

# An Examination of the Factors That Impact Elementary School Principal's Perceptions of Their Leadership Role

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AN EXAMINATION OF THE FACTORS THAT IMPACT ELEMENTARY  
SCHOOL PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR LEADERSHIP ROLE

by

KATHRYN M. KISH

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Honors in the Major Program  
in Elementary Education  
in the College of Education and Human Performance  
and in The Burnett Honors College  
at the University of Central Florida  
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## **ABSTRACT**

A growing body of research supports the idea that large-scale school reform efforts often fail to create sustained change within the public school sector. When implementing deep organizational change, both novice and veteran educators are challenged to learn new skills, reexamine their instructional practice and content knowledge, and re-shape their underlying beliefs and values about schools.

This qualitative study explored principals' perceptions of their leadership roles in the school system. Data collection was done through a series of three interviews with three elementary school principals in Central Florida. In addition to their perceptions, it also studied factors that may influence their perceptions, including revised curriculum standards, new teacher evaluation models, and state assessments mandates. The findings of this research considered the demographic, educational, and professional background of each participant as well as the school to which they are assigned. It also examined the principals' self-reported responsiveness to current educational reform mandates and their perceptions of areas of leadership strength and weakness with their teachers and staff at their school.

## **DEDICATION**

For all school principals who strive to make students the most successful they can be.

For my mentors, Taylar Wenzel, Sherron Roberts, Cyndi Walters, Marni Kay, and Mary Little,  
for helping me achieve my goals.

For my family and your constant support and never-ending belief in me.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## INTRODUCTION

In today's school systems, leadership and teacher roles have changed drastically. Over the past two decades, federal policy has aggressively pursued what is billed as a rigorous standards-based reform agenda (Lowenstein and Marx, 2012). When implementing deep organizational change, both novice and veteran educators are challenged to learn new skills, reexamine their instructional practice and content knowledge, and re-shape their underlying beliefs and values about schools. The ways in which principals frame school reform initiatives and broker knowledge for their teachers can also aid teachers in both collective and individual understanding while supporting teacher's application of reform concepts. By supporting both individual and collective support for teachers, principals can build and sustain networks of teacher learning community.

Over the past two decades, a continuous change of standards, as well as expectations on how to implement them, has evolved (Lowenstein and Marx, 2012). This national reform movement led to a renewed focus on instructional improvement and the leadership that fosters it. Designing and facilitating learning experiences for current and prospective leaders for such school environments necessitates innovative collaboration that is contextually-situated, personally relevant, and informed by authentic issues and experiences of leadership practice (Burke, Marx, and Lowenstein, 2012). How do school administrators perceive recent state mandates, specifically new curriculum standards, their district teacher evaluation model, and state assessment requirements? Are they able to effectively implement these new expectations in their daily routine at their schools? Are they able to communicate to their staff adequately?



My personal interest in the topic of educational reform began during my semester as an intern. I was placed at a state-mandated school [a school that receives multiple state visits from the Florida Department of Education as a result of a differentiated accountability program], which was rated as a “D” school. Based on my observations, the strain that the multiple state visits frequently changing their expectations on the administrators and teachers was obvious. I became interested in the idea for this research as a result of those observations and concerns.

## **RELEVANCE OF STUDY**

### Florida Standards

The Common Core Standards were introduced in the United States officially in 2009. They had been in the process of development for about a decade (National Governor's Association, 2011). "The development of Common Core State Standards is a success story of meaningful, state-led change to help all students succeed." (National Governor's Association, 2011). The end goals of these standards include college and career readiness, which address what students need to know to graduate from high school. Using backward design, skills are embedded into standards starting in kindergarten. Florida's Next Generation Sunshine State Standards then transformed into Florida Standards, branching off of Common Core Standards on February 18<sup>th</sup>, 2014 (Florida Department of Education, 2015).

All Florida students deserve to graduate high school with knowledge and skills they need to succeed in college, careers, and life. Over the last several years after implementing the Next Generation Sunshine Standards across all content areas, Florida has made strong academic gains. But, we know today's workforce requires our graduates to have stronger critical thinking, problem solving and communication skills than ever before. Higher standards that challenge and motivate our students are essential.

To address this need, leaders in education across Florida improved our academic content standards, creating new expectations for what students need to know and be able to do. The Florida Standards are designed to ensure that all students reach their greatest potential. During the 2013-2014 school year we received and incorporated feedback

from Florida educators, parents, as well as business and community leaders regarding the Florida Standards. On February 18, 2014, the Florida State Board of Education voted unanimously to adopt what is now known as the Florida Standards.

The Florida Standards reflect our foundational expectations of what all students should know and be able to do in each grade from kindergarten through 12th grade. During the 2014–2015 school year, all K–12 schools began implementing the Florida Standards and our schools are committed to providing teachers with the professional learning they to prepare for this transition.

Over the last three years, teachers have participated in professional learning sessions to inform ongoing planning to implement the standards. Local school districts continue to determine the textbooks and instructional materials that help their students learn best.

For the purpose of this thesis, Common Core State Curriculum Standards will be referred to as Florida Standards as the multi-case study participants serve in Florida.

#### State Assessment Mandates

With the Florida standards in place to help Florida students succeed, the Florida Standards Assessments (FSA) in English Language Arts (ELA), Mathematics, and end-of-course (EOC) subjects (Algebra 1, Algebra 2, and Geometry) will serve Florida students by measuring education gains and progress, instituted in the spring of 2015.

The new statewide science assessment will still be administered to students in grades 5 and 8, and FCAT 2.0 Grade 10 Reading Retake will be available for students with this requirement.

With these new assessments being the newest educational reform measure of those considered in this study, it will be interesting and timely to explore how these testing requirements impact principals' perceptions of their leadership role at their schools.

### Revised Teacher Evaluation System

State and district leaders have been working intensely in the state of Florida for the past few years to respond to legislation calling for revised teacher evaluation systems that incorporate multiple measures of student learning and teacher practice. Professional development has been regularly associated with the "results" of evaluation, instead of recognized as an integral part of the evaluation process itself. Thus, the power of evaluation to generate greater teaching effectiveness has been severely diminished (Coggshall, Rasmussen, Colton, Milton, Jacques, 2012). Whether through strengthened accountability or more formative support, the primary goal of this teacher evaluation revision work was reported to be the continuous improvement of teaching and learning (Coggshall, Rasmussen, Colton, Milton, Jacques, 2012). To meet this goal, teacher evaluation systems were redesigned and implemented with teacher learning and development at their core, rather than appended later as an afterthought.

### *Marzano's Teacher Evaluation Model*

Marzano's Teacher Evaluation Model is a system that fosters teacher learning. This differs from evaluation systems in the past that aim to measure teacher competence (Marzano, 2012). One can trace this activity to a variety of reports and initiatives that highlight two failings of past efforts. Teacher evaluation systems have not accurately measured teacher quality because they've failed to do a good job of discriminating

between effective and ineffective teachers. Also, teacher evaluation systems have not aided in developing highly skilled teacher workforce (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2011, Toch & Rothman, 2008, U.S. Department of Education, 2009, Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern, & Keeling, 2009).

Marzano (2012) stated that “although efforts to move quickly in designing and implementing more effective teacher evaluation systems are deserving, we need to acknowledge a crucial issue and that is measuring teachers and developing teachers are different purposes with different implications. An evaluation system designed primarily for measurement will look quite different from a system designed primarily for development.”

The Marzano system of evaluation for teachers is prevalent in public school systems in Central Florida. The three elementary principals’ I interviewed in this study either fully use the Marzano system for teacher evaluation or use elements from his ideology.

## **RESEARCH QUESTION**

In this study, I explored three elementary principals' roles within educational reform through interview methods. I sought to find answers to the essential research question that follows in order to give a different point of view for how the principals' implementing these regulations might feel towards new and shifting state mandates:

How do school administrators perceive recent state mandates, specifically 1) new curriculum standards, 2) their district teacher evaluation model, and 3) state assessment requirements, as factors that impact their leadership role at their schools?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

After reviewing many articles in regards to the educational reform, I organized my research based on principals' roles within state mandates of curriculum, assessment, and teacher evaluation. Principals' must surely know how to balance the pressure from the district that is put on them as well as lead so that their school runs smoothly. Each principal's role as an instructional leader also appears to have changed drastically within schools. They have a great deal on their plate and they need to be up to date on their own professional development in order to effectively support curriculum expectations, evaluate their teachers and their school, and understand assessment requirements for each grade level.

### Requirements to Become a Florida Principal

Becoming a principal has become more complex across the nation, however the requirements in Florida in regards to educational preparation require that candidates obtain at least a masters degree from a regionally accredited or approved institution. Their core curriculum includes a graduate degree major in educational administration, administration and supervision or educational leadership awarded by an approved institution, a graduate degree with a major in a subject other than educational administration, administration and supervision or educational leadership, and successful completion of a Department of Education approved modified Florida program in educational leadership offered by an acceptable institution, a graduate degree with a major in a subject other than educational administration, administration and supervision, or educational leadership awarded by an acceptable institution, and 30 semester hours of

graduate credit which includes credit in each of the courses in the Florida Educational Leadership Core Curriculum. The Florida Leadership Core Curriculum includes courses in instructional leadership, management of the learning environment, learning, assessment and accountability, decision-making strategies, human resource development, technology, ethical leadership, vision, community/stakeholder partnerships, and diversity. After this is all completed, they need the documentation as proof ((Bureau of Teaching Certification, 2011-2016).

Candidates for principalship must meet all of the above educational requirements, plus complete a Department of Education approved district school principal certification program, which includes professional development training and experience. There is also an examination that aspiring principals' must take called the Florida Educational Leadership Exam (FELE). All three subtests must be passed. These include instructional leadership, operational leadership, and school leadership. Once a principal candidate holds a valid Educational Leadership certificate, they must also have worked full-time in an educational leadership (assistant principal) position in a Florida public school under the supervision of a school principal or manager for at least one year prior to being assigned a principal position (Bureau of Teaching Certification, 2011-2016 ).

Leadership with a focus on increased student learning involves processes and behaviors by which individuals influence other members of the professional community to improve teaching practices with the aim of increased learning and achievement for every student (Leithwood, 2004). This perspective is inclusive of both formal (i.e. Principals, Assistant Principals, and Deans) and informal leaders (supervising teachers



and/or mentors) and is consistent with instructional (Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2009; Blasé & Blasé, 2004), distributed (Spillane, 2006), and constructivist (Lambert et al. 2002) theories of school leadership.

### The Role of the Principal in Florida Standards (or Curriculum Standards)

According to many states' educational systems, the new state mandates are in charge of how a classroom is run. The main question posed in today's educational systems among principals' is: "How does a principal balance his or her professional expertise with state-regulated mandates?" The United States is a complex social and political system, making the development of "standards" a contentious issue, and perhaps even a dangerous enterprise for those who need to engage with those standards (children, families, and professionals). While some educational standards are broad goals that serve to guide learning, others are narrow, reductive, and ultimately prescriptive (Flannery, 1998). Those who are socially invested in education are confronted with the daily realities of participating in the system(s) of education of which we are told are in need of (or in the process of) "reform."

Public schools and school systems, as they are presently constituted, are not administered in ways that enable school leaders to respond to the increasing demands they face under standards-based reform (Elmore, 2000). Public education is currently confronted by one of its most challenging and fundamental transitions: providing all students with the support and instruction to meet new college readiness standards. These new benchmarks for education, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) or Florida Standards in our state, require educational leaders to be intentional and systematic about implementation and will change the planning and design of instruction K-12. The Florida

Standards created a learning shift by preparing students to utilize higher order thinking skills, to communicate and reason their personal positions on real-life conflicts, and to develop the ability to interpret and apply data.

The Florida Standards provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn so teachers and parents know what they need to do to help them. The Standards are designed to be robust and relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that our young people need for success in college and careers. With American students fully prepared for the future, our communities will be best positioned to compete successfully in the global economy (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010).

The textbook-based instruction, still driving most public school classrooms, will no longer be an effective model for teaching these complex standards. Furthermore, the antiquated pencil and paper state assessment will be replaced in most states by a digital, performance-based test where the assessment will adapt to measure each student's particular skill set. Not only is the educational paradigm forced to transform with the implementation of the new standards, but also the assessment requirements for all public school students will tighten school accountability systems.

The local state-controlled assessment programs will no longer be in practice as a testing tool. Legislators and educators alike seek to level the playing field and to produce an educational system where standards align more with real-life circumstances and schools receive standardized testing data in a timely fashion to implement necessary instructional change. These reforms will not only cause the role of the teacher to evolve, but also place more demands on educational leaders to become abundantly resourceful on

both curriculum and effective instructional methods. Researchers assert that the increased emphasis on accountability has numerous implications for the role of educational leadership (Goldring & Schuermann, 2009). Principals' will have to decipher new state policies, understand their implications, and translate them into manageable school policies according to which their teachers can implement instructionally.

### Florida State Assessment Mandates

The State of Florida has, for some years, been committed to perfecting a workable system of accountability for the public schools. The Florida Statewide Assessment Program, begun in 1971, has been an important element in this accountability effort. The program was designed to assess students' academic strengths and weaknesses, particularly in the basic skills (Florida Department of Education, 2015). In 1971, the statewide objectives included the following: yearly establishment of statewide objectives, assessment of student achievement of these objectives, public reporting of results for the state, each district, and each school, testing, basic skills in reading, writing, and mathematics, and development of a cost-effectiveness plan (Florida Department of Education, 2015.)

The next big change was the implementation of the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). It was initiated in 1998 and went through many changes from then until 2014. The FCAT was designed to meet both the requirements of the Comprehensive Assessment Design and the rigorous content defined by the Sunshine State Standards. The FCAT measured the content specified within the strands, standards, and benchmarks of the Sunshine State Standards and did so in the context of real-world

applications. Initially, the FCAT was designed to assess reading, writing, and mathematics at four grade levels so that each subject was assessed at all levels of schooling: elementary, middle, and high. With legislative approval of Governor Bush's A+ Plan in 1999, the FCAT was expanded to include grades 3-10. In 2001, achievements for all grade levels were reported for the first time. The FCAT became the test required for high school graduation for the class of 2003.

In the 2014-2015 school year a new statewide assessment was implemented. The Florida Standards Assessment (FSA) is the most current assessment to reflect the new Florida Standards developed and approved by the Florida State Board of Education. In response to public concerns about these standards, the Florida Department of Education (FLDOE) in the Fall of 2013 opened three channels for the public to provide input to policy makers (Florida Department of Education, 2015).

First, three public meetings were held throughout the state at which attendees had the opportunity to communicate support for the standards as well as concerns about the standards. Second, a website was posted that presented information about the new standards, links to the proposed standards, transcripts of the public meetings, and other resources. A form was provided on the website for public input. Third, an email address was created for individuals to send their comments directly to the FLDOE. Based on the results of the public comment, in January of 2014, the Department recommended that changes be made to the standards adopted in July 2010. Both of the finalized *MAFS* and *LAFS* are to be fully implemented across the grades in the 2014-15 school year. (Florida Department of Education, (2015).

## The Role of the Principal in Teacher Evaluation

During the past few years, more than 30 states have enacted legislation to change the way teachers are evaluated (Grossman, 2011). The new laws in most states discontinued Professional Services Contracts and imposed more strict annual evaluations leading to annual contracts only; typically, multiple evaluations during the school year were only required for new teachers. They also require the use of multiple measures to determine a teacher's effectiveness and tie high-stakes decisions to the outcomes of teacher evaluations. Decisions related to tenure, compensation, and employment are among these high-stakes decisions (NGA Center for Best Practices, 2011).

Notwithstanding the growing number of states that have enacted new policies governing the evaluation of educators, little attention was paid to the training and support principals' needed to evaluate teachers using the instruments that states developed and/or adopted. This lack of attention to principals' need for professional development to evaluate teachers is alarming. Research studies confirm that principals' are relatively good at determining the effectiveness of teachers who are high performing and low performing; yet, principals' cannot differentiate teacher performance for the approximately 60% of teachers whose effectiveness is average or near average (NGA Center for Best Practices, 2011).

Many states have made progress in adopting policies that require teachers and principals' to be evaluated regularly, while other states have not yet acted to do so. States considering action are well advised to go about the work in a way that supports teachers and principals' in their practice. An urgent need exists to develop state policies that will ensure educators are evaluated in a meaningful way. However, new policies should

recognize that principals' must be trained and given time to ensure the policies' intention is realized. States that have already acted may need to examine the timelines tied to the implementation of new policies to ensure the process is as fair and as objective as possible (NGA Center for Best Practices, 2011).

### The Role of the Principal in Educational Reform

Leadership framework is predicated on the notion that effective leadership means more than simply knowing what to do: it's knowing when, how and why to do it. Effective leaders understand how to balance pushing for change while at the same time protecting aspects culture, values and norms worth preserving. They know which policies, practices, resources, and incentives to align and how to align them with organizational priorities. They also value people within the organization processes (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2009).

This has made countless changes on perspectives after the national education reform on school leaders. Principals' have to be the mentor and keep their school as normal and uniform from year to year to make their schools feel comfortable and confident.

### The Role of the Principal as an Instructional Leader

Over the past two decades, a growing body of international research suggests that instructional leadership from the principal is essential for the improvement of teaching and learning in schools. However, in many parts of the world, the practice of instructional leadership remains both poorly understood and generally outside the main job description of the principal. Thus, in many nations, the expectation for principals' to

act as instructional leaders represents a major change from traditional practice (Hallinger & Lee, 2014).

Two functions, framing the school's goals and communicating the school's goals, comprised the dimension, defining the school's mission. These functions concern the principal's role in working with staff to ensure that the school has a clear mission and that the mission is focused on academic progress of its students. While this dimension does not assume that the principal defines the school's mission alone, it does propose that the principal is responsible for ensuring that such a mission exists and is communicated widely to the school's stakeholders.

Managing the instructional program focuses on the role of the principal in 'managing the technical core' of the school. This dimension incorporates three leadership functions: supervising and evaluating instruction, coordinating the curriculum and monitoring student progress. Although these instructional leadership responsibilities must be shared with teachers and other school administrators, the framework assumes that coordination and control of the academic program of the school remains a key leadership responsibility of the principal.

Promoting a positive school-learning climate is broader in scope and intent than the second dimension, and overlaps with facets of transformational leadership frameworks (Hallinger, 2003; Leithwood et al., 2006). It includes several functions: protecting instructional time; promoting professional development; maintaining high visibility; providing incentives for teachers; and providing incentives for learning. Through enactment of these functions, successful principals' create an 'academic press'

and a culture that fosters and rewards continuous learning and improvement (Hallinger, Lee, 2014).



## **METHODOLOGY**

This study was a qualitative research phenomenology analyzing three elementary principals' perceived impact of how recent reform mandates, specifically curriculum standards, teacher evaluation models, and state testing requirements impact their role as an instructional leader in their schools.

### Principal Recruitment

Recruiting principals' was necessary in order for this study to be successful. The initial recruitment plan was to invite principals' to participate via email. The response rate from the 45 e-mails sent was zero. Follow-up convenience recruitment methods were used to identify three principals' who have served as a principal for at least one year in an urban elementary school setting.

### Principal Interviews

In order to conduct further research on the constant changing education system, the best way to gather up to date analyses of administrators on the impact that the educational reform has on them was to conduct questioning to a specified group of principals'. The goal of this was to put the participant's experience in context by asking him or her to tell as much as possible about him or herself in the light of the topic at the present time (Seidman, 2006). The interview was given orally starting with more basic questions including:

- Administrator's gender
- Administrator's school-based role (principal, assistant principal, dean, etc.)

- Administrator's race/ethnicity
  - Administrator's number of years as a school leader
  - Number of teachers in the school building
  - Student enrollment at the school building
1. Why did you become an educator?
  2. Tell me about your professional experience as an educator?
  3. Why did you decide to become a principal?
  4. How did you become the principal of your current school?
  5. How did you prepare to become a principal?
  6. What matters most to you as a principal?
  7. How does your experience with recent state mandates (specifically Florida Standards, teacher evaluation model, and state assessments) impact your vision and goals for the success of your school?
  8. How does your experience with recent state mandates (specifically Florida Standards, teacher evaluation model, and state assessments) impact your day-to-day routine at your school?
  9. Could you please define the skills that you think are necessary for principals' to have in order to effectively implement reform mandates?
  10. What is the most recent school reform initiative that you have implemented?  
Describe how you took actions to implement the reform?
  11. Have you had any experiences in your role as a principal that have been barriers to implementing past reform initiatives?
  12. If yes, please describe those experiences:

After I asked that set of questions, I proceeded to more in depth questions. The goal of was to concentrate on the concrete details of the participants' present lived experience in this topic area of study (Seidman, 2006). Questions included:

1. How do you balance all the mandates given to you while at the same time being an instructional leader?
2. Does the implementation of new state standards impact your ability to be an instructional leader? If so, how?
3. Does the implementation of your district's teacher evaluation model impact your ability to be an instructional leader? If so, how?
4. Does the implementation of state assessment requirements impact your ability to be an instructional leader? If so, how?
5. Are there any the variables specific to your school that impact your ability to be an instructional leader? If so, how?
6. How have you communicated your vision of the implementation of Florida Standards to your staff?
7. How are you building capacities at your school for Florida Standards? How does that affect your day-to-day role?

I asked each of the three principals' if it was permitted to record them as I conducted the interview and they all agreed. I tape recorded the interview as well as typed as much data as I could of their responses.

### Data Analysis

After the interview was complete, I listened to the recording and made a bulleted list to outline their responses in order to make transcribing their responses smoother and

easier to compile for data analysis. I proceeded to analyze and evaluate the responses through a qualitative analysis approach. The research included member-checks as appropriate to ensure the applicability of the data analysis deployed. I chose to compile this table to effectively display to readers how my in depth interview aligns to my research question as well as the elements in my background, relevance of study, and literature review.

Table 1: Data Analysis Of Research Question Element To Survey/Interview Items

<b>Research Question Element</b>	<b>Data Collected</b>
Impact of Florida Standards	Demographic Questions: #7, #8 Follow-Up Questions: #2, #6, #7
District teacher evaluation model	Demographic Questions: #7, #8 Follow-Up Questions: #3
State assessment requirements	Demographic Questions: #7, #8  Follow-Up Questions: #4
Impact on leadership role: Planning/Vision	Demographic Questions: #7, #9, #11  Follow-Up Questions: #1, #5
Impact on leadership role: Day-to-day Routine	Demographic Questions: #8, #9  Follow-Up Questions: #1, #7

## RESULTS

This study sought to answer the research question: How do school administrators perceive recent state mandates, specifically 1) new curriculum standards, 2) their district teacher evaluation model, and 3) state assessment requirements, as factors that impact their leadership role at their schools?

I compiled principal A, B, and C's responses in regards to their personal demographics, their school demographics, and their perceptions of the relationship of their principal role to Florida Standards, teacher evaluation model, and state assessments. I also analyzed the commonalities across the principals' responses as well as their unique or different perspectives.

### Demographics

After interviewing Principal A, B, and C, the demographics among them had a broad range, which suggests that responses from different backgrounds were obtained in this research.

Principal A is a Caucasian female who has been a principal for 23 years in the public school system in Central Florida with prior experience as an Assistant Principal and a Curriculum Resource Teacher (CRT). She taught in the classroom for seven years ranging from kindergarten to fifth grade. She went into education for her passion of teaching. She had gone into banking first, but she knew that was not for her and switched into the education field. After teaching for seven years, her administrators pushed her to go into administration as well. She has been at her current school as principal for 11 years

and was at her prior school as principal for ten years. She believes that being a CRT really helped her prepare for her role as a principal because she had to serve as a mentor for teachers. She is in her last year of being a principal, and will be retiring in January of 2016. She has been the principal of her current school since its opening, and it has been an “A-Rated” school since that time as well. Prior to that she was a principal of a high poverty school for ten years. Her current school has 870 students and 61 teachers.

Principal B is a Caucasian male who is in his second year as a principal in the public school system in Central Florida. He has prior experience as an Assistant Principal for eleven years. He taught in the classroom for ten years ranging from kindergarten to fifth grade. He had no intention of going into education; his father was a teacher and he did not want to enter the same field. He was originally a biology major and learned that he did not like it. After teaching for several years, his administrators also pushed him to go into administration as well. He has only stayed at different schools for five years at the most and has been moved around frequently. In his opinion, his schooling to get his masters degree in Educational Leadership best helped him prepare to become a principal. His current school has 630 students and is a “C-Rated” school. It is his first year as this school.

Principal C is a Caucasian female in her seventh year being an elementary school principal of a private school in Central Florida. She was in the public school system as a special education teacher for secondary students for 15 years. She then became a Curriculum Resource Teacher (CRT) for five years. She went into education for her love of working with children and watching them grow and progress. She decided to become a principal because she wanted to impact and interact with all of the students and wanted

to share her knowledge with other educators in order to help impact the education of all students in the learning environment. She did it within the private school system because she was in the public school system for a long time and felt like she needed a change from the limitations of the public school system. The school at which she is principal has 75 elementary students and 5 teachers on staff.

Table 2: Demographic Citations Among Principals'

Idea(s)	Participant	Quote
a-Why they went into the profession of education	Principal A	<p>a-“It was about passion and working with kids. You start as a child teaching others.”</p> <p>b-“City A is constantly growing. When I opened Elementary School A, the student enrollment was 1500. No elementary school should have more than 600-700 students.”</p>
b- Demographics of their school	Principal B	<p>a-“I had no intentions of going into education. My father was a teacher and I learned a lot of the disrespect that was being said towards teachers, like salaries. Once I got to college, education kind of drew me in.”</p> <p>b- “Since Elementary School B is the only elementary school in the entire town, it builds a strong community for students and parents with teachers and staff.”</p>

	Principal C	<p>a-“I always loved working with children and seeing them grow, especially within the field of exceptional education.”</p> <p>b-“Since we are tending to a slightly different population, it is hard to enforce change because sometimes the parents are more likely to oppose change than my staff.”</p>
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Florida Standards

Principal A believes in the new Florida Standards. She feels we have to teach students to be problem solvers and collaborators and she sees a plethora of that in the new standards. The barriers to effectively implementing the Florida Standards in her opinion are bureaucracy and being micromanaged. She teaches at a school in a high socioeconomic status (SES) community and is the highest achieving elementary school in the district. They were also just recognized as a National Blue Ribbon School, which means they rank high in their commitment to educational excellence and their ability to overcome outstanding odds to properly educate their students.. It frustrates Principal A, as a veteran principal, that she is treated the same way as a principal with less experience or of a school that needs more help.

Principal B believes in the new Florida Standards. He believes the ideology that accompanies the new standards produces more rigor. He also believes that the teacher evaluation model reflects the standards really well. At Principal B’s current elementary school, the arts are very involved in students learning and he is trying to change the STEM (Science, technology, engineering, and math) program that he is used to STEAM



(Science, technology, engineering, art, and math.) When interviewing Principal B, it turned into more of a discussion about his point of view on the standards. When we were conversing, he pointed out that he considers the Florida Standards as enablers for inquiry based learning.

Principal C believes in the new standards to a certain extent, but opposes them more. As a principal of a small school that is designed for gifted children, the standards don't always align with their curriculum, which is different than that of the public school systems. She uses the Florida Standards as a guide for her staff and students to make sure they are receiving a similar education to students in the public school system. When the educational reform was first initiated, Principal C found that the new Florida Standards were not working for the students of her school and had to adjust in order to fit her school, which can be frustrating to balance.

Table 3: Principals' Opinions of Florida Standards

<b>Idea(s)</b>	<b>Participant</b>	<b>Quotes</b>
Opinion of the New Florida Standards.	Principal A	“We are having students look at original documents and compare and contrast them, become analyzers and critical thinkers. How can that be bad?” in response to bad publicity about the educational reform.
	Principal B	“Inquiry based learning involves so much rigor. I walk into classrooms and see such innovating techniques from teachers and students learning by questioning”
	Principal C	“My school and I found that the new Florida

		Standards were showing less rigor for our students compared to their curriculum.”
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Marzano Teacher Evaluation Model

Principal A uses the Marzano Teacher Evaluation Model and she believes in and finds it helpful for herself and her teaching staff. Her entire district is on this teacher evaluation system. She believes that this evaluation model helps capture behaviors that make teachers highly effective (i.e. checking for understanding amongst all students with thumbs up, or white boards instead of just asking two students in the entire class and assuming all of the students understand). She also thinks the scales that accompany Marzano’s teacher evaluation system are important to track student’s abilities and knowing what they are doing (evidence for teachers and administration) in order to reflect what level of the scale they are on. There are a couple of things that she does not like about it and those include her being mandated to be in the classroom every three weeks. She thinks it has become quantity of evaluations when it should be the quality of what’s being said in evaluations.

Principal B uses the Marzano Teacher Evaluation Model. He believes Marzano provides great research based strategies and philosophies. He thinks these strategies are forming better teachers because it enhances their ability to be a facilitator and for students to be in charge of their learning (i.e. scales). Problem based learning supports Marzano’s Teacher Evaluation Model to enhance rigor and critical thinking.

Principal C uses her own adaptation of an evaluation system for teachers. Being in a private school (although a franchise), she has a little more flexibility, as everything does not need to be the same across the board like public school systems. She has each of her five teachers set up a professional development plan which is similar to Marzano in that she uses a professional development plan with her staff and makes at least three formal evaluations per teacher per school year.

Table 4: Principals’ Forms of Evaluating Teachers

Idea(s)	Participant	Quotes
Barriers of Marzano’s Teacher Evaluation System	Principal A	<p>“Marzano never meant for his ideas to turn into a teacher evaluation model. Some aspects of it are great, but it can also be improved to tend to each individual school and teacher.”</p> <p>“It has turned into being about quantity of observations opposed to quality observations.”</p>
Going into the classroom to observe teachers	Principal B	<p>“More times than not, I go into classrooms to see all of the cool things going on, especially STEM activities. I like to see what the students are doing via inquiry based learning and seeing the teachers being merely facilitators. Sometimes I tell my teachers that I wish I saw the lesson done backwards. Handing an experiment to students to learn instead of teachers talking at them at letting them loose is more beneficial and memorable</p>

Communicating evaluations with staff	Principal B	to the student.”
	Principal C	“Since I have five teachers that I manage, it makes it easier to meet with them more often, I meet with them on a weekly basis to have that communication with them and support them on their professional development plan.”

State Assessments

Principal A does not consider the new state assessments that accompany the new Florida Standards to be an interference of her abilities to be a successful principal. She has similar beliefs as many educators in the United States in that schools should not be dependent on standardized testing for curriculum. We should teach successfully to the standards, not to the test. If teachers are teaching in a fun and innovative way corresponding with the standards, then the state assessment should impose no barriers to show success in learning.

Principal B does not consider the new state assessments that accompany the new Florida Standards to be an interference of his abilities to be a successful principal. As previously stated, he thinks the new Florida Standards enable inquiry based learning and if that level of problem solving is present in learners, then students should perform successfully on the state assessment.

Principal C does not consider the new state assessments that accompany the new Florida Standards to impact her ability to be a successful principal. Her students do not take the same test (Florida State Assessment: FSA) as public schools do. Her students

are tested with the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, which is a norm-reference standardized test to test skills in vocabulary, word analysis, reading comprehension, listening, language, mathematics, and social studies, She uses the IOWA Assessment as a tool to compare results with other students of her private school franchise. Teachers' evaluations do not reflect student scores on the assessment.

Table 5: Principals' Outlooks on State Assessments Being Barriers to them as a Principal

Idea(s)	Participant	Quotes
Are state assessments barriers to you as a principal?	Principal A	“My teachers are what make me successful. They are on the front line, I make sure to tell them to teach effectively and be innovative.”
	Principal B	“If students are using the same problem-solving strategies on the assessments as in the classroom, the assessments should just be a reflection of that.”
	Principal C	“No. I have never taught to the test. I only use it as a guideline.”

### Commonalities

The commonalities between principals' A and B were more prevalent than not. Since Principal C is a principal of a private school, she had a number of more unique or different perspectives from the other two principals' interviewed. Both Principal A and B especially support the educational reform mandates included in the interview questions for this study, and I think Principal C would be more supportive if her school's students

were in the public school system. Since Principal C is in charge of a gifted population, it may be difficult to be totally aligned with the standards that are geared towards the general population in the public school system.

Table 6: Principals’ Support of the Educational Reform

Idea(s)	Participant	Quote
Support of the educational reform.	Principal A	“Life is too short to be negative in your career. I decided to embrace this reform and I truly believe it is changing children’s lives for the better.”
	Principal B	“As a principal, I need to be my staffs motivation to support this educational reform to let them see the pros.”
	Principal C	“It is hard to effectively communicate this reform to the parents and teachers, but once everyone is on the same page we are really successful.”

Unique or Different Perspectives

The main unique or different perspectives among the three principals’ that I noted were the diverse ways of incorporating “special areas” of curriculum. For example, Principal A has art education still in her school, while Principal B does not. Principal C offers Spanish to her students as well as Chinese and American Sign Language. Principal B is trying to integrate art into his school curriculum via STEM turning into STEAM, as previously stated.

Table 7: How Principals’ Integrate Elements to Support the Educational Reform

Idea(s)	Participant	Quote
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Incorporation of educational reform elements.	Principal A	“We have a very involved PTO which allows parent involvement and additional funding for extra things and curriculum nights”
	Principal B	“It is unfortunate that we have lost art funding, but I am trying to slowly incorporate it back into our curriculum with the use of core subjects, like math and science.”
	Principal C	“We introduce foreign language to include Chinese, Spanish and sign language starting at the infant age and up.”

Interviewing these three principals’ successfully answered my research question and also gave me additional information to take away from this experience. They gave me three varying points of view about this educational reform as well as some common ground in regards to teacher evaluation, support for the new standards, and not allowing standardized testing impact their ability to be an effective leader for their school. The following chapter takes the findings culled from the three interviews and attempts to synthesize and arrive at some meaningful conclusions in reflection to the topic at hand.

## CONCLUSIONS

This section analyzes the researchers response to interviewing the principals' and the relevance to the educational reform and the opportunities for future research. The purpose of this study was to examine my preexisting view that the recent educational reform puts a stress on instructional leaders. This research consisted of a qualitative research across three elementary principals'. The organization of this study was in response to my research question: How do school administrators perceive recent state mandates, specifically 1) new curriculum standards, 2) their district teacher evaluation model, and 3) state assessment requirements, as factors that impact their leadership role at their schools?

Research has suggested that principals' provide the scaffold between the conceptualization of new educational initiatives and their actual implementation. They are the ones responsible for placing the reform closest to the teachers because without support, reform cannot effect change alone (Rowan & Miller, 2007). Research on principal's perspectives remains scarce, but there continues to be a need to understand the role of principals' within large-scale school reform (Ogawa et al., 2003). Because this study examined the perceptions of educators involved in school based reform, the methods used in collecting and analyzing data were of qualitative design, (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Pelto & Pelto, 1978; Wolcott, 1994). I attempted to understand the factors that are presented to principals' that they must balance in order to be effective instructional leaders.



By completing a qualitative study, I was able to understand more of the factors that hinder principals' understanding of the educational reform. For example, when transcribing my interviews I realized that much information is not effectively communicated to principals' and may get lost in the translation as principals' attempt to communicate it to their staff. That is why principals' must serve as a buffer between county representatives and their teachers and as a positive role model while being the middle in this educational reform.

After conducting these interviews, varying data was reported from the three principals' interviewed. While all three principals' offered unique responses, they all had the same priority in mind, which was the success of their schools and their students. However, the way they conveyed these messages was slightly different. Some principals' described how they evaluate teachers and gave specific support and details to correlate with the educational reform and some did not. Some principals' gave more specific ideologies that are within their schools and some gave more broad responses.

#### Implications for Principal Preparation and Professional Development

After conducting this research and analyzing my participants' responses, implications arose for an individual to be prepared for educational leadership. The county that the principal is employed by provides professional development that supports all teachers and their individual understanding as how to deliver the Florida Standards instructionally. Principals', essentially, serve as the one key bridge between the standards as legislated and the standards as implemented into the school. The way in which principals' select or frame information from the Florida Standards for teachers will have implications for how the standards are incorporated into the school setting.

Examples of ways principals' incorporate these standards into their school include common planning time, coaching workshops, and participating in team meetings. Principal A attends weekly team meetings for each grade level and makes sure they incorporate standards in the learning goal scale of Marzano's Teacher Evaluation Model so that the students and teachers are involved and knowledgeable of the new standards in this educational reform. Principal B often informally observes the classrooms of his school in order to confirm that the inquiry-based nature of these current standards is being applied. Principal C has teachers create a professional development plan that must reflect the curriculum in order for teachers to be conscious of the curriculum to effectively teach their students. The broad range of how these three principals' incorporate these standards into their school setting shows that other principal's will have many divergent ideas.

As defined by research, "framing refers to interpreting a situation in a particular manner; it is a social construction of phenomenon; therefore, it is subjective and selective" (Lindahl, 2010, p. 243). Principals' are often responsible for implementing, or supporting the implementation process, of school reform initiatives. As part of that process, they read and absorb information about school reform. Principals' allocate importance to pieces of the reform that they deem as vital for their teachers. As principals' disseminate information to teachers, they highlight or focus on portions of the information that they see as pivotal for staff and contributing to a committed implementation process. A significant body of research suggests that teachers and principals' interpret, adapt, and even transform reforms as they put them into place (Cohen & Ball, 1990; Desimone, 2002; Tyack & Cuban, 1995; Weatherly & Lipsky,

1977). In fact, some researchers claim that teachers actually shape policy more than their practice is shaped by it (Coburn, 2001).

The main implication I found for leadership preparation is for novice principals'. While the veteran principal I interviewed with 23 years of experience was very calm and knowledgeable about all of the changes over the years in the educational system, I think novice principals' may be at a big disadvantage. I believe that more professional development needs to be put in place for newer principals', so they can attain a higher level of expertise so as to better serve with educators having more experience. When I transcribed the interview data, not much about professional development was discussed. They spoke more about their personal research and knowledge. I think that when this big change is happening, reform needs to be supported by professional development to effectively coach principals' to guide their school to success.

### Limitations

I quickly found out after the IRB process that the results were providing many limitations to my research methods. When I originally wanted to do a quantitative study with a convenience sample of about 20 principals', this had to change quickly when the responses from principals' were lacking. While I still used a convenience sample, it changed into a much smaller sample of only three principals', which resulted in a research design change from survey-based mixed method data collection to a case study approach of a qualitative research phenomenon. While these findings are not generalizable, I contend that the results I found offer insights into how elementary principals' in Florida may perceive reform and can be used in the future. I also learned a great deal about qualitative research methods in order to effectively gather data about

elementary school demographics, principal demographics, and the factors (i.e. Florida Standards, school population, teacher evaluation models, and state assessments) that affect elementary schools as a whole, which intrigued me from the beginning and started this whole research project.

### Future Research

This study opens many doors for future research and studies. When I originally began this journey to research principals' perspectives and the factors that impact the learning environment within the educational reform, I learned quickly that it was too broad of a study and I kept having to narrow it down more and more. I think a convenient way to expand this study would be to incorporate more principals' to get even more perspectives and explore different factors that may alter their perceptions. A more complex way to expand this study for future research would be to get a different population perspective (i.e. students and teachers). Also, the growth of the teacher evaluation model over time would be an interesting aspect of future research to consider. For example, what did the teacher evaluation model look like before Marzano? What are the differences in student achievement since the implementation of the Marzano Teacher Evaluation Model? Limitless possibilities for future research are embedded in this study. I am eager to learn more perceptions of the educational reform apart from only principals' as well as different programs used as a teacher evaluation model.

### Final Remarks

When the plan arose to study essentially how principals' feel about educational reform, I did not expect to gather the results that I did. I honestly expected more negative

feedback than what I collected. I am pleasantly surprised at the all of the positive statements being said about education and children. I think that while barriers certainly exist that pose difficulties for principals', they still have hope. At the end of the day, all educators are in this profession for one main reason and that is for the children and their success. It is great to know that there is still positivity in this career field and for the future of our education system. As Principal A said, "Life is too short to be negative about your career and life."

**APPENDIX: IRB OUTCOME LETTER**



University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board  
 Office of Research & Commercialization  
 12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501  
 Orlando, Florida 32826-3246  
 Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276  
[www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html](http://www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html)

**Approval of Exempt Human Research**

From: **UCF Institutional Review Board #1  
 FWA00000351, IRB00001138**

To: **Taylor B. Wenzel and Co-PI: Kathryn M. Kish**

Date: **October 20, 2015**

Dear Researcher:

On 10/20/2015, the IRB approved the following activity as human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review: Exempt Determination  
 Project Title: An Examination of the Factors that Impact Elementary School Principals' Perceptions of Their Leadership Role  
 Investigator: Taylor B Wenzel  
 IRB Number: SBE-15-11656  
 Funding Agency:  
 Grant Title:  
 Research ID: N/a

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the [Investigator Manual](#).

On behalf of Sophia Dziegielewski, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

Signature applied by Joanne Muratori on 10/20/2015 08:07:28 AM EDT

IRB Manager

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