was 48.2 years of age (South Carolina Department of Education, 2009). Superintendents continue to find it difficult to find strong replacements for principals, and while they favorably report on the candidates hired, many consider the process to be challenging (Anderson, 2002).

As the role of the principal continues to evolve, the importance of the principal on school culture, change, and success remains key to the success of a school. In their study, Leithwood, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (as cited in Bloom, Danilovic, and Fogel, 2005) cited a strong need to view the role of the principal as a strong, integral part of the school improvement process. A successful principal has both the ability to develop a school, examine ineffective practices, and eradicate them from a school (Hammond, 2007). Principals must work to understand the strengths, challenges, and needs of the school and work to build on leadership, practice, and strong culture (Hoerr, 2007). According to Clark et al. (2009), only a small percentage of literature focuses on the principal's impact, making it difficult for educators to fully grasp the multitude of factors contributing to student achievement.

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Studies of Educational Leadership

Educational leadership studies have yielded multiple sources of information regarding the impact of principal leadership on student achievement. The various practices and activities principals immerse themselves in during their tenure have an impact on student achievement (Cotton, 2003; Leithwood et al., 2004; Marzano et al., 2005). A majority of the previously conducted research focuses on qualitative work and case studies including those by Marzano et al. According to Marzano (2005), little has been done to provide school leaders with the guidance necessary to create change. The studies do, however, offer the manner in which specific behaviors will affect and influence student achievement. To further investigate the behaviors of principals in schools, Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) assimilated the results of previously conducted research studies. To identify behaviors reflective of student behavior, they analyze and compile data from sixty-nine studies. In their meta-analysis, researchers use quantitative techniques to synthesize studies. This method seems effective for the purpose of allowing for information from the studies to be compiled in a manner so as to allow the researcher to draw generalities from the information contained and findings from the studies.

Using the skills highlighted in their study, Waters et al. (2005) find that the higher principals rated on the traits analyzed for successful school leaders, the higher the levels of student achievement. Two areas ranked as leading indicators of the effect of the principal leadership on student achievement. According to Waters, et al. (2005), principals must select an area of focus for improvement and examine how change affects existing practices and norms. Once a principal accepts the challenge of raising student

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achievement and understanding his or her role within the change, he/she can take the necessary steps associated with raising student achievement.

In the Marzano work, the trio highlighted twenty-one behaviors of principals who influence student achievement. According to Waters et al. (2005) when school leadership is effective, there is a profound impact on student achievement scores. In an effective school (top 1% of schools) 72% of students are expected to pass the test whereas a school in the bottom one percent is expected to only have 28% of students pass (Marzano et al., 2005, p. 4). According to the researchers, understanding the role of leadership becomes the centerpiece of examining decades of research. To best illustrate the effects of leadership on student achievement, the researchers identified 21 "responsibilities". Each indicator showed a strong correlation to student achievement. The twenty-one responsibilities are displayed table 2.1.

Table 2.1:

The 21 Responsibilities of a School Administrator

Affirmation	Change Agent	Contingent Rewards
Communication	Culture	Discipline
Flexibility	Focus	Ideals/Beliefs
Input	Intellectual Stimulation	Involvement in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment	Monitoring/Evaluating	Optimizer
Order	Outreach	Relationships
Resources	Situational Awareness	Visibility

(Marzano, et. al., 2005, p. 69)

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A principal's ability to enhance curriculum is denoted in eleven factors originally included in the 2003 Marzano study. Various demographics, backgrounds, and a multitude of other factors are also responsible for elevated student achievement levels; therefore, it is unreasonable to parallel one factor to the impact of principal leadership on student achievement. Understanding that the leader must work within these factors to improve a school is critical in order to be an effective leader (Marzano, 2005).

Marzano's (2005) leadership study primarily focuses on the plans leaders may consider as they develop as a principal. According to Marzano et. al, school administrators must have a leadership team in place; this helps him builds a purposeful community (p. 99). Second among steps for successful leaders spotlights the importance of leaders sharing responsibilities (Marzano, 2005). By perpetuating a cycle of shared leadership, the administrator affords stakeholders with the unique opportunity to have a voice and share in the implementation of key programs and services (106). Moreover, Marzano, et al (2005) suggests that stakeholder buy-in with respect to understanding the vision and the paths to reaching that vision creates a successful experience for both the administrator and his colleagues. In order to best utilize the research conducted by Marzano, et. al, the researcher must take into account the type of work happening in the school such as professional development opportunities, measurable goals, and the magnitude of the desired outcomes and expectations. Finally, Marzano, et. al (2005) maintain that schools in which the leader utilizes prescriptive methods to raise student achievement experience a higher level of success.

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Leadership and the Impact on Education

While juggling the expectations and demands of his/her job; a school leader must constantly look for ways to engage and connect with multiple stakeholders (Kajs & McCollum, 2009). It is also essential for the administrator to develop a leadership style that melds to the school's vision, beliefs, and goals. In developing this style, effective school leaders should select astute faculty members to serve on the school's leadership team, and use both their expertise and voices to impart and gather information from the staff (Leech & Fulton, 2008). Creating an environment that invites collaboration and ownership within the school/organization is vital in making team members feel valued and focused toward meeting the goals of the organization (Devos & Rossel, 2009, Hulpia, Somech, 2005; Leech & Fulton 2008).

In a 2008 study, Michael Fullan refers to six principles that are beneficial in establishing cultures in which productivity is both high and correlated parallel to the goals of the institution. These leaders show appreciation for their employees and work to establish/sustain an environment that nurtures success. They build a culture that allows co-workers to collaborate and work toward the mission of the organization with little intervention from the leader. Faculty members feel comfortable communicating their academic, programmatic, and development ideas. Everyone must be a continuous learner in a successful culture. Transparency is key to the overall success of the organization. Leadership should be built from within, allowing workers to grow and learn thus serving in leadership roles. With a clear focus/goal on raising student achievement, the use of the aforementioned practices will create an environment in which capacity exists to work collaboratively to raise student achievement.

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In their work, Nettles and Herrington (2007) explain several examples of how student achievement (test scores) is linked to the practices of the principal, and thus further justifies the importance of principal practices and expectations to raising student achievement. The 2004 National Study of Leadership in Middle Level Schools listed the principal as the most critical element in a highly successful school (Valentine, et. al, 2004).

Principal Leadership in Schools

A school leader's primary focus should always be to improve student achievement and provide optimal learning experiences (Hallingera & Heck, 2010). Similarly Leech and Fulton (2008) explain, "The traditional roles of teachers and principals have changed and improved organizational teamwork is fostered by all members of the learning community assuming decision making roles" (p. 630). Principals working to be inclusive and practicing in ways that involve stakeholder's works toward success are key to building a productive school setting. To strengthen commitment toward raising student achievement, principals involve teachers in the process. This leadership style improves teacher productivity and student achievement (Seashore & Wahlstrom, 2011). According to Leech and Fulton (2008) teachers will be more involved if the principal is open and collaborative in nature. Consistency in action and practice by principals will work to build trust to thus build capacity to raise performance and student achievement (Seashore & Wahlstrom, 2011).

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Schools need principals who practice effective communication methods that allow staff members to participate in professional/collegial exchanges rather than situations where there is little discussion a hierarchical approach (Bell, 2002). Stakeholders' trust in the school administrator's ability to lead is a major component of a positive school culture (Nolan & Hoover, 2008); therefore, the leader should make every effort to build a culture of appreciation and respectful relationships (Leech & Fulton, 2008).

While building relationships and trust amongst stakeholders is vital to a school's success, principals must also be instructional leaders and pioneers. McEwan (2008) identified several roles/traits of effective instructional leaders. Her work stipulates that successful leaders establish and maintain academic standards, serve as instructional resources, create a conducive to learning, communicate the vision and mission of the school, develop and maintain positive stakeholder relationships, and set high expectations for self and staff. Recent studies find that in order for student achievement to rise, principals must be instructional leaders who promote teacher quality and work to increase student achievement (Baker & Cooper, 2005).

Principal Selection

District superintendents face the daunting task of selecting principal leaders. Petzko (2002) indicates that district superintendents face numerous challenges when attempting to attract strong principal leader candidates. His research emphasizes the following five areas: difficulty of attracting qualified candidates; insufficient preparation programs; insufficient extended learning opportunities for principals; and diminished

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satisfaction in the principal's position. More importantly, educators are leaving the profession at younger ages leaving a lower pool of candidates.

In order to circumvent hiring issues, Chapman (2005) recommends that districts reevaluate their employment policies and practices. She says, "There is increasing emphasis on the need of coherent, integrated, consequential, and systematic approaches to leadership recruitment, retention, and systematic approaches to leadership recruitment, retention, and development. Underpinning such approaches must be the co-operative support, direction, and commitment of all interested constituencies, requiring negotiations among school principals, representatives of professional associations, employing authorities, government, universities, and members of the broader community (p. 3)." Understanding this need will encourage school superintendents to examine their hiring practices.

As their leadership roles evolve, principals note additional reforms and changes that impact their job satisfaction levels (Norton, 2003). Research suggests several support style programs that both allow principals to move seamlessly into their current role and simultaneously support their future growth. In a study of mentoring programs, the need for mentors who operate in informal settings, support their mentee's growth, and participate in intensive sharing see the greatest success. More importantly, advisors must carefully select strong leader mentors. This ensures greater mentee success (Walker, et. al. 1993).

In their 2009 study, Clark, Martorell, and Rockoff use data collected from New York schools to examine hiring practices among principals. The trio comments that

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traditionally principals have been teachers and then assistant principals prior to becoming principals. Currently, New York hires principals from non-traditional backgrounds, thus allowing candidates with other credentials to become principals. Clark, Martorell, and Rockoff assert, "These changes are based on the notion that principals need not have served the district for a long period of time in order to be effective leaders, and that talented educators should be promoted when they are considered ready to lead schools (4). In the final findings of their study, the trio share, "We find little evidence of any relationship between school performance and principal education and pre-principal characteristics, although we do find some evidence that experience as an assistant principal in their current school is associated with higher performance of schools led by inexperienced principals. We find mixed evidence in regard to principal training and professional development programs, although program rules are such that it is hard to isolate the effects of these programs. Our clearest finding is that schools perform better when they are led by experienced principals. The experience profile is especially steep over the first few years (30)."

Principal Leadership Styles

In order for school leaders to develop their skills, boost student achievement, and maintain growth for students, they must recognize their style and approach is vital their overall success. Notwithstanding, the level of challenge presented to a principal varies from school to school or district to district. Recognizing the importance of those challenges presents the need for principals to better understand their own role as a leader

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and the type of skills and approaches necessary to ensure effectiveness and propel student achievement.

Visionary

Visionary leaders are those who understand the importance of focus and building a common vision that leads to success. In fact, leading with vision is included as a chief effective leadership practice (Kotter, 1996; Kouzes & Possner, 2002; McEwan, 2008). These leaders relentlessly reiterate the importance of the vision and develop concise target goals, methods to achieve the goals, and involve key stakeholders in the process. Visionary leaders are ones who plan for the future and understand that planning for the future is the key to establishing current successes. The principal leaders ability to working toward the vision is guides his decision-making, and making it a reality is critical to the trajectory of success his organization/school experiences. In addition, this leader has the ability to eliminate steps and ideas that are not a part of realizing the vision (Cangemi et. al, 2005). Visionary leaders' work is deliberate and methodical, making it easy for them to rally the troops (Cangemi et. al, 2007). These are leaders who keep an open door policy for their employees and participate in frequent dialogue with stakeholders and groups to further the vision of the school. They are often the first to arrive and the last to leave. These principals also frequent extra-curricular and neighborhood events, making them an integral part of the community (Whitaker 2000).

Trustworthy

Within school and community confines, a principal's ability to construct lasting relationships is one of the most important aspects of leadership. In order to establish and

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maintain trust in a school, leaders must exude trust and respect by building a consensus and allowing for shared decision-making (McEwan, 2003). Building trusting relationships foster thriving relationships amongst all stakeholders thus opening more opportunities for them to positively impact student achievement (Barth, 2006). Effective leaders understand the importance of promoting collegial exchanges between school staff members, which will encourage development (Cangemi, et. al, 2005).

Risk Taker

Principals who take risks understand that the status quo mentality pervades many school employees; principal leaders challenge this mentality (Benis, 2003). By example, these leaders work to raise both faculty and student performance levels and productivity (Kouzes & Posner, 1995). Asking questions and working toward understanding best practices is key to a risk-takers approach to creating a successful environment. Principals who are risk takers often encourage teachers to innovate, scaffold, co-teach, and diversify their lessons, initiatives, and assessments. According to Benoy (1996), these principals best serve the needs of students, understand failure, and empower teachers to act.

Change Agent

Change agents welcome change and understand its ability to create positive movement in their schools. The focus of change agents often becomes a matter of completing tasks and work based on the set of expectations rather than on the way the things had been done previously (Conner, 1992). While constant change can be detrimental to schools and stakeholders, leaders who deny that change is necessary to improve student

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achievement do not experience success in terms of implementing current pedagogy (Sarason, 1993). While principals may serve as the primary change agents in their building, they must include other stakeholders in decision-making processes. Otherwise, their initiatives may prove unsuccessful. The shared-vision piece is essential to the change agent's ability to realize the school's vision (Sarason, 1993). Successful change agents in education are those who can create and sustain fundamental change within the culture and teaching of a school (Fullan, 2002).

Building a Vision of Success for Learners

Once a principal is hired and immerses himself/herself into the new position, it is important to craft intentional steps to ensure success. While the superintendent, school board, or additional influences provide principals with guiding standards with which to follow, their primary focus is creating and marketing the school's vision. Just as a superintendent is charged by the school board to produce results, other leadership (including principals) must work to raise student achievement (Bryant & Houston, 2002). As the school board and superintendent work to develop goals and methods of evaluating the goals, principals and other district leadership team members must work to evaluate criteria and implement strategies for achievement (Cudeiro, 2005).

School and community stakeholders should have a thorough understanding of the school's vision and expectations for student achievement (Downey, 2001). This is accomplished not only via the principal but also through the support and guidance of the superintendent (Sherman & Grogan, 2003). As the call for change is developed and the

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charge passed to principals, each school leader will work to achieve the goals and activities. Superintendents who lack the skills to heighten the knowledge of stakeholders charge to ensure success for all students are fulfilling their ethical obligations (Sherman & Grogan, 2003).

When superintendents hire principals, they should seek candidates who can articulate and build a vision for the school. When the superintendent makes the assignment of a principal to a school, the goal should be to place the person in the role to increase student achievement. Ensuring a leader (principal) is in place with the chief duty of raising student achievement should be at the forefront of assignments when Superintendents place principals in positions. Likewise, working with principals in the schools must recognize that student achievement is at the crux of successful schools. The principal will develop the vision to fit the community of the school. In order to implement plans to raise student achievement, school principals may work to implement Professional Learning Communities as a vehicle to shared leadership and responsibility.

According to DuFour and Eaker (1998), there are three components that create effective professional learning communities. These essential communities develop stratagem that impact student achievement. First, rather than focusing on rules and policies, schools must be led through shared vision (likely from the Superintendent and the principal of the school). Second, schools must involve multiple stakeholder groups in the decision-making process for the school. Principals who act in a way that empowers groups to work and act on decisions experience heightened levels of success. Finally, staff members must maintain and utilize all resources and materials to make strong decisions. Principals utilizing this model can enhance opportunities to increase growth.

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Establishing a strong vision for a school is essential. In order to produce results, school principals need to examine the culture of the school and work to build a school climate in which student achievement is at the center of all actions. Research studies validate the relationship between school climate/culture and student achievement (Barker, 1963; Brookover, Beady, Flood, Schweitzer, & Wisenbaker, 1978; Duke & Perry, 1978). Creating and sustaining positive school climate and relationships will enhance student achievement (Cohen, 1999).

In building climate, the vision of the school in conjunction with a set of realistic action steps builds capacity to create change. Schools with a strong vision, clear goals and action plans, and a constructive climate yield positive student achievement outcomes. Schools working in deliberate fashion enhance student achievement scores and build capacity for change, growth, and development (Cohen, 1999). Moreover, schools with a strong nurturing culture can only be developed through strong principal leadership (Seashore & Wahlstrom, 2011). Seashore and Wahlstrom (2011) identify four ways in which principals positively affect the climate of the school in to raise outcome level and student achievement. First, school leaders establish a system in which a focus and values are regarded as key to success, and they seek to understand the untouchable values of the staff members. Second, leaders look to eradicate those practices that prohibit the school culture from changing. Third, leaders work to assist members in understanding and building protocol to influence the future culture of the school. Fourth, school leaders implement plans for evaluation and reinforce changes. Using these skills will allow principals and leaders to help shape the classroom achievement and student achievement of the school (Seashore & Wahlstrom, 2011).

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A Principal's Role in Student Achievement

Of the various roles and responsibilities placed on a school principal, perhaps the primary role is that of instructional leader. As such, the principal must work with all stakeholders in order to create impactful programs and services that increase student achievement levels. Over thirty years of school leadership research reiterates that the correlation between successful school leadership and student achievement is substantial (Marzano et al., 2003). The principal's role in raising student scores and heightening the level of best practices is critical to the success of a school and to the principal's overall success and effectiveness (Cotton, 2003). It is also the school leader's responsibility to emphasize student achievement and create a culture that embraces student success in a manner that encompasses the entire school. The principals who obtain the best results are those who are involved and methodical about targets with ties to raising student achievement (Hallingera & Heck, 1996).

The Institute of Educational Leadership created the Task Force on the Principalship and in its report called *Leadership for Student Learning: Reinventing the Principalship* (2000), several recommendations and indicators was discovered. The report suggests that schools need leaders who are vested in student achievement outcomes, instructional leaders, take ownership of the school and involvement in the community, and work as visionaries to their craft. Principals who accept these three roles are those who champion the cause of placing student achievement at the forefront of the school.

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From the principal leader's perspective, one of the primary areas that directly impacts student learning is the selection of quality teachers. Brewer (2003) contends, "The greater the percentage of teachers appointed by a principal with high academic goals, the higher the student test score gains; the greater the percentage of teachers appointed by a principal with low academic goals, the lower student test score gains (287)." Similarly, Cooper (2005) maintains, "If we assume that principals are predisposed to seek teachers with backgrounds similar to their own, then principals' own background attributes- like test scores and/or undergraduate institution- may be particularly important for guiding principal recruitment and selection, even if a principal lacks other attributes perceived important in educational leadership (455).

School leaders must work to apply leadership theory to their organization in order to ensure long-term success. Competent leadership is necessary in order to create efficiency (Sergiovanni, 1990). Leadership in schools is widely written about as being the main factor in determining the success of the school (Bass, 1990). One major function of the principal is to examine and utilize data provided by assessments and other sources to better make decisions about education. Schools who need to observe a boost in student achievement must have an effective leader who is vested in all aspects of the school (Steiner & Hassel, 2011). Principals who enact changes based on data and develop a needs assessment to sustain growth through expectations for results typically bring a strong focus and mission to the school (Kowal, E.A. Hassel & Hassel, 2009). Principals who engage their staff and have very deliberate plans to boost student achievement typically see greater results with regard to student achievement (Louis et. al, 2010). The principal begins the process to initiate change and sustaining growth. The

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clear mission and vision for the school will be enhanced through work and reflection. More importantly, successful schools and students have principals that not only view themselves as instructional leaders in both philosophy and action (Louis et. al, 2010).

Principals and the role of Testing

In American schools, principals must be able to handle multiple projects at one time. In their 1982 work, Peters and Waterman offered eight factors for creating highly successful schools. According to Petters and Waterman, successful schools, hold regular/daily meetings for administrative purposes while morphing committees into task forces. They examine regularly the success of those who have gone through the school and understand the relevance of the education received. The leader recruits and retains those employees who will work toward innovation. Schools celebrate the success of teachers while encouraging feedback and strong learning opportunities. The leader remains highly visible and must be constantly involved in the instructional practices of the school. Effective leaders closely monitor the achievement of students. Leaders provide a measure of the autonomy of the school; and mandate the protection of core values within the autonomous school.

Even in this early work, the principal's role in having a direct effect on raising student achievement is highlighted. The call for effective leadership is essential for the success of the school. While the Andrews and Soder (1987) study was conducted nearly twenty-five years ago, they focus on four similar principal roles – an instructional resource, communicator, resource provider, and visible presence. Clemente-Watson

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(2007) also believes that a majority of what is done to raise student achievement is within the control of the principal.

Gains among student learners have been impacted as a result of testing accountability systems. Gains made since the 1990's occurred in schools whose states adopted an accountability system inclusive of high stakes testing programs (Raymond and Hanushek, 2003). To better understand the impact of high stakes tests versus lower tests, Green, Winters, and Forster (2003) found that when two states' results were considered, one on a high stakes system, one on a low, the outcome yielded information showing that the high stakes tests provided more reliable information on student performance. While this study produced positive arguments for high stakes testing, Amerin and Berliner (2003) completed a study showing that student performance in eighteen states did not yield a measurable improvement. Overall, schools have noted more focused time in reading and math while other subjects have been eliminated (Center 2006). In a 2003 study, Elmore noted that using high stakes tests could lead to school improvement if administrators observe the information and utilize it toward improving achievement. This supports the view that the principal is a crucial factor in improving schools since one of the largest duties he/she may perform is working with teachers to change performance (Lambert 2006).

Using High Stakes Testing

In 2002, President George W. Bush signed the reauthorization of the *Elementary/Secondary Education Act/ No Child Left Behind* legislation into law. By

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doing so, the federal government placed a requirement on all schools. They mandated that all students meet proficiency standards in the areas of reading and mathematics by 2014. Since then, school districts have worked to implement strategies and ideas to improve student achievement. As academic pioneers, principals ensure that data for each student and groups of students is fully analyzed (Stiggins & Duke, 2008). Accordingly, principals must have the training necessary to understand school data, and thus create a climate in which data is scrutinized and utilized in the formation of academic, remediation, and enrichment goals, programs, and services.

Using the *No Child Left Behind* testing data provides support for teachers' learning intentions and long-term goals. Utilizing this data can benefit schools in the reflection, academic planning, and assessment processes (Thorton & Perreault, 2002). Examining material, data, and using the information to impact instruction is necessary to support instructional leadership (DuFour, 2002). Instructional leaders empowered by data can use the information to better plan and thus practice data-based decision making (Thorton & Perreault, 2002). Schools that practice the use of data-based decision making in a methodical, systematic way can note significant results (Thorton & Perreault, 2002). The principal must serve as the chief instructional leader and thus be data driven and focused on meeting goals established by the school (Checkley, 2000). The principal is charged with observing classes, providing constructive feedback, acting to meet goals, and making decisions that will impact student achievement (Anthes, 2002).

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Elementary Secondary Education Flexibility Waivers

In 1965, the United States Congress passed the *Elementary Secondary Education Act*; it ensured equal access and opportunity to students across the country. The bill, however, required periodic reauthorization from the United States Congress. In 2001, the bill was reauthorized as *No Child Left Behind* (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). In 2012, the United States Department of Education produced a report detailing how schools across the country were not meeting the demands of the nation-wide accountability system of Adequate Yearly Progress. While signs of improvement existed across the country, the stringent all or none required results forced more and more schools to not meet the requirements for federal accountability. U. S Secretary of Education Arne Duncan at the direction of President Barack Obama in 2011 announced plans to allow states to seek flexibility from the requirements of the *No Child Left Behind* legislation which had not been reauthorized by Congress since the passage of *No Child Left Behind* (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Under the waiver system, state education agencies and school districts could apply for a waiver from the *No Child Left Behind* requirements. States who elected to apply for waivers must abide by several chief requirements. First, the state must have a commitment to providing college and career ready standards for all students. States must also have a plan to implement reforms that focus on recognizing schools for innovation and results, accountability measures that require schools to improve and increasing measures for teacher and principal effectiveness (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Overall, schools must be results driven and focused.

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In February 2012, South Carolina submitted its *Elementary Secondary Education Act* Flexibility request to the U.S Department of Education. The proposal was submitted after several stakeholder meetings, community input sessions, and work being done at the Department of Education (ESEA Flexibility Request, 2012). As part of the proposal, the South Carolina Department of Education submitted a plan to rate schools using a new system based on a series of calculations which yields an overall points for each school and a grade of A, B, C, D, or F. Schools and districts receive a score calculated by using student achievement scores on the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards test for grades 3-8 and the High School Assessment Program test results for high schools.

Under the new system, a new process is used to calculate Adequate Yearly Progress required under the *No Child Left Behind* legislation. Five steps are followed to determine the rating of the school. First, those who are present on the first day of testing determine a student cohort. Second, means are calculated based on the testing scores; each subgroup of students must be thirty or more. Third, means are compared to measurable objectives and used to determine scores to be part of the composite scores. Fourth, the objective scores are divided by total possible objectives and converted to a percent objectives met. Next, the measures are multiplied times the objectives weight score. Sixth, a total score is calculated by adding the total weight for a score of 0-100. Finally, a letter grade is assigned. Schools receive a weighted composite score as follows: 90-100, the school receives an A as the performance substantially exceeds the state's expectations; 80-89.9, the school receives a B as the performance exceeds the state's expectations; 70-79.9, the school receives a C as performance meets the state's expectations; 60-69.9, the school receives a D as the performance does not meet the

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state's expectations, and finally schools below 60 receive an F for substantially being below the state's expectation (ESEA, 2012).

After submitting the extensive required documents that included the new system of calculating progress toward national and state goals for student achievement, a new teacher and administrator evaluation system, and new accountability measures in 2012, the United States Department of Education approved the plans. In his July 2012 letter to the South Carolina State Superintendent, Dr. Mick Zais, Secretary Arne Duncan discussed the merits of the flexibility waiver. Duncan says,

> The Department expects that South Carolina will conduct robust outreach to all LEAs to ensure that school and LEA leaders are informed about the State's new accountability system, including how the metrics are designed, how the system will be implemented, and how the State educational agency (SEA) will work with LEAs to support continuous improvement in all schools. We expect that this outreach will be proactive and will be designed to result in a clear understanding by stakeholders of the impact of the new system on South Carolina's LEAs and schools. Additionally, as South Carolina implements its *ESEA* flexibility request, the Department expects that the SEA will meaningfully engage and solicit input from stakeholders and meet regularly with LEA superintendents. The waivers that comprise *ESEA* flexibility are being granted to South Carolina pursuant to my authority in section 9401 of the *ESEA* (2).

In addition to words of support, the United States Department of Education provided feedback and guidance for the South Carolina Department of Education as it began

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implementation of the accountability measures. In all, the state received flexibility in nearly twenty various requirements under the *No Child Left Behind* legislation which allowed for the creation of a new accountability system.

Turnover in the Principalship and Factors

Once principals enter the position, a variety factors either increase the likelihood of the principal remaining in the position or the principal leaving the position. A study conducted by Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) and the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) (Bottoms & O'Neil, 2001) found that there are thirteen primary responsibilities for principals within a school that serve as determinants of success. These include the following practices: focusing on student achievement, developing a culture of high expectations, designing a standards-based instructional system, creating a caring environment, implementing data-based improvement, strong communication, involving parents, starting and sustaining change, providing professional development, being innovative, maximizing resources, building external support, and staying current with effective practices. All of these practices are trademarks of strong leadership, and thus provide insight into the success of some principals and the struggles of others (Bottoms & O'Neill, 2001). Like any other organization, schools need consistent leaders. Ingersoll (1999) found in studying businesses that, "high levels of employee turnover are found to be both the cause and effect of problematic conditions and low performance in organizations" (p.7).

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When teachers work for strong leaders, they typically decide to become school administrators; this usually occurs within the first five to seven years of teaching (Fuller, et al., 2007). Physical education teachers are more likely (nearly 50%) to work on an administrative degree (Fuller, et al., 2007). Those who work toward leadership positions typically have been department chairpersons, coaches, or others who seek leadership opportunities while still teaching (Fladeland, 2001). Once in the position, some principals become overwhelmed with the responsibilities; one study notes that in Texas, nearly half of administrators left their position within the first five years (Fuller et al., 2007). Fuller also found that principals under age forty-six stayed in their position longer; on the other hand, within ten years, nearly 75% left their position as building level administrators (Fuller et al., 2007).

The Fuller et al., (2007) study focused on schools in Texas and specifically principals' backgrounds. The researchers found that in schools where there were high levels of poverty, there were elevated principal turnover rates. In a similar study, principals in North Carolina who served in high poverty schools had also previously been teachers or assistant principals in the school in which they were serving as principal (Clotfelter et al., 2006). In both Texas and North Carolina, test scores typically were lower in high poverty schools.

Baker & Cooper (2005) found that schools with large numbers of minority students typically had higher numbers of students who did not score at the expected level on state high stakes testing. Additionally, these schools often had larger numbers of teachers who had no certification or who lacked proper certification. Schools with lower poverty and lower levels of minorities typically see different results.

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Instructional leadership is a key component of any successful school and thus is required to produce higher levels of student achievement. The supervision of instruction is critical to success of the school. Mackey, Pitcher, and Decman (2006) found that three responsibilities emerge with regard to a principal's ability to affect change and raise test scores. The researchers found that the principal's vision, background of the principal, and the principal's success as an instructional leader were essential to the overall success of a school.

Researchers note that there are other factors influencing school leadership. Size of the school, student demographics, faculty experiences, and students in general all affect the leaders of the school (Glanz et al., 2007). School leaders must work through all available data and information to fully understand the impact of their leadership on student achievement. Principals will likely utilize these factors to make long- term determinations of their placement in a school.

Unfortunately, districts across the country experience a shortage of qualified principal candidates. The National Association of Secondary School Principals revealed that nearly half the districts in the United States are reporting a shortage of well-trained principals (Peterson, 2002). Moreover, they note that changing principals proves to be disruptive to schools. According to Hoy and Miskel (2005) changing leadership can change communication processes, relationships, and other such mechanisms, which could result in changes in student achievement. To fully establish a system in which the school can build consistency, having a leader in place to support continuous growth and development is necessary. Novice principals may often have behaviors different from their colleagues who have been in their position longer.

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According to Oplatka (2004) research should consider the principal's career stage in understanding the impact of the principal on student achievement. Oplatka found that a principal's career stages are often overlooked in research and thus sometimes discounted. She says, "Principals at all stages must understand that their career stage is likely to affect their ability to adopt a certain leadership style (Oplatka, 2004, p.53). More research could be conducted on the longevity of school principals in terms of understanding the key differences between successful and unsuccessful principals. Allowing principals to remain in their positions while practicing successful leadership skills and improving results should be a standard practice (Fink and Brayman, 2006). The principals who engage in strengthening and raising student achievement will allow the culture to expand and grow. They also dually noted that after a period of success, the principal would impact the school and thus the student achievement (Fink and Brayman, 2006).

Longevity of the Principal

According to Michael Fullan (2002), well established, high quality leadership yields successful leaders, programs, and students. When engaged in raising student achievement, the principal needs time to produce results and sustain growth. Additionally, the leadership "problem" according to Fullan, needs to be addressed in schools since vast amounts of leaders are leaving the positions or not pursuing future openings. Whether directly or indirectly, the effect of continual principalship turnover can be detrimental to the success of the school, thus affecting student achievement. The literature is lacking in studies associated specifically with the impact of issues presented with the changing of a principal; however, much legislation calls for the practice when

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schools are not meeting performance standard requirements. Grusky (1963) and Bruggink (2001) assert that a change in principal leaders disrupts the focus on student achievement. As one leader is changed to another, the priority order may change thus changing the focus (Corbett, Dawson, & Firestone, 1984).

Examining the root causes of longevity on the ability to increase student achievement is still in need of research. Mascall and Leithwood (2010) argue;

> One needs to exercise a degree of caution in describing the link between principal turnover and student achievement. While there certainly is research that concludes that frequent principal turnover leads to lower student achievement, the current accountability climate in the United States also leads to the opposite causality agreement: low student achievement leads to frequent principal turnover, as leaders of 'failing' schools are replaced (369).

Whether after a short or long period of time, turnover in the principal position causes lapses in focus and success. For example, teachers may lack trust for the new leader, which could result in a lapse of focus on organizational goals (Macmilliam, 2000). Knowing that effective change can take time, keeping a principal in place benefits a school as long as academic growth is evident.

According to stage theory, leaders give credence to various stages of in a principal's career. Hargreaves et al. (2003) found that viewing succession as a process allows schools to prepare that eventually there will be a change in leadership. The stage theory model suggests that leaders need five to seven years to cultivate strong

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relationships (Gabarro's, 1987). The principal needs approximately five years to create a culture that will have a positive impact on student achievement. If a leader is in a position for more than five year, a flourishing school will continue to be successful; however, there will be little impact on continued improvement (Gabarro, 1987). Research continues to show that principals who leave their school within the first two years are much less likely to have any positive impact on student achievement (Fullan, 1991; Hargreaves& Find, 2006).

Student Achievement and School Size

Schools are various sizes and compositions across the United States. In some areas, schools are configured to be smaller learning environments while some schools are larger. Some schools encompass multiple grade levels and some are configured differently from others in terms of grade level composition. In New York for example, Wendling and Cohen (1980) studied elementary schools and found that the size of the school did impact the levels of student achievement. The pair found that in, larger rural schools there was a higher level of student achievement while in more urban schools, it was the opposite. Cotton (1996) studied various studies conducted on school size and found that in the studies, nearly half of them found no connection between the sizes of the schools while in other schools; smaller ones yielded higher results. Fowler and Walberg (1991) found that smaller schools had higher student achievement in schools in New Jersey. The pair studies schools and the impact of poverty and size on achievement. In smaller schools where there was higher poverty, there were often higher student

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achievement results. Many of the studies conducted found that various schools with smaller populations typically score higher. Larger schools sometimes lack the focus and attention necessary to support stronger student achievement. Wasley (2002) found in studying schools in Chicago that small schools produce strong results because of the personal touches typically associated with the small campus.

Understanding the impact of school size on student achievement is one of many factors associated with student achievement. While larger schools encourage more participation, they typically lack the focus and the personal touches associated with smaller schools (Lunenburg and Ornstein, 2002). In at least one South Carolina study, Roberts (2002) found that there was a negative correlation between school size and results on the state testing program. In each study, the results reflect various factors impacting the success of the school and the student achievement.

The Gender of the Principal

The school principal is often referred to as the key component to a successful school (Fiore & Curtin, 1997). In many studies, effective leadership is focused on collaboration and building capacity toward positively impacting teacher success and student achievement (Lashway, 1996). Men and women differ in their career priorities. Marshall (1992) confirms that stereotypes for women had developed over time impacting the perception of equality between men and women in the job place. Men typically hold administrative positions in schools according to Gupton and Slick (1996). Women are often underrepresented in administrative positions in schools and studies indicate that

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there are differences between men and women administrators (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2000).

Gupton and Slick (1996) found that women made up over 40% of elementary principals, around 20% of middle school, and less than 15% of high school principals. Another study indicated that in 2000, nearly 65% of principals with less than five years of experience were women (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2002). Females are moving into administrative positions each year. Women in some ways have abilities that are making them stronger candidates for positions. Brunner (1999) found that schools with female principals build stronger teams and more collaborative that in schools with male principals.

Studies examining the role of the gender in the principalship have found mixed results. Stanley (2002) used the Principal Leadership Inventory to determine that men and women often marked their own gender higher in principal effectiveness. In the same study, effectiveness in principal leadership of instruction was evaluated. According to Stanley (2002), gender of the principal did not make a difference in the perception of principal leadership of instruction.

The Development of Middle Schools

The Association for Middle Level Education (AMLE) (previously known as the National Middle School Association was founded in 1970 as the Midwest Middle School Association to assist with the development of the movement of schools toward becoming middle schools (Dickinson, 2001). The goal of the association was to collaborate with

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schools and to provide guidance in creating that advance developing adolescents, include interdisciplinary teams, implement inquiry methods, provide advisory opportunities, create schedules that work to promote growth and development, and generate programs that assist the student in his/her development (Dickinson, 2001). John Lounsbury (1991) conducted a study of junior high schools and middle schools in which he found that both types of schools shared numerous similarities. The call for more focus to be placed on the middle grades developed a number of middle grades reforms aimed at working to increase student achievement in the adolescent years of development.

In his work, John Lounsbury (1992) writes about how psychology influenced change in middle schools. According to Lounsbury, psychologists began focusing efforts on adolescents and advocating for a new model in education to assist these developments. Alongside the traditional roles of the school, middle schools must work to enhance the experiences of the student in such a way to increase student achievement while working to enhance learning opportunities.

Understanding the expectation for student learning and outcomes is essential to the success of the student. Students must be able to not only recognize the importance of the material, but also how best they learn it and how this knowledge will impact their growth and development (Bransford, 1999; Jackson & Davis, 2000; Tomlinson & Eidson, 2003; Wiggins & McTighe, 1999; Zemelman, Daniels & Hyde, 1998). It is vital that middle-level instructional practices conform to the students' backgrounds, needs, and should be served by those who understand these obligations (NMSA, 2003). Only a few research studies exist that focus solely on which practices are the most effective for middle school students (Allington & Johnston, 2000; Sosniak & Stodolsky, 1993);

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therefore, researchers may find it necessary to conduct further studies that provide current information about the overall effectiveness of middle schools on raising student achievement.

Between 1990 and 1999, South Carolina instituted a major reform aimed at implementing the teaching of the middle school model in schools through funding from the Carnegie Corporation of New York (Caught between the lines, 2006). In 2006, the South Carolina Education Oversight Committee published a middle school profile that outlined the challenges of students in grades six, seven, and eight. The study revealed that among the many challenges facing students in middle school grades, having multiple teachers and less structured after school activities present challenges to students (p. 4). Middle Schools in South Carolina need effective leadership to boost student achievement. In 2005, according to the Education Oversight Committees *Caught Between the Lines* (2006) middle schools represented 274 schools in the state. Of those, 56 schools had both a lower poverty rate than 50% and had a mean principal's years at school of 5.4. Another 137 schools had a poverty rate between 51% and 79% had a mean principal's years at school of 4.5, and the remaining 81 schools with a poverty rate of 80% or more had a mean principal's years at school of 3.7 (p.22). The report shows that schools with higher poverty have principals with fewer years at the school.

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CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The literature suggests that a relationship between the principal and student achievement exists. Literature also exists to affirm that the gender of the principal, length of service, and qualifications of the principal are all factors in the principal's ability to impact student achievement. The purpose of the study was to determine if there is a relationship between principal longevity in a school and student achievement. Achievement was measured using the percent of students scoring met and exemplary on the Palmetto Assessment of States Standards assessment, the *Elementary/Secondary Education Act* Flexibility Waiver for South Carolina, and schools. This chapter will present the data collection process, research design and methodology of the study.

To conduct this study, the researcher used a correlational method to determine if there was a relationship between the longevity of a principal in a particular school and (a) student achievement and (b) the *Elementary Secondary Education Act* Flexibility Waiver rating for South Carolina middle schools. Further analyses were completed using a regression model to determine the existence of a relationship between longevity and achievement while controlling for principal gender, school enrollment, and poverty. The data used to conduct the study was from the South Carolina Department of Education, specifically on the 2012 South Carolina School Report Card. The researcher used the percent of students scoring met and exemplary on the 2012 administration of the PASS test.

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Research Questions

The following research questions were used to conduct this research:

1. Is there a relationship between principal longevity and student achievement on the 2012 reading and math subtests of the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards test?
2. Is there a relationship between principal longevity and middle school ESEA ratings on the 2012 South Carolina School Report Card?
3. Is there a relationship between principal longevity and student achievement on the 2012 reading and math subtests of the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards test and on the ESEA rating on the 2012 South Carolina School Report Card when controlling for principal gender, school enrollment, and poverty?

Statement of the Problem

Fullan (2001) argued that a leader needs approximately five years to affect changes that will impact the culture of a school. The principal is the first step in increasing student achievement (Fullan 2002). Fullan goes on to advocate for sustaining transformation of the learning culture to sustain growth and increases in student achievement. According to Early and Weindling (2007), principals can affect the outcomes of the school over time by developing skills. Weinstein et al. (2009) surveyed principals in New York City and found that achievement goals became unattainable due to increased turnover of principals. Therefore, this study examined the relationship

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between the principal longevity and student achievement in South Carolina with regard to the percent of students meeting federal reporting requirements for proficiency. It also examined the compliance index for the Elementary Secondary Education Act Waiver for South Carolina using principal gender, school enrollment, and poverty as control variables.

The State Department of Education for South Carolina database provided numerous data sets related to student achievement levels. These data sets offered insight into the work being done in schools and student performance on the standardized tests. Additionally, the results of student achievement on the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards tests were used to provide schools with an ESEA Compliance Index. This study sought to determine if there is a relationship between principal longevity and (a) student achievement as measured by the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards test for middle schools and (b) the ESEA waiver rating of middle schools.

Research Design

All data used to complete the statistical tests of the study was collected by the South Carolina Department of Education. Correlational tests were used to determine the effect of one variable on another. Additionally a regression was conducted to determine the predictability of the variables. . In this case, the study examined middle schools in South Carolina.

A correlational research approach allows two data sets to be compared. According to Gall et al. (2003), "correlational research is very simple, involving nothing more than

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collecting data on two or more variables for each individual in a sample and computing a correlational coefficient" (p. 323). Additionally, the correlational study provided predictors on interactions of two separate pieces of information (Brewerton, 2001). In the study, the researcher examined the relationship between the principal longevity and student achievement for question one. In the second research question, the researcher examined the interaction/relationship between principal longevity and the ESEA waiver compliance.

The study examined if a relationship existed between principal longevity and student achievement as well as principal longevity and ESEA waiver compliance. The data collected from the South Carolina School Report Card for 2012 provided data sets to complete the statistical analysis. Specifically, the researcher examined the statistical power of principal longevity on student achievement in reading and mathematics and the *Elementary Secondary Education Act* waiver compliance index. Only 2012 data was used because at the time of the study, only the 2012 *Elementary Secondary Education Act* waiver data was available from the South Carolina Department of Education. According to Creswell (2009) using quantitative research "is a means for testing objective theories by examining the relationship among variables (18)." Examining the relationship of longevity and student achievement was the focus of this study.

The research employed a quantitative approach that examined principal longevity and the performance of students on the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards reading and mathematics subtests and the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* waiver ratings. Creswell (2005) stated, "a correlation is a statistical test to determine the tendency or pattern for one (or more) variables or two sets of data to vary consistently"

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(p. 325). Completing this research study using a correlational statistics test afforded the researcher with the ability to, "describe and measure the degree of association (or relationship) between two or more variables or sets of scores" (Creswell, 2005, p. 325). The correlational study also allowed for the researcher to select a population without control over the variables, in this case the researcher had no influence over the test scores or the principal longevity (Lodico et al., 2006).

To ensure reliability of the data, the researcher utilized data collected from the State Department of Education. To determine the power of the relationship, the study examined multiple, quantifiable variables including the number of years the principal was in the school, the poverty index, the ESEA waiver score, and the percent of students met and exemplary in the areas of reading and mathematics. These were chosen to better understand the principal's longevity and its relationship to results on the PASS test in the areas of math and reading, and the newly adopted ESEA Waiver index.

To determine the results of the statistical analysis of the data to answer the research questions, the power of the coefficient was examined. In a Pearson Product Moment Correlation (*r*), values range from -1 to +1 and represent the area in which the two data sets are related to one another. . When there is a positive correlation between the two sets of data, as one increases, so to will the other. Additionally, in the correlation, if one decreases so will the other since the two data sets are related to one another (Gall, 1999). Using the *r*, allows researchers to examine two data sets to determine if a relationship exists. Coefficients closer to zero yielded a lower correlation power (Brewerton, 2001). In analyzing two variables, the correlation was expressed as a coefficient (r) (Brewerton, 2001). The coefficient consisted of the measure of the linear

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dependency of two variables. The closer the value of r gets to zero, the greater the variation the data points are around the line of best fit meaning at zero, there is an absence of a correlation. At +1, and -1the two values are perfectly related and are considered to be perfect predictors. (Gall, 1999). A positive correlation (closer to +1) means that when one value is high, the other value will be high or when one is low, the other will be low. Comparatively, a negative correlation (closer to -1 value), when the value of one variable is high, the other variable is low (Brewerton, 2001).

In this case, the study illustrated the linear correlation of two variables. In the first research question, the researcher studied the correlation of the principal's longevity and student scores in reading and math. The researcher examined the *r* value of the two variables to determine the value of the correlation. In the second question, the researcher observed the linear dependency of principal longevity and ESEA compliance. Finally, to address the third research question, the researcher scrutinized these values using principal gender, school enrollment, and poverty index scores as control variables due to the potentially confounding effect of these variables through a linear regression.

Population and Sample

In conducting research, the researcher relied on the group that best reflected the population (McClave, Benson, & Sincich, 2010). The study included all South Carolina schools identified by the South Carolina Department of Education as middle schools as reported on the 2012 South Carolina School Report Card. A total of 292 schools in South Carolina met this criterion to be included in this study. Three schools were removed due

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to missing data leaving 289 schools as the final sample. Including all of the schools allowed for no type of random or specific population thus minimizing the risk of unreliable data.

The study sought to understand the relationship of traditional public schools in South Carolina. Therefore, the study excluded middle schools in the South Carolina Charter School District because they operate under different rules with regard to enrollment and requirements of inclusive population for attendance areas. Further, the data from charter schools may not accurately reflect poverty and performance. For example, the Children's Attention Home in Rock Hill is a public charter school whose student population is made up of high needs students who are typically in a temporary placement from their home schools. Spending in 2012 for each student in the Children's Attention Home was over $20,000 per student. York Preparatory Academy has a managing director rather than a principal. While these leaders had similar duties of a school principal, they served as executive managers of the entire organization rather than operating like a traditional school program.

Sampling Procedures

In order to obtain the most accurate data, the researcher selected data from the South Carolina Department of Education on the research portal located on the website at www.ed.sc.gov. A purposive sample approach was used since only middle schools as identified by the South Carolina Department of Education were used in the research. The researcher was interested in understanding the relationship between longevity and student

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achievement specifically in middle schools because little research has been done in the area of middle schools in South Carolina. All schools in South Carolina who receive a middle school report card were used. For each school, the percent of students in the school scoring met and exemplary in the areas of mathematics and reading on the 2012 PASS test were be recorded in a spreadsheet. These benchmarks were used in the study because these are the measures used by the South Carolina Department of Education and the United States Department of Education to determine if students and subgroups of students are meeting the requirements of the *No Child Left Behind* legislation. The principal's number of years at the school was also recorded. Since South Carolina now produces an annual rating system for schools based on the requirements of the approval of the United States Department of Education Elementary Secondary Education Act waiver, these ratings for middle schools were used to determine the relationship as well. Control variables were extracted from the South Carolina Department of Education website. These included gender of the principal, school enrollment, and the poverty index for each school. These variables were chosen after reviewing the literature as possible factors in determining the length of time a principal stays in the position or at a school.

Palmetto Assessment of State Standards (PASS)

The Palmetto Assessment of State Standards (PASS) test is unique to South Carolina. It is an assessment program required under the *Education Accountability Act of 1998* and amended in 2008. The testing serves two purposes. First, it meets the requirements of the Federal Department of Education and *No Child Left Behind*. All

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states will assess students in the area of reading and mathematics annually. Secondly, the testing program was used to calculate school report card ratings for all schools in South Carolina. The scores collected through the administration of the PASS test were used to rate schools based on the number of students in various subgroups scoring at the Met and Exemplary performance levels. The South Carolina Department of Education uses the scores for each student to determine individual score reports, subgroup performance levels, school scores, district scores, and state level performance ratings. According to the South Carolina Department of Education website, students receive a score level based on three classifications:

> **Exemplary** - The student demonstrated exemplary performance in meeting the grade-level standard.
>
> **Met** - The student met the grade-level standard.
>
> **Not Met** - The student did not meet the grade-level standard.

In order to meet requirements for federal accountability standards, a student must receive a rating of met standards or exemplary (indicating that they exceeded expectations). For the purpose of this study, the researcher used the percent of students in a school scoring either Met or Exemplary on the PASS test since the United States Department of Education uses these ratings for determining the *Elementary Secondary Education Act* Waiver ratings. These data were used because the United States Department of Education uses only the percent of students met and exemplary to determine a school's progress toward meeting the demands of the ESEA waiver and accountability.

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Elementary Secondary Education Act Waiver Ratings

Beginning in 2012, schools in South Carolina receive a rating on the South Carolina School Report Card under the state's approval for a waiver from meeting adequate yearly progress previously required under the *No Child Left Behind* legislation. The State Department of Education assigns a score to schools based on student achievement scores on the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards test. Schools are assigned a percent score that corresponds to a letter. For the purpose of this study, the researcher used only the percentage earned.

The composite index score earned by schools was calculated by the South Carolina Department of Education using a formula using test scores from the PASS test. School ratings were created from the previous year's scores (ESEA, 2012). Schools were assessed on various subgroups based on race, gender, socioeconomic status, limited-English proficiency, and ethnicity. Schools receive a weighted composite score as follows: 90-100, the school received an A as the performance substantially exceeded the state's expectations; 80-89.9, the school received a B as the performance exceeded the state's expectations; 70-79.9, the school received a C as performance met the state's expectations; 60-69.9, the school received a D as the performance did not meet the state's expectations, and finally schools below 60 received an F for substantially scoring below the state's expectations (ESEA, 2012).

The data are a matter of public record and available for access by all persons wishing to view it. Each school included in the study received a composite rating and therefore the data were utilized from the website. In the South Carolina *Elementary*

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Secondary Education Act Flexibility Waiver, the state decided to award schools both an index rating based on mean scores (adjusted using improvement formulas) and a letter grade.

Principal Gender

Principal gender was used as a control variable in this study. This variable was coded as 0 = *female* and 1 = *male*. The gender was determined collecting information from the schools.

School Enrollment

School enrollment (the total number of students at the school) was used as a control variable in this study. The school size is reported by South Carolina Department of Education on the annual school report card.

Poverty Index

The state of South Carolina annually produces a Poverty Index for each school in the state. These numbers are published annually. The poverty index is based on the number of students who qualify for free or reduced lunch in a school. This percentage is used to determine a schools status within the Elementary/Secondary Education Act Title I eligibility as well as other federal funding formulas for schools and district. For the purpose of the study, the researcher grouped the poverty indices into quintiles. In

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controlling for poverty, the researcher grouped schools into quintiles; a poverty index of 0-20%, 20.1-40%, 41.1-60%, 60.1-80%, and 80.1-100%.

Reading and Math Achievement Levels

The percentage of students scoring met and exemplary on the PASS subtests in reading and mathematics were calculated through the SCDE and the South Carolina Education Oversight Committee. Once this information was calculated, it was posted to the SCDE research portal. Although this information is a matter of public record, the research sent email to the State Superintendent of Education to request permission to use the information (Appendix A). No student or school names were published in the study. Prior to running the analysis or hypothesis testing, each school's data were compiled into a spreadsheet and reviewed the data to ensure accuracy.

Data Collection Procedures

Prior to collecting data, the researcher submitted an IRB request and gained approval to conduct the study. The data are available at the South Carolina Department of Education website at www.ed.sc.gov. The website contained a research portal which has school report card information for all schools for multiple years, including 2012. The researcher extrapolated the following data from the report card fact file: the principal's years in current schools, the ESEA compliance index for 2012, the student achievement scores in reading and mathematics subtests, and each school's poverty index for 2012.

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The researcher downloaded two files containing the data necessary to complete this study from the report card portal. First, the performance data file on the portal provided the data regarding scores by school used for the state school report card. This data file included various subtests including reading and mathematics. A second data file, referred to as the fact file, was used to collect the principal's number of years in the school, gender, school enrollments, and the poverty index values. The two files were merged using Excel to generate the necessary data to complete the study. After the data files were combined, the data were entered into the statistical analysis program, Statistics Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), to conduct the correlation and regression tests.

First, the school name was used to present the list of participants in the study and allowed for accuracy in the data transfer and collection. In order to protect the anonymity of the school, the school names were changed. Next, the percentage of students who met or exceeded the reading and mathematics subtests expectations was collected and entered in a spreadsheet next to the school name. The principal's number of years in the school was added to the spreadsheet.

In order to complete correlations, the data were imported into the SPSS for analysis. After running the procedures in SPSS, the researcher reviewed the descriptive statistics including the means of the data included in the study. First, the researcher determined means and standard deviations for each variable included in the study then examined the correlations between study variables. After determining the results for the first two research questions, the researcher then conducted a regression to determine the answer to the third research questions. After conducting these tests, the researcher described the outcomes and explained the meaning of the products and test results. The

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test results were used to answer the first two research questions. In order to answer research question three, a regression analysis was conducted using the SPSS program. The researcher used principal gender, school enrollment, and poverty indices as control variables in conducting the regression analyses to determine the relationship between principal longevity and student achievement performance.

Data Analysis

For the three questions, procedures were run in the following manner:

Question 1: The correlation was run to determine the correlation of the principal's years in the school and the percent of students who scored met and exemplary in the areas of reading and mathematics.

Question 2: The correlation was run to determine the relationship between principal longevity and the school rating on the ESEA Waiver for 2012.

Question 3: The use of multiple regression analysis allowed for controlling for the potential effect of principal gender, school enrollment, and poverty in examining the relationships between principal longevity, student achievement, and ESEA ratings. The research questions directed around a set of quantitative values, which were used for making multiple predictions; therefore, a multiple regression testing procedure was appropriate (Mertler & Vannatta, 2005).

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Limitations

While the number of years a principal served as a school's leader is one factor, there are numerous external variables that may explain student achievement levels. This study intended to address the area of a possible relationship between a principal's years in the school and student achievement. The study was also used to assess the longevity of a principal and the ESEA Waiver rating for 2012. Other factors may have contributed to the number of years a principal served in a school such as demographics, funding, or employment changes. This study was not intended to examine the other factors. By not including these factors (other than the three control variables in this study), it may limit the study by not providing a full set of predictors for student achievement and principal longevity. Participation in this study included schools identified as middle schools by the South Carolina Department of Education; therefore, replicating this study across different types of schools could produce different results.

Principals included in this study have a variety of experiences. Some have been in their position at the school for only one year and some have been in the position much longer. The study did not provide qualitative data that may have provided insight into specific steps and activities enacted by the principal in the school. Since the study did not take into consideration the types of programs, activities, or other supports the principal implemented to raise student achievement, the study results may be limited. Principals with more experience of experience in the school, in theory, there will be higher student achievement. The study examines if there is a relationship between the level of student achievement and longevity of the principal.

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The data used to complete this study is limited to only one administration of the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards subtests in reading and mathematics and one year of the poverty index. Replication of this study using multiple years of data may yield different results. South Carolina students in grades 3-8 are also assessed in the areas of science and social studies; while the *Elementary Secondary Education Act* Flexibility Waiver rating does take into account social studies and science, the value is substantially lower than math and reading. This study only included the areas required by the United States Department of Education. Using only one year of data for both the test scores on the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards and years of experience may have limited the results of the study.

While there were many benefits to using correlational research, there were other limitations as well. For example, according to Price (2006), using correlations permitted researchers to demonstrate the connection of variables; however, researchers must not be hasty in determining causal relationships. The researcher must carefully examine data sets and determine values of causal relationships. Price reminds researchers that simply using correlation does not imply a cause; it seeks to find the linear connection of the variables.

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CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

This study investigated the correlation between principal longevity and student achievement in South Carolina Middle Schools. The study also determined the correlation between principal longevity and the Elementary Secondary Education Act Compliance Index for South Carolina Middle Schools. Finally, the study found the correlation between each of these factors while controlling for principal gender, school enrollment, and poverty index levels. This chapter presents an analysis of the data collected from conducting the study.

Three research questions were posed:

1. Is there a relationship between principal longevity and student achievement on the 2012 reading and math subtests of the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards test?
2. Is there a relationship between principal longevity and middle school ESEA ratings on the 2012 South Carolina School Report Card?
3. Is there a relationship between principal longevity and student achievement on the 2012 reading and math subtests of the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards test and on the ESEA rating on the 2012 South Carolina School Report Card when controlling for principal gender, school enrollment, and poverty?

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In this chapter, the results of the analyses are presented. First, the results from the descriptive statistical analyses are presented. Then, the results from the inferential analyses performed to answer the research questions are described, and the chapter ends with a summary.

Descriptive Statistics

Complete data on years as a principal, gender of principal gender, school enrollment, ESEA composite scores, PASS reading and math test results (percentage meeting or exceeding expectations), and poverty index scores were available for 289 schools. Table 4.1 shows descriptive statistics for the study variables. Years as a principal ranged from 0 to 27 with a mean of 4.91 (*SD* = 4.22). School enrollments ranged from 97 to 1,460 with a mean of 609.45 (SD = 283.00). Most of the participants (53.6%) were males. The percentage of students meeting or exceeding expectations on the PASS reading test ranged from 23% to 100% with a mean of 69.66% (*SD* = 13.77%). For the PASS math test, the percentage meeting or exceeding expectations ranged from 27% to 100% with a mean of 68.36% (*SD* = 13.10%). For the ESEA composite index, values ranged from 22.00 to 100.00 with a mean of 68.36 (*SD* = 17.67). Finally, for the poverty index the values ranged from 14.18 to 99.50 with a mean of 74.30 (*SD* = 18.77). These values were used to create Table 4.1 in which shows the descriptive statistics of the data.

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Table 4.1

Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables (N = 289)

Variable	Min.	Max.	*Mean*	*SD*
Years as principal	.00	27.00	4.91	4.22
School enrollment	97.00	1,460.00	609.45	283.00
PASS reading subtest percentage meeting or exceeding expectations	23.00	100.00	69.66	13.77
PASS math subtest percentage meeting or exceeding expectations	27.00	100.00	68.36	13.10
ESEA composite	22.00	100.00	82.00	17.67
Poverty index	14.18	99.50	74.30	18.77
			n	%
Principal gender				
Female			134	46.4
Male			155	53.6

Inferential Statistics

According to Choudhury (2009), to best understand a Pearson Product Moment Correlation, one should use a range to determine the strength of the correlation. Relationships between two variables are often referred to as being strong, moderate, weak or none. To answer the research questions, the researcher determined if there was a correlation and then presented the power (strength) of the correlation. Table 4.2 was used to interpret the power of the correlation in this study.

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Table 4.2

The Values of r and Strength of Relationship

Value of (*r*)	Strength of Relationship
-1.0 to -.05 or 1.0 to 0.5	Strong
-0.5 to -0.3 or 0.3 to 0.5	Moderate
-0.3 to -0.1 or 0.1 to 0.3	Weak
-0.1 to 0.1	None or very weak

(Choudhury, 2009 p. 2)

Research Question 1

The first research question of this study was: Is there a relationship between principal longevity and student achievement on the 2012 reading and math subtests of the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards test? Table 4.3 shows the correlations among the study variables including the correlations between principal longevity and the two achievement measures from the PASS. The symbol for a correlation is *r*. The *r* value indicates the strength and direction of the relationship between two variables and has a possible range from -1.00, which indicates a perfect negative relationship, to +1.00, which indicates a perfect positive relationship (McMillan, 2004). Years as a principal was positively correlated with the percentage meeting or exceeding expectations on the PASS reading test, $r = .28$, $p < .001$. The *r* value indicates the "strength and direction of the relationship" (McMillan, 2004, p.134). The correlation of .28 indicated that at schools with higher levels of principal longevity, the percentage of students meeting or exceeding expectations on the PASS reading test was higher than those with a principal

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serving fewer years. A correlation of .28 suggests a weak relationship between the two variables (principal longevity and reading test scores). While the results indicate a statistically significant correlation, it is a weaker correlation.

Similarly, the correlation between years as a principal and the percentage of students meeting or exceeding expectations on the PASS math test was $r = .24$, $p < .001$. The correlation on the math test reveals a weaker correlation. Like the reading test, the math test correlation produces a positive correlation, however, it is a weak correlation according to Table 4.2. In both of the correlations regarding the scores on the tests, only about 25% of the variance is explained. Thus, it is important to note that other confounding factors produce the longevity of principals in this study. The correlation between principal longevity and student achievement results yields a finding that at schools with higher levels of principal longevity, a higher percentage of students met or exceeded expectations on the PASS reading test. In both cases, the weak correlation suggested only a low level of relationship. Therefore, the answer to the first research question of this study was that there was a positive relationship between principal longevity and student achievement on the 2012 reading and math subtests of the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards test. In the schools where there is a principal with longer longevity of the principal, the reading and math subtests scores are higher.

Research Question 2

The second research question was: Is there a relationship between principal longevity and middle school ESEA ratings on the 2012 South Carolina School Report Card? As shown in Table 4.3, the correlation between years as a principal and ESEA

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composite scores was $r = .25$, $p < .001$. The results yielded a weak positive correlation. While the two variables are related as one rises, the other will rise; the correlation only explains about 25% of the variance meaning that this is a weak correlation. Therefore, the study indicates that in those schools where principals have served longer, the ESEA score is higher. Therefore, the answer to the second research question of this study was that there was a positive relationship between principal longevity and middle school ESEA ratings on the 2012 South Carolina School Report Card. When there is longer principal longevity, the ESEA composite score is higher. It is important to note that there are numerous factors and variables used to determine the ESEA waiver index. This study intended to determine if there is a correlation between the two variables. The study reveals there is a correlation.

Table 4.3

Correlations Among Study Variables (N = 289)

Variable	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1. Years as principal	-				
2. PASS reading test percentage meeting or exceeding expectations	.28*	-			
3. PASS math test percentage meeting or exceeding expectations	.24*	.91*	-		
4. ESEA composite	.25*	.81*	.75*	-	
5. Poverty index	-.11	-.73*	-.81*	-.52*	-

*$p < .001$.

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Research Question 3

The third research question of this study was: Is there a relationship between principal longevity and student achievement on the 2012 reading and math subtests of the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards test and on the ESEA rating on the 2012 South Carolina School Report Card when controlling for principal gender, enrollment, and poverty? In order to answer this research question, three multiple regression analyses were performed. One analysis was performed for each of the two PASS test results and one for ESEA composite scores. In all three analyses, principal gender (coded as 0 = female and 1 = male), school enrollment, and poverty index scores were used as control variables.

The results from the regression analysis with PASS reading test percentage meeting or exceeding expectations as the dependent variable are shown in Table 4.4. In this table, the *B* coefficient is the unstandardized regression coefficient. The researcher used the unstandardized regression coefficient because the equations are different however the same variables were used. The value of B for each predictor is difficult to interpret because the magnitude of B depends on the scale of the predictor variables that differ from predictor to predictor. The SE_B column refers to the standard error for each B coefficient (an assessment of the precision of each B coefficient used to test the statistically significance of each predictor). The β coefficients are the standardized regression coefficients and the primary basis for interpretation of the effects of each predictor because they indicate the size of the relationship between the predictor and the criterion variable (achievement) on a standardized scale from -1.00 to +1.00 when controlling for all of the other variables in the model. The *t* column contains the

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observed t values for the test of the statistical significance of each β coefficient and the *p* value column indicates whether each predictor was statistically significant (when p is less than .05) or not (when p is greater than .05).

Overall, the regression model was statistically significant, R^2 = .68, adjusted R^2 = .67, $F(4, 284) = 147.81$, $p < .001$. The R^2 coefficient of .68 indicated that 68% of the variance in PASS reading test percentage meeting or exceeding expectations was explained. Poverty index scores were statistically significant in this model, β = -.82, $p <$ .001, indicating that at schools with higher levels of poverty have lower percentages of students meeting or exceeding expectations on the PASS reading test. Neither of the other control variables (principal gender and school enrollment) was statistically significant. Years as a principal was statistically significant in this model, β = .16, $p < .001$, indicating that at schools with higher levels of principal longevity have higher percentages of students meeting or exceeding expectations on the PASS reading test. Because β=(.16), it is marginally significant in this model. In other words, the years a principal is at the school does little to predict the student achievement performance but it does show regression. As the principal's years of experience increase, the student performance goes up as well.

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Table 4.4

Results from Regression Analysis with PASS Reading Test Percentage Meeting or Exceeding Expectations as the Dependent Variable (N = 289)

Variable	*B*	SE_B	β	*t*	*p*
Constant	111.01	2.89		38.44	< .001
Principal gender (male)	-.53	.89	-.02	-.60	.549
School enrollment	.00	.00	-.07	-1.86	.065
Poverty index	-.58	.03	-.82	-21.14	< .001
Years as a principal	.50	.11	.16	4.67	< .001

Notes. R^2 = .68, adjusted R^2 = .67, $F(4, 284) = 147.81$, $p < .001$.

Table 4.5 contains the results from the regression analysis with PASS math test percentage meeting or exceeding expectations as the dependent variable. The regression model was statistically significant, R^2 = .58, adjusted R^2 = .57, $F(4, 284) = 97.46$, $p <$ .001, with 57% of the variance in the percentage meeting or exceeding expectations on the PASS math test explained in the model. Again, poverty index values were predictive of PASS math test percentage meeting or exceeding expectations, β = -.76, $p < .001$. Higher values for the poverty index were found at schools with lower PASS math test meeting or exceeding expectations percentages. School enrollment was also statistically significant in this model, β = -.10, $p = .028$. The negative regression coefficient for school enrollment indicated that at larger schools there was a lower percentage of students meeting or exceeding expectations on the PASS math test. Principal gender was

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not statistically significant. Years as a principal was also statistically significant in this model, β = .21, $p < .001$. In this model, because β is .21 is weak but suggests that the principal longevity is a predictor of student achievement performance. Principals with greater longevity were found at schools with a higher percentage of students meeting or exceeding expectations on the PASS math test.

Table 4.5

Results from Regression Analysis with PASS Math Test Percentage Meeting or Exceeding Expectations as the Dependent Variable (N = 289)

Variable	*B*	SE_B	β	*t*	*p*
Constant	110.59	3.46		31.96	< .001
Principal gender (male)	-.18	1.07	-.01	-.17	.869
School enrollment	.00	.00	-.10	-2.21	.028
Poverty index	-.55	.03	-.76	-17.01	< .001
Years as a principal	.67	.13	.21	5.28	< .001

Notes. $R^2 = .58$, adjusted $R^2 = .57$, $F(4, 284) = 97.46$, $p < .001$.

The results from the final regression analysis are shown in Table 4.6. In this analysis, ESEA composite scores served as the dependent variable. The model was statistically significant, $R^2 = .31$, adjusted $R^2 = .30$, $F(4, 284) = 31.97$, $p < .001$, with 31% of the variance in ESEA composite scores explained in the model. Poverty index scores were statistically significant, β = -.49, $p < .001$, indicating that ESEA composite scores

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were lower when poverty index values were higher. Neither principal gender nor school enrollment (the other control variables) were statistically significant as predictors of ESEA composite scores. Years as a principal was statistically significant, β = .19, p < .001. This indicated that at schools with principals with greater longevity the ESEA composite scores tended to be higher. In this model though, β= .19, which suggests that principal longevity is not a strong predictor of the ESEA waiver compliance however it was statistically significant. Based on the results from the three regression analyses, it was concluded that principal longevity was positively related to the percentage of students meeting or exceeding expectations on the PASS reading and math test and ESEA composite scores even when controlling for poverty index scores.

Table 4.6

Results from Regression Analysis with ESEA Composites as the Dependent Variable (N = 289)

Variable	*B*	SE_B	β	*t*	*p*
Constant	111.57	5.68		19.65	< .001
Principal gender (male)	1.26	1.75	.04	.72	.471
School enrollment	.00	.00	.01	.13	.894
Poverty index	-.46	.05	-.49	-8.68	< .001
Years as a principal	.81	.21	.19	3.86	< .001

Notes. R^2 = .31, adjusted R^2 = .30, $F(4, 284) = 31.97$, p < .001.

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Summary of Findings

The results from the analyses performed to answer the three research questions of this study are presented in this chapter. These results were completed after running statistical analyses in SPSS.

Research Question 1:

Is there a relationship between principal longevity and student achievement on the 2012 reading and math subtests of the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards test? The results indicated that there was a positive relationship between principal longevity and student achievement on the 2012 reading and math subtests of the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards test. The correlation reveals that while there is a positive correlation (the two variables are related), it was a weak correlation. Only about 25% of the variance between the two variables is explained in this model. The weak correlation suggests that other variables may have been present that allowed the variance between the values. The results of the study indicate that in those schools with longer serving principals, more students scored Met and Exemplary on the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards test.

Research Question 2:

Is there a relationship between principal longevity and middle school ESEA ratings on the 2012 South Carolina School Report Card? The results showed that there was a positive relationship between principal longevity and middle school ESEA ratings on the 2012 South Carolina School Report Card. Again in this correlation, the two variables are related as determined by the positive correlation, however, as in question one, there is a

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weak correlation at the .25 level. This means that only 25% of the variance between the two variables is accounted for in this question. While the two variables are related, there is a weak association between the two. Specifically, at schools having principals with more longevity, ESEA ratings tended to be higher.

Research Question 3:

Is there a relationship between principal longevity and student achievement on the 2012 reading and math subtests of the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards test and on the ESEA rating on the 2012 South Carolina School Report Card when controlling for principal gender, school enrollment, and poverty? The results from the three regression analyses performed for this research question indicated that principal longevity was positively related to the percentage of students meeting or exceeding expectations on the PASS reading and math test and ESEA composite scores even when controlling for principal gender, school enrollment, and poverty index scores. That is, even when principal gender, school enrollment, and poverty levels were taken into account, schools having principals with more longevity tended to be those at which the percentage of students meeting or exceeding expectations on the PASS reading and math tests and ESEA composite scores were higher.

The research produced results that suggested a relationship between principal longevity and student achievement in each regression. Poverty was also a possible predictor identified in the study. The factors included in the study did not generate statistically significant results. While in each regression, there were weak results, each

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time conducted did produce results that indicate that principal longevity does impact student achievement.

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CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter, results of the study are discussed in the context of past literature, and recommendations are offered for both educational practice and future research. The recommendations are based on the results of statistical analysis and the review of the literature surrounding the topic of principal longevity. This chapter presents a summary of the research findings on determining the relationship between principal longevity and student achievement in South Carolina Middle Schools. Recommendations for further study and future work related to longevity is also included in this chapter.

Summary of Study

Understanding the role of the principal in impacting student achievement is the subject of many research studies. In this study, the researcher sought to examine if there was a relationship between the longevity of a principal and student achievement on the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards test. In addition to student achievement, the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* Flexibility Waiver compliance index was also used to determine statistical relationships existed. Finally, the researcher used gender of the principal, poverty index, and size of the schools to complete a regression to determine the power of the correlation. As explained in Chapter One and Two, schools continue to receive data reported by the South Carolina Department of Education to determine

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overall performance ratings. This study examined the longevity of the principal and its relationship to these school data quality indicators.

The study focused on three questions to investigate the relationships. These questions were:

1. Is there a relationship between principal longevity and student achievement on the 2012 reading and math subtests of the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards test?
2. Is there a relationship between principal longevity and middle school ESEA ratings on the 2012 South Carolina School Report Card?
3. Is there a relationship between principal longevity and student achievement on the 2012 reading and math subtests of the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards test and on the ESEA rating on the 2012 South Carolina School Report Card when controlling for principal gender, school enrollment, and poverty?

This study relied on the use of quantitative data to determine the relationships. The data were gathered by accessing the public information research portal available on the South Carolina Department of Education website at ed.sc.gov. Using the fact files which contain the data examined (test scores, principal years of experience, and poverty index), the data were extrapolated and placed into the SPSS program to complete the statistical analysis and tests described in Chapters Three and Four.

In order to determine the answers of the research questions, the researcher used statistical analysis to determine the power of the relationships in the data collected. For each question, the data was entered in the SPSS program and tests completed to

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determine the answers. After conducting the research in the SPSS program, the results were analyzed and interpreted to produce the results written in chapter four. The data suggested that in each question, there is a positive relationship between the variables.

Researcher's Interpretations

Research Question 1

What is the relationship between principal longevity and student achievement on the 2012 reading and math subtests of the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards test?

The first research question intended to examine available data to determine the relationship between principal longevity and the reading and math performance on the 2012 administration of the PASS test for middle schools in South Carolina. The mean years of experience is less than five years of experience in the current school. In schools where there is a longer serving principal, based on the data analysis, the higher the scores on both reading and math subtests. Therefore the study does suggest a positive correlation of principal longevity and student achievement. In this study, in schools with longer serving principals, student achievement is higher.

While the study revealed a positive correlation in both reading ($r = .28$, $p < .001$) and math ($r = .24$, $p < .001$) it also showed a weak relationship between the two variables. In the study, schools who have longer serving principals have higher test scores however, because the relationship was weak, the research suggests that more information may be needed to determine if there is a connection between the variables. Since the research provided a weak correlation, other factors are likely affecting the relationship of

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longevity and student achievement. The data does suggest that principals who serve in a school longer may impact the achievement levels of the students.

The study determined that there is a positive correlation affirming that there is a correlation between the longevity of a principal and student achievement. The schools in which the principal has been in place are those with higher numbers of students scoring met and exemplary on the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards test. As the central figure in determining the direction of the school and the focus of the academic program, the principal serves as a major figure in student achievement. In schools where the principal is newer, there often has been little time to make the necessary improvements or advancements toward achievement. This study suggests that longer serving principals work in schools in which student achievement scores are higher.

Research Question 2

What is the relationship between principal longevity and middle school ESEA ratings on the 2012 South Carolina School Report Card?

Research question two examined the effect of principal longevity and the new *Elementary Secondary Education Act* (ESEA) waiver ratings for South Carolina Middle Schools. The *Elementary Secondary Education Act* Flexibility waiver is new to schools in South Carolina. The data is based on student achievement scores on the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards test. The new rating system was put in place during the 2012-2013 school year. The ESEA waiver rating is system still relatively new to South Carolina Middle Schools. The calculations are based on formulas determined by the South Carolina Department of Education and authorized by the United States Department

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of Education. The data collected to determine the relationship between the ESEA waiver grade and principal longevity suggest a positive correlation. In the schools where there is a principal in place for longer periods of time, there is a positive correlation. The schools with longer serving principals have higher ESEA ratings, which suggests that principals are impacting the ESEA ratings.

While the research confirmed a relationship between ESEA compliance and principal longevity ($r = .25$, $p < .001$), it provided a weak correlation. The data suggests that this could be used as information for determining if principal longevity and ESEA waiver scores are related; however, there is not enough information to suggest that this is a significant relationship and that the two variables are in direct relationship. More research is needed to make determinations regarding the factors included in this question. The schools with higher ESEA ratings have longer serving principals. While the study produced only a weak correlation, there may be opportunities for additional study by examining other factors that may influence the ESEA waiver ratings.

Research Question 3

Is there a relationship between principal longevity and student achievement on the 2012 reading and math subtests of the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards test and on the ESEA rating on the 2012 South Carolina School Report Card when controlling for principal gender, school enrollment, and poverty?

In South Carolina the poverty index is used to make determinations on many areas such as subgroup identification, funding, and accountability measures. A variety of factors of principal longevity were discovered through a review of the literature. The

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factors examined in the study and used for the regression- included poverty index, gender of the principal, and school size. The poverty index provides insight into various types of schools and provides more information about the demographics of schools. This study examined whether there was a relationship between these variables. In those schools where a principal served longer, there can be achievement gains. When examining the schools, those who had a principal longer often saw higher achievement scores in the data used for the study. Even when controlling for principal gender, school enrollment, and poverty, schools tend to have higher percentages of students meeting the target requirements on PASS when there is a principal in place longer.

Each regression revealed weak connections. The principal longevity did however become statistically significant in each in terms of relating to student achievement. While the research provides the relationship and the power of the regression, there is not enough information to suggest that principal longevity is the chief indicator of student achievements. More research would need to be conducted to make determinations about the overall impact of principal longevity on student achievement. The study does however show that there is a relationship between the two variables.

Discussion of Research Questions/Findings

After completing the research, several key findings exist. Based on a complete review of the literature about organization effectiveness, principal leadership, and school performance, the researcher has determined that in the data examined, there is a positive relationship between principal longevity and student achievement. The findings of each question reveal that there is a positive correlation between the variables. The practices

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that principals immerse themselves in during their time in a school have an impact on student achievement (Cotton, 2003; Leithwood et al., 2004; Marzano et al. 2005).

Hammond, et. al (2007) explained in their study that successful leaders seek to understand problems and work toward solutions that will have positive impact on raising student achievement. The researchers suggested that sustaining leadership practices and working to achieve goals over time would result in positive change. Understanding how leaders over time can impact student achievement is important considering the many initiatives that suggest changing principals is an acceptable practice to raise student achievement.

While this study only sought to determine the relationship, it provides information for leaders to make their own determinations about the topic of principal longevity. While it is a weak correlation, there does exist a relationship between principal longevity and student achievement. This study did not seek to provide an answer about the significance or the impact of the principal on raising student achievement. The amount of variability in the study does suggest that other factors play a role in student achievement. While principal longevity is one of those, it only explains a portion of the student achievement.

Some things such as previous experiences were not taken into consideration in this study. Future studies may be done to determine if the principal had experience prior to working in the school. Having this information may allow researchers to make decisions about how those experiences affected the work of the principal. Principals must make student achievement the first priority. When student achievement drives the performance goals, schools can produce positive results (Hallingera & Heck, 2010).

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Using the performance data of students to make decisions in the school will lead to success over time.

The research conducted in this study can support the findings of other studies conducted on the topic of principal leadership and the use of data. Studies varied in their focus however, most reviewed studies determine there is a strong correlation between student achievement and the principal. This study does not suggest an acceptable length of time for principals to be in their position, however, it does suggest that in the most successful schools in South Carolina in 2012, the principal had been in the school longer.

While there are few studies available analyzing principal longevity and student achievement, many other studies exist on the correlation of leadership and student achievement. Successful leaders recognize the need to focus on a set of goals and work toward them. According to Fullan (2002), when high quality leadership exists, it will produce successful leaders, programs, and students. As leaders implement changes and strategies, over time, the outcomes will be positive; therefore, constant turn over/change in leadership in schools may negatively impact student achievement. Bruggink (2001) found that whenever there is a change in leadership, particularly the principal, there will be a disruption to the student achievement. This study adds to the research suggesting that consistent leadership in schools is positively correlated to student achievement in South Carolina.

Conclusions

Determining if there is a relationship between principal longevity and student achievement was the focus of this study. In all three-research questions, the data

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concluded that there is a positive relationship. These data suggest that there are opportunities for further research to better understand how the principal being in the school is impacting student achievement. The study showed that there is a relationship between student achievement on the PASS test in reading and math and principal longevity. The third question provides another avenue to determine connections by examining the relationship when controlling for poverty, gender, and school size. This research provided a basis for showing that a relationship does exist.

The South Carolina accountability systems require schools to meet benchmarks annually. This study determined that these benchmarks could be impacted directly by the principal. In 2012, the state launched a new system approved by the United States Department of Education. The *Elementary Secondary Education Act* Flexibility Waiver allows schools to earn partial credit toward federal benchmarks by showing improvement over time. The study suggests that if principals are in place longer, they may be able to impact improvement to meet these requirements. This study shows that there is a correlation between the time a principal is in the school and student achievement.

Recommendations for Further Study

When the *No Child Left Behind* Legislation was passed, many knew that it would be impossible for schools to meet the requirements of all students being proficient in reading and math. While states adopted accountability measures, these systems have been met with a variety of acceptance. The measures have had varying levels of success. When the United States Department of Education began accepting waivers from states to

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implement new accountability systems to address shortcomings of the *No Child Left Behind* legislation, a variety of research was used (Kane & Staiger, 2002; Linn & Haug, 2002; McEachin & Polikoff, 2012; Weiss & May, 2012). The work being done in states is showcasing a new approach to implementing accountability systems that are based on an array of requirements by the state and federal legislation. In South Carolina, there have been no major studies involving the components of the school accountability data included in arriving at the *Elementary Secondary Education Act* waiver ratings. In researching this topic, there were not very many studies specifically designed to determine if there is a relationship between student achievement and principal tenure in South Carolina. One of the provisions of federal and state legislation involving schools who are not progressing toward the accountability goals centers on changing leadership in the school. Policy makers should consider developing methods of determining effectiveness of principals. These criteria could be used before removing a principal as a method to increasing student achievement.

This study sought to determine if there is a relationship between principal time in the school and student achievement in South Carolina middle schools in 2012. The study could be replicated in other settings using data relative to the ESEA waiver similar to those included in the study. Therefore, the accountability system needs to focus on the work done in the area of student achievement, and thus should be designed in a way that encourages strong leadership to implement strategies to improve student achievement over time.

In their work, Nettles and Herrington (2007) explain several examples of how student achievement is linked to the practices of the principal, and thus further justifies

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the importance of principal practices and expectations for increasing student achievement. The 2004 National Study of Leadership in Middle Level Schools listed the principal as the most critical element in a highly successful school (Valentine, et. al, 2004). Ensuring a leader (principal) is in place with the chief duty of raising student achievement should be at the forefront of assignments when superintendents place principals in positions. Likewise, working with principals in the schools must recognize that student achievement is at the crux of successful schools.

The researcher provides the following recommendations for further study on the topic of principal longevity.

- The sample of this study only included middle schools in South Carolina. The study could be conducted again using all principals in the state or in other grade configurations.
- The sample used in this study only examined one year of data from the state of South Carolina School Report Card. Since multiple years of data will be available in future years, future studies should include multiple years of data. At the time of this study, there was only one year of data available for the ESEA Waiver portion of the data collected. The study could be replicated to examine the relationships over time or other such determinant.
- The intent of the study was only to determine if a relationship existed. Future studies should determine what the relationship between principal longevity and student achievement is and thereby determine what the strength of the relationship.

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- The study utilized principal gender, school enrollment, and poverty index scores provided by the South Carolina Department of Education as control variables. When examining the data for future studies, the researcher should consider using additional control variables such as location of the school, amount spent per pupil, or other items from the school report card.
- Future researchers should consider using principal race or years of experience in determining the relationship of the longevity and student achievement. Reviewing the literature will yield other studies that have been completed using indicators of principal performance and longevity.
- Future studies of this topic should consider a principal's previous experience.
- Additional research is needed to determine what the impact is on student achievement. Future studies should provide explanations for how the longevity impacts student achievement.
- Future studies may include examining the data included in this study or other data to determine the extent that the longevity actually had on student achievement.
- In examining the data, future studies could be conducted by regrouping the principals years at the school in bands. This may provide insight into performance levels of schools with principals at various points in their tenure. This study took the mean of all middle school principals in the State of South Carolina to determine the answers to the questions.

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- In analyzing the data prior to running the statistical tests, it was noted that there are some principals that have been in a position for a long period of time. Future researchers may consider examining the qualitative side of the research by examining how these individuals characterize their time in the position. Any qualitative research conducted may provide for specific reasons and ideas about the implications of the research. Using additional qualitative research may also provide best practice exemplars for other principals.
- Schools need to participate in an accountability system that acknowledges variables outside of the control of the school. Policy must be written so as to protect against non-school related factors such as poverty and amount spent per pupil (Clotfelter & Ladd, 1996).
- Accountability systems need to have strong characteristics that allow for solid connections of related data. Making determinations about the success of a school based on a test may not be the best determinant of the success of the school. States should consider examining other ways to determine the effectiveness of schools.
- Accountability systems implemented must examine the role of longevity as a component. In value added models, school principals cannot be judged as effective or ineffective in the first year. These models may not accurately reflect the work being done. This study does provide insight that longevity does impact student achievement. Future studies may be

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done to include more data related to the success of the accountability models.

In order to better understand the data and the results of this study, future studies could include a multitude of sources, data sets, and research approaches. This research may serve as the basis for future research to be conducted using the ESEA Waiver index and student achievement to provide further insight into the importance of the role of the principal. In order for principals to create effective and affective change on the school's culture and operation to enhance student achievement, it may take time. Understanding that changes to create a culture focused on student achievement and producing results in terms of student achievement can take some principals in some schools much less time than other principals in other schools. In order for policymakers and those responsible for hiring leadership in schools must know the importance of longevity and the possible implications of principal being in the position too long or not long enough. By understanding how middle schools perform on standardized tests and in the various accountability measures required by the sate and federal government, school districts can make a sundry of decisions about the impact of principal leadership on student achievement.

The Institute of Educational Leadership created the Task Force on the Principalship and in its report called *Leadership for Student Learning: Reinventing the Principalship* (2000), several recommendations and indicators were discovered. The report suggests that schools need leaders who are vested in student achievement outcomes, instructional leaders, take ownership of the school and involvement in the community, and work as visionaries to their craft. As school leaders develop their skills

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and work to enhance student achievement by placing a high value on performance, they will grow outcomes and over time strengthen the success of the school. Leaders who are vested in the success of the school, over time will produce more positive results with regard to student achievement. Principals remaining in their position for longer periods of time will positively impact student achievement and over time can produce stronger results.

In South Carolina the continued focus on educator quality is changing. School districts are facing new evaluation methods and requirements for accountability. School administrators will soon face a new accountability system in which a letter grade will be assigned. Principals will see increased pressure to improve student achievement in order to maintain positions and strengthen schools. The Elementary Secondary Education Act Waiver for South Carolina now calls for an evaluation system that requires value added measures to determine school success. Having a leader in place that works to improve student achievement will be essential in meeting these tough requirements. Increased turn over in school leadership may develop and present a challenge to the state in order to secure enough qualified candidates for principal positions. As the new system develops and is implemented, understanding the role of consistent leadership and principal longevity may prove beneficial to the state in order to fully understand the impact of the impending accountability system.

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APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

OFFICE OF RESEARCH COMPLIANCE

May 30, 2013

Mr. David McDonald
College of Education
Education Leadership & Policies
Wardlaw Columbia, SC 29280

Re: Pro00026035Study Title: The Relationship of Principal Longevity and Student Achievement in Middle Schools in South Carolina

Dear Mr. McDonald:

The Office of Research Compliance, an administrative office that supports the University of South Carolina Institutional Review Board (USC IRB), has completed an administrative review of the referenced study on behalf of the USC IRB, and has determined that the proposed activity is exempt from the Protection of Human Subjects Regulations (45 CFR 46.102). No further oversight by the IRB is required; however, the investigator should inform this office prior to making any substantive changes to the study, as this may alter the exempt status of the study.

If you have questions, please contact Arlene McWhorter at arlenem@sc.edu or (803) 777-7095.

Sincerely,

Lisa M. Johnson IRB Manager

cc: Lynn Harrill

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