

Administrators' Perceptions of the Impact of No Child Left Behind Compliance on High Poverty, Rural School Systems

by

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Abstract

Since the publication of a Nation at Risk in 1983, public schools have been through many waves of reform claiming that the enhancement of educational quality provided for all students in public schools was the major goal. The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), commonly called The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), was national legislation aimed at correcting the educational gap among children of poverty and color. NCLB continues the ESEA emphasis of holding all students to the same academic standards and expands the role of the federal government in public education. The NCLB Act was controversial in many circles, with some claiming that it did not address the goals it was created to correct (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003; Sunderman, Tracey, Kim, & Orfield, 2004).

“The Black Belt is still home to persistent poverty, poor employment, low incomes, low education, poor health, high infant mortality, and dependence (Wimberley & Morris, 1997, p. iii). The public school systems of the Black Belt region of Alabama are largely high poverty and majority minority. This study addresses the perceptions of central office and school site administrators in school systems of Alabama’s Black Belt region related to activities undertaken by the school systems as part of their NCLB quality personnel compliance efforts. Specifically, the researcher seeks to determine whether public school systems’ administrators perceived efforts to comply with NCLB highly qualified teacher and high quality professional development more a benefit to the participating school systems or a challenge to be addressed by the school systems.

The researcher developed No Child Left Behind Survey of Compliance Trends was used to gather data about recruitment and professional development from participating school systems. Survey data indicated areas of recruitment and staffing difficulty; efforts undertaken to recruit, retain, and provide professional development for teachers; and perceptions of the impact of NCLB compliance on school culture in these districts.

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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

Background of Study

When in 2002, the reauthorization of the 1995 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), known as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, was signed into law by President Bush, public school education in the United States changed at all levels. NCLB (P.L. 107-110) reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act replacing the Eisenhower Professional Development Program and the Class Size Reduction program with a single formula grant initiative supporting an array of activities to improve the elementary and secondary teaching force (ed.gov).

Teacher quality, professional development, and accountability became the focus of the federal government. “Designed to help all students meet high academic standards, the NCLB Act set an ambitious goal that all students will be proficient in reading and mathematics by 2014” (ed.gov). Like schools across the country, public schools in the high poverty, rural systems in Alabama’s Black Belt Region were faced with the responsibility of meeting the personnel, accountability, and professional development mandates of NCLB. This provided challenges and opportunities.

“The words ‘Black Belt’ have been used for over 100 years to describe the socioeconomically distressed, crescent-shaped region in the South from Maryland to Louisiana where Blacks make up a relatively high percentage of the local residents” (Calhoun, Reeder, & Bagi, 2000, p. 20). In Alabama, the counties of the Black Belt region are generally characterized by poverty, poorly funded education systems, and intense racial stratification (Adams, 2005).

Though there have been many improvements in the region, problems persist in the areas of unemployment, inadequate employment opportunities, transportation, education and other quality of life issues that commonly plague high poverty areas (Calhoun, Reeder, & Bagi, 2000).

As an administrator in a small, high poverty, high minority, rural system, where administrators commonly have more than one major responsibility, I had to grapple with making decisions and completing reports related to the compliance efforts for both the recruitment and retention of highly qualified personnel and for providing professional development that would aid teachers in developing and enhancing the skills and attitudes that would enable them to teach successfully in our high-needs classrooms. It became an emerging area of inquiry for this researcher whether or not the NCLB compliance experience of her employing system was the common experience among systems in the region.

As indicated by Holloway (2002), having qualified teachers for all classrooms is more “than simply matching qualified candidates with job openings; it is a matter of distribution of teachers who are qualified and willing to teach in high-needs schools, especially rural schools ... with high proportions of low-income and minority students” (p. 139). Efforts undertaken by school systems such as those in this study “must examine the complexities of teacher recruitment, retention, and professional development in order to build a comprehensive policy for ensuring high quality teaching in rural schools” (Holloway, 2002, p. 139).

NCLB includes a mandate that by July, 2006, all public schools employ only teachers who are highly qualified at every grade level and in every core academic area—English, reading, language arts, mathematics, science, history, civics and government, geography, economics, the arts, and foreign language (Alabama Department of Education, 2006). States are to develop plans addressing the hiring of highly qualified teachers with measurable objectives for both

school systems and schools requiring plans showing the annual increases in the percentage of teachers hired and of teachers receiving high-quality, professional development. Professional development activities should be regularly evaluated for their impact on teacher effectiveness and student achievement (ESEA Section 9102, 2000, as cited in Azordegan & Coble, 2004).

Statement of the Problem

Educating America's children is a government function that occurs in a sociopolitical matrix (Truscott & Truscott, 2005, p. 128). Because rural and urban schools often have poor local tax bases, they often depend on federal and state funds and are affected by external political and social forces that come with government funding. This situation results in complex challenges for such districts because the resources of government come bundled with values and agendas (Truscott & Truscott, 2005).

A unique challenge for the Black Belt school systems in this study was that schools that could not comply with NCLB mandates risked sanctions, especially those addressing funding. Refusing to try to comply with the mandates ensured the loss of their federal funding. In every one of these systems, programs and personnel were being supported largely by federal funds.

A primary recurring challenge has been recruiting teachers for classes of high need students. Prior to NCLB, the problem had been finding certified teachers. No Child Left Behind required teachers to have a bachelor's degree, full state certification, and proof that they knew each subject they taught (ed.gov). In order to fulfill the ESEA requirement to improve the education provided for populations that are the focus of the legislation, states were required to "measure the extent to which all students have highly qualified teachers, adopt goals and plans to ensure all teachers are highly qualified, and publicly report plans and progress in meeting teacher quality goals" (ed.gov). Nowhere in the mix of teacher quality requirements did teachers have to

prove that they could teach. Southeast Center Teacher Quality (SECTQ) research “revealed three primary findings about teacher quality:

- “Highly qualified” does not ensure high quality,
- Hard-to-Staff solutions are hard to find, and
- The same approaches will lead to the same results.” (SECTQ, 2004)

Now that NCLB required teachers in core academic classes to be highly qualified, the challenge had grown. Educating the youth in high poverty, impoverished areas results in systems having to take funds from entities that also pass along their values and expectations (Truscott & Truscott, 2005). The systems benefited by being able to offer additional programs and employ additional personnel with ESEA funding. The systems were challenged by factors of the funding regulations and the systems’ particular geographic and economic demographics which added complexity to their being able to meet all of the expectations of the funding agents.

Still, another challenge for the systems in this study was that school systems could not easily plan and conduct high quality professional development. NCLB mandates that systems provide high quality professional development so that “all teachers have access to and take advantage of activities that improve teaching practice and help students learn” (SECTQ, 2003). Additional requirements are that the professional development be job-embedded and ongoing. All professional development activities had to meet Alabama’s rigorous standards which ‘were adopted by the Alabama State Board of Education on June 13, 2002.’ These state standards, listed below, are embedded in the NCLB definition of professional development in Title IX, Section 9101 (34). Alabama’s Administrative Code 290-4-3-.01 requires that the standards be used as a guide in developing a local education agency’s (LEA) Professional Development Plan and implementing activities under that plan (ALSDE).

- Standard 1: Effective professional development organizes adults into learning communities whose goals are aligned with those of the school, the district, and the state.
- Standard 2: Effective professional development requires knowledgeable and skillful school and district leaders who actively participate in and guide continuous instructional improvement.
- Standard 3: Effective professional development requires resources.
- Standard 4: Effective professional development uses disaggregated student data to determine adult learning priorities, monitor progress, and help sustain continuous improvement.
- Standard 5: Effective professional development uses multiple sources of information to guide improvement and demonstrate its impact.
- Standard 6: Effective professional development prepares educators to apply research to decision making.
- Standard 7: Effective professional development uses learning strategies appropriate to the intended goal.
- Standard 8: Effective professional development applies knowledge about human learning and change.
- Standard 9: Effective professional development provides educators with the knowledge and skills to collaborate.
- Standard 10: Effective professional development prepares educators to understand and appreciate all students, create safe, orderly and supportive learning environments, and hold high expectations for their academic achievement.

Standard 11: Effective professional development deepens educators' content knowledge, provides them with research-based instructional strategies to assist students in meeting rigorous academic standards, and prepares them to use various types of classroom assessments appropriately.

Standard 12: Effective professional development provides educators with knowledge and skills to involve families and other stakeholders appropriately (ALSDE).

Meeting the requirements of the standards meant that systems cannot offer one-shot workshops and must provide quality professional development for instructional personnel using teacher and student needs data to drive the planning and evaluation of professional development effectiveness (Garet, et al., 2001).

A major challenge is that high poverty, high minority, rural school systems experience difficulties attracting highly qualified teachers for vacancies in core academic areas. Further, they experience difficulties implementing high quality professional development that should assist in retaining highly qualified teachers for their high needs classrooms once they have been recruited.

Purpose of the Study

The study seeks to determine the perceptions of school system administrators and school site administrators related to the No Child Left Behind compliance experience for high-poverty, rural school systems of Alabama's Black Belt Region. The research explores both how these systems benefited from or were challenged by compliance with No Child Left Behind Title II personnel quality and professional development mandates. Additionally, the study identifies best practices for recruiting, retaining and inducting highly qualified teachers to teach in high poverty, high minority, rural schools. Another aim of the study is to identify ways that these

systems can collaboratively encourage teachers who seek employment in the region to successfully continue teaching in the region using the proven professional learning community approaches to providing professional development. The areas are explored from the point of view of school administrators who are most directly charged with personnel recruitment and improvement.

For this study, the researcher used a survey, The No Child Left Behind Survey of Compliance Trends, to examine administrators' perceptions of the NCLB teacher quality and professional development compliance efforts of high poverty, rural school systems in the Black Belt region of Alabama. Superintendents, central office administrators and principals were asked to participate by completing both the Likert-type and open-ended items relating to the demographics of the person completing the instrument and the school system of employment; items relating to recruitment and retention activities; items relating to professional development; and an item relating to perceptions of NCLB's impact on school culture.

Significance of the Study

For rural, geographically isolated, small systems to meet the accountability requirements of both teacher supply and teacher capacity, systems must "examine the complexities of teacher recruitment, retention, and professional development" (Holloway, 2002, p. 139). Initially, it was the belief of the researcher that geography, poverty, limited resources, low performance of student populations, and low self-efficacy of personnel made meeting NCLB mandates for having a highly qualified teacher in every classroom difficult, if not impossible, in the system where employed.

The researcher sought the perceptions of other central office administrators with similar personnel related duties in systems with similar demographics to determine to what extent they

had similar experiences and to identify strategies that would facilitate successful NCLB mandate compliance in this region. This research is important for the school systems involved as it identifies additional areas for colleges and universities to consider as they establish partnerships and develop additional programs to train teachers for these systems; it should help systems as they develop learning communities to identify best practices for addressing instruction related challenges; and it should help these systems in the examination of organizational structures and procedures.

Findings from the study should help leaders from all of the systems as they work to develop overall regional capacity to meet mandates and enhance programmatic effectiveness. Although the letter of the law promotes the idea that ‘highly qualified’ teachers both know their subject matter and know how to teach it effectively, leaders in the U.S. Department of Education have chosen to emphasize content knowledge and give little attention to instructional practice (SECTQ, 2004).

“To recruit highly qualified teachers, rural districts will need to emphasize the benefits of rural life, adopt proactive recruitment strategies that target those wanting to live in rural areas, develop local talent, improve the hiring process, and offer incentives for working in the hardest-to-staff schools or subject areas” (GAO-03-631). The ideal highly qualified teacher for some systems is one who can teach a variety of mathematics and science secondary level classes, special education, a foreign language and whatever else is needed (Lemke, 1994, as cited in Harmon, 2001). Additionally, the shortage of applicants for vacancies in these systems is “much more complex than simply matching qualified candidates with job openings” (Holloway, 2002, p. 139). Findings from this study should enable personnel in these systems to effectively plan to address the situation of hiring qualified teachers, training them, and retaining them.

High quality professional development is crucial to the future of education. To be successful, staff development must focus on the strengths and needs of local schools, be specific to identified needs, and continue through ongoing follow-up support (Kent, 2004). These systems need to be able to identify best practices and collaboratively provide professional development that will better prepare the teachers already in the classrooms and others who are recruited to the classrooms for success in the classrooms of the Black Belt region schools.

Increasingly, the evidence base is pointing towards teacher collaboration, study groups and other reflective processes emphasizing the potential of learning communities to generate teacher quality and student growth for school improvement (Sparks, 2002). As small systems, working to form a regional community of learners may prove an advantageous move for improving the quality of professional development offerings (Hargreaves, 2003).

Research Questions

Four research questions guided this study:

1. What do administrators perceive to be barriers to NCLB compliance?
2. What do administrators perceive to be benefits of NCLB compliance?
3. In which core academic areas did the school systems experience greatest difficulty meeting the NCLB mandate to have highly qualified teachers?
4. What are best practices for the recruitment, retention, and improvement of teachers in rural areas as described by administrators?

Definition of Key Terms

Black Belt: The term is generally used demographically to refer to those counties in the South in which the Black population outnumbers the White population.

ESEA: Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

High minority: A high minority school system is one in which 50 percent or more of the students are non-White.

High needs schools: High needs schools are defined as those high poverty, high minority, or low performing schools

High poverty: A high poverty school system is one with 50 percent or more of its students eligible to receive free or reduced price meals.

High Quality Professional Development: The NCLB definition of high quality professional development addresses activities and opportunities intended to improve the quantity and quality of professional learning for instructional personnel (Southeast Center for Teaching Quality, 2003).

Highly Qualified: Under the law, “highly qualified” generally means that a teacher is certified and demonstrably proficient in his or her subject matter.

Induction: A process—a comprehensive, coherent, and sustained professional development process—that is organized by a school system to train, support and retain new teachers and seamlessly progresses them into a lifelong learning program (Wong, 2004, p. 42).

Mentoring: “Mentoring is a formal coaching relationship in which an experienced teacher gives guidance, support, and feedback to a new teacher” (Center for Teaching Quality as cited in Kaufmann, 2007, p. 1).

Mentors: Mentors serve as advisers and guides for new and beginning teachers. Synonyms for mentor include buddy, coach, master teacher, veteran teacher, experienced teacher, counselor, observer, trainer, role model, adviser, guide, senior sponsor and supporter (Center for Teaching Quality as cited in Kaufmann, 2007, p. 1).

NCLB: The No Child Left Behind Act; also referred to as NCLBA.

Recruitment: Efforts aimed at getting teachers when vacancies exist.

Retention: Keeping teachers who are hired.

Rural: A rural school system is located in areas with communities of 2,500 or fewer people.

Limitations of Study

Administrators from only ten of the fifteen Black Belt school systems participated in the study. Because administrators from other high poverty, rural school systems in other regions of the state did not participate, information related to the compliance experience for these systems will not be examined. Having every teacher ‘highly qualified’ by deadline was problematic for school systems serving poor, minority, and low achieving children in urban and rural areas (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003) however only systems in this largely rural area were included. As the Department of Education has extended the deadline for having all core academic teachers highly qualified, and the time for reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act had passed without its being reauthorized, the study will not provide answers to questions raised about what happens to teachers who are not highly qualified or what happens when systems continually cannot find highly qualified teachers for core academic areas.

Summary

The most recent reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, known as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, required all public school systems to hire highly qualified teachers and provide high quality professional development for teachers as part of efforts to ensure that all students receive quality education. This study of school systems in

Alabama's rural Black Belt region addresses administrators' perceptions of their school systems' efforts to comply with the NCLB teacher quality mandates.

This chapter provided an overview of the study including the purpose of the study, the problem, the research questions guiding the study, the methodology, the population, the definitions of specific terms, and the limitations of the study. Chapter two follows with a review of literature related to the areas of teacher quality, professional development, teacher recruitment and teacher retention as these areas impacted the high poverty, rural public school systems especially those of the Black Belt region of Alabama.

CHAPTER II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

All, regardless of race or class or economic status, are entitled to a fair chance and to the tools for developing their individual powers of mind and spirit to the utmost. This promise means that all children by virtue of their own efforts, competently guided, can hope to attain the mature and informed judgment needed to secure gainful employment, and to manage their own lives, thereby serving not only their own interests but also the progress of society itself. (A Nation At Risk, 1983, p. 9)

Introduction

This study is designed to assess the perceptions of central office administrators and school principals in high poverty, rural school systems as it relates to their school systems' efforts to comply with No Child Left Behind's (1) teacher quality mandate to have highly qualified teachers teaching every core academic subject, and (2) professional development mandate to provide high-quality, job embedded, ongoing, data-driven professional development for instructional personnel. Specifically, this study was undertaken to improve student academic achievement as a result of more successful teacher recruitment and retention and to ascertain administrators' perceptions of whether their work to meet NCLB compliance requirements was more a benefit to their school systems or a challenge faced by their school systems.

This review is organized into four major sections. The first section provides an overview of the NCLB legislation, specifically the two primary NCLB mandates that are the focus of the study—teacher quality and professional development—and the roles of the federal government, the state government, and the local school systems in school leadership as relate to personnel quality. The second section addresses teacher quality and its significance for children of rural high needs schools. The third section focuses on providing professional development in high poverty, rural school systems. The fourth section examines recruitment and retention issues specific to high poverty and rural school systems. Particular emphasis pertaining to these four areas is made related to Alabama’s Black Belt region. A brief summary completes the review.

Legislation

Lyndon Johnson was President in 1965 when the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was passed as part of his “‘War on Poverty’ which sought to compensate for educational deficits in the lives of the nation’s poor and minority children” (Bloomfield & Cooper, 2003, p. 1). ESEA continues to provide funding for the neediest students and schools (Ohio Education Association, 2007). According to DeBray-Pelot and McGuinn (2009), the original Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 was politically popular legislation as the federal government was giving states funding to equalize educational opportunity for poor and minority children. Those on Capitol Hill and in state capitols were able to spend money on education with hardly any stipulations and no true accountability for student performance. “Despite their political and philosophical differences then, during the 1965 to 1994 period, interest groups on both the left and right had a stake in preserving the old educational policy regime and in opposing expanded federal efforts to promote school reform” (DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009, p 20). It was not until the 1980s and 1990 that there was much change.

Since the early days of its passage to its latest reauthorization, ESEA has undergone several changes in focus. The 1965 ESEA set as its focus a larger federal role in equalizing funding of schools and implemented programs to improve the educational opportunities of poor children (Sunderman, 2005). “From 1965 to 1980, the reauthorizations of ESEA focused on whether Title I was to be considered truly targeted funding or whether it was cleverly disguised as general aid to education” (Ohio Education Association, 2007, p. 1). “A recession and fears of foreign economic competition in the 1970s and early 1980s led to concern about the quality of American schooling” (Fuhrman & Lazerson, 2005, p. xxvi). The years from 1980 to 1990 were a time of block grants and funding consolidations with little or no increases in funding under President Ronald Reagan. The National Commission on Excellence in Education publication, *A Nation at Risk* (1983), released during the term of President Ronald Reagan “unleashed a more than two-decades-long upsurge in attention to educational quality” (Fuhrman & Lazerson, p. xxvii).

With two presidents, Reagan and George H.W. Bush, who opposed too great a federal role in education, the primary response to the report was more at the state level than at the federal level (DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009). After the release of *A Nation At Risk*, attention to education moved to the national level as the connection was clearly made between the state of America’s schools and the nation’s productivity (Ohio Education Association, 2007). During the 1980s and 1990s, legislation at both the federal and state levels addressed standards-based reform and included curriculum standards and expanded state testing of student performance (Sunderman & Orfield, 2006).

President George H. W. Bush assembled the nation’s governors for an educational conference “in 1989 and advanced a proposal for voluntary national academic standards with his

America 2000 plan, but in the end no major changes to federal policy were made, and these efforts proved largely symbolic” (DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009, p 22).

The election of President Bill Clinton leading to the passage of the Goals 2000 and the Improving America’s Schools Act in 1993 is one example of the new approach to federal accountability for the use of ESEA funds. Goals 2000 required all states to set standards for student performance in reading and mathematics and “encouraged states to develop standards, testing, and accountability systems,” (DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009, p. 23). Leaders from both political parties and teacher organizations were not totally pleased by the recommendations and the Clinton administration weakened the impact of the legislation.

President George W. Bush’s No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act is the latest example of the change in the federal approach in education. In 2001, Congress passed President Bush’s No Child Left Behind Act with much support in a bipartisan effort to improve education in the United States, particularly for low-income and minority students (Sunderman, 2006).

NCLB is the most recent reauthorization of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the largest source of federal support for public K–12 education. NCLB moves the federal government from being primarily a source of funding—now about 9% of every public school dollar—to being a major factor in shaping the substance of K–12 instruction. (Bloomfield & Cooper, 2003)

This act does indeed represent a broader and stronger federal role in elementary and secondary education. The federal government is putting more pressure on states and local school districts to raise student achievement, especially as measured by test scores. It is also demanding that schools eliminate achievement gaps between different racial, ethnic, income, and disability groups of students. Pressure is also being brought to bear

on states and school districts to upgrade the qualifications of teachers and paraprofessionals (Jennings, 2002, p. 25).

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 redefined the role of the federal government (Cohen-Vogel, 2005). “The legislation sends the message that the federal government will be assuming a more forceful role in elementary and secondary education, one that makes unprecedented demands on states and local school districts to raise academic achievement and to take direct action to improve poorly performing schools” (Center on Education Policy, 2002, p. 1).

The ten titles within the NCLB Act range from Title I which addresses the education of disadvantaged youth to Title X which ensures education for homeless children. Of particular interest to this researcher are Title I, Aid for Disadvantaged Children, and Title II, Teacher Quality, Principal Quality and Instructional Technology.

Of the ten different Titles of the NCLB Act, two, Title I and Title II, could prove to be both promise and problem for systems in the Black Belt. “The Title I program began in 1965 as part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and was intended to ensure that all children have the opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach proficiency on challenging state standards and assessments” (Stullich, Eisner, McCrary, & Roney, 2006). Title I, Part A funds were primarily allocated to high poverty school systems with greatest needs to provide staff, professional development, extended-time programs, and other strategies to increase academic achievement for students who historically had not succeeded in public schools (Stullich, Eisner, McCrary, & Roney, 2006).

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 reauthorized Title I with noticeable changes. Among the changes are the following:

- NCLB strengthened the assessment and accountability provisions of the law, requiring that states annually test all students in grades 3–8 and once in grades 10–12 on assessments that are aligned with challenging state standards.
- States had to set targets for school and school system performance that lead to all students achieving proficiency on state reading and mathematics assessments by the 2013–2014 school year.
- Schools and school systems not making adequate yearly progress (AYP) towards the proficiency goals were identified as needing improvement and were subject to increasing levels of intervention to improve student performance and possibly have to provide additional resource options for their students.
- States were required to establish definitions for “highly qualified” teachers and require that all teachers of core academic subjects be highly qualified. (ed.gov)

Title I had brought Average Yearly Progress (AYP) among educational acronyms, disaggregated data, and improvement among topics for discussion.

Title II contained funding for professional development specifically for teacher and principal training. This Title was designed to provide special help for ‘high need’ school districts; and schools that have been identified as needing improvement, having the lowest proportion of ‘highly qualified’ teachers (ed.gov). “Title II funding is distributed to states and school districts based on a formula that considers student population and poverty.... In school districts, the money is spent primarily on professional development, credentialing teachers, and reducing class size” (Rotherman, 2008, p. 2). Among NCLB’s many provisions and requirements, those pertaining to teacher preparation, teacher recruitment, and teacher retention

were possibly the most challenging and far-reaching in terms of real state policy change (Azordegan & Coble, 2004).

The No Child Left Behind Act has four major areas of focus. They are

- stronger accountability for results;
- more freedom for states and communities;
- use of scientific research-based, proven education methods; and
- more choice for parents (ed.gov).

President Bush pushed NCLB as the national extension of Texas initiated efforts undertaken while he was governor in an effort to show his continuing “deep belief in our public schools and their mission to build the mind and character of every child, from every background, in every part of America” (ed.gov, 2006). “The belief that schools and schooling in general should be left to the states with minimal federal involvement has been replaced with a new, more complicated governance norm wherein federal, state, and local authorities share control of education” (Cohen-Vogel, 2005, p 19).

“The U.S. Constitution makes no mention of education, and schooling has always been primarily left to state and local control” (Hess & Petrelli, 2006, p. 8). “While education was considered a public good and a national interest, responsibility for the delivery of schooling was placed in the hands of the states” (Corcoran & Goertz, 2005, p. 25). As noted by Fuhrman & Lazerson (2005) in the following

Constitutional authority for education resides in the states, a ‘reserved’ power arising from the Tenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. States in turn, decide how much authority to retain, and how much power to give to local education agencies (LEAs), schools, and parents. The federal government is not responsible for the preparation,

hiring, and work life of teachers; these responsibilities rest with states and localities. The extent of this delegation varies widely across the states, reflecting different political histories, traditions, and political cultures, but for the most part, until the 1960s both responsibility for and control of education rested firmly in the hands of local communities through their elected school boards and school administrators. State and federal governments had limited involvement in elementary and secondary education (Corcoran & Goertz, 2005, p. 31).

“The United States has 50 different state systems of education that vary enormously in size, expertise, capacity, beliefs, and traditions of state-local relationships” (Sunderman & Kim, 2004, p. 5). While states have played a central role in developing policies for teaching, curriculum, graduation requirements, attendance, testing, and other areas regulating and standardizing public education, state departments of education have remained relatively small and weak (Sunderman & Orfield, 2006).

State departments of education had “performed a limited range of functions administering some federal grant programs, distributing funds, and collecting statistics” (Sunderman & Orfield, 2006, p. 3) until the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was passed in 1965. ESEA made the federal government and the state departments of education more significant players in public education.

“Since the *Brown v. Board of Education* decisions, it has been clear that there is a national interest in education” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006, p3). “From the inception of ESEA, there were concerns that schools were inadequately educating disadvantaged students and were not being held accountable for their effectiveness” (Hess & Petrelli, 2006, p. 10). “Americans were promised that as a result of the targets, incentives, and punishments of NCLB

we would have higher-quality, more equitable, and more accountable public schools” (Wood, 2004, p. xi).

Unfortunately, that promise remains unfilled as indicated by research conducted by the Southeast Center for Teaching Quality (SECTQ) in Alabama and three other southeastern states in 2003–2004 (Emerick, Hirsch & Berry, 2004). The reality is that some children are still not yet reaping the benefits of the promise of a higher quality education. The SECTQ study revealed, that one of the central goals of NCLB, ensuring that poor students and students of color have equal access to effective teachers as their peers, remains largely out of reach for many schools. A lack of resources and technical know-how severely limits the capacity of states and districts to create new and innovative strategies in order to comply with the law and provide their most at-risk students with high quality teachers. (SECTQ, 2004, p. 19)

Implementing the NCLB teacher quality provisions involves different levels of activities for the state, local school systems, and schools (Sunderman, 2005). The law is premised on the notion that local education politics is ineffective and that the Federal government must apply “strong, external pressure on school systems, focused on student achievement” in order to improve schools (Hess & Petrilli, 2006, p. 23). NCLB provided the broad requirements and left implementation specifics to the judgment of the national Department of Education and the state education agencies (p. 30).

Local boards of education have primary responsibility for ensuring that the schools are governed by the people they serve. Local school boards are to protect the interests of their populace.

While this has certainly occurred in many cases, we have also learned that local control by lay boards of education does not always translate into schools that are equitable, responsive, or reflective of the best knowledge available about how to educate children. Often it has meant that the rights of minorities are unprotected and educational decisions are ill-informed (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009, p. 53).

The states still have the constitutional responsibility for education, but in effect, most major decisions are made at the local level. What matters the most is what happens in schools and classrooms.

As a local school system administrator responsible for supervision of both instruction and professional development, the researcher observes that resources are made available and federal funds are used to make purchases or contract services that would not be possible without the funding. Additionally, she noted the increases in student performance in reading and mathematics in schools where oversized classes had hindered teacher and student performance prior to our district's use of class size reduction funds. It was observed by the researcher also that purchases, contracts, class size reductions and other actions do little to enhance student performance more than does providing competent, caring, community-minded teachers to teach students.

A major challenge of the system's receiving federal funding has been having to devote so much attention and funding to making certain that required testing activities are conducted for both students and personnel. A primary disadvantage has been having less time to attend to cultural and historical lessons in order to have the required instructional time for reading, mathematics, and science. Time concessions sometimes prevented teachers from extending

lessons beyond what was required of the “tested” curriculum as extra time had to be devoted to test preparation and skills instruction (Sunderman, Tracey, Kim & Orfield, 2004).

Impacting students, parents, teachers, principals, superintendents, school boards, chief state school officers, governors, higher education personnel, and community leaders in so many ways, No Child Left Behind has been the source of and topic of considerable controversy and debate. The law has generated “much discussion from practitioners and policymakers from both sides of the political aisle and increasingly, the general public” (SECTQ, 2004, p. 3)

Having poor educational opportunities for citizens is not a way to improve the quality of life in an area, so the promise of leaving no additional children behind and giving parents other choices for their children were on target. However, the four pillars and the promise for improving education for all would be of little true significance if students did not all have competent teachers.

The sanction of possibly losing funding for not meeting the provisions of NCLB would loom imminent to the educational programs already in place in systems without access to highly qualified teachers for their high-needs schools. The law’s narrow emphasis on just content knowledge has driven states to lower standards for teachers (Emerick, Hirsch, & Berry, 2004) resulting in what Ansell and McCabe (2003) call “the teacher gap”. “Students in high poverty, high minority, and low performing schools are less likely than other pupils to be taught by teachers trained in their subjects and few states and districts have designed specific policy strategies to close the gap” (Ansell & McCabe, 2003, p. 1).

The law touts choices for parents as a pillar. In areas studied, for various reasons, any true public school educational choices for parents were difficult to identify. Linda Darling-Hammond (2004) writes,

While the choice option is a useful idea in theory, such alternatives are likely to reap little overall improvement in the opportunities for most students in poor rural or inner city, because—in addition to the fact that this option for some comes at the expense of school funding for their peers—there are frequently no ‘non-failing’ public schools with open seats available to transfer to nearby. (p. 14)

Life in an area of low income, high unemployment, and few quality of life opportunities was still a reality in Alabama’s Black Belt region.

A basic pillar of NCLB is that “all schools would be held to the same high standards and be accountable for the performance of all of their students. In meeting these goals, little consideration was given to differences in the resources between schools or to the type of students they served” (Sunderman, 2006 p. 11). Virtually every effort to improve the quality of education since the publication of *A Nation At Risk* in 1983 has focused on overcoming deficits in student knowledge or in reshaping the structure and organization of schooling. These reforms—ranging from encouraging more students to take higher level, harder courses to establishing charter and voucher schools, from testing and holding schools accountable to lowering class size, and from raising student self esteem to creating schools within schools—all have largely left the classroom untouched (Sparks & Hirsh, 2000). “Improving student achievement boils down to the teacher” (Wong, 2004, p. 41).

Teacher Quality

The No Child Left Behind Act requires all public schools to hire highly qualified teachers in all core academic areas. For teachers, being highly qualified “means that they have state certification, hold a bachelor’s degree, and have demonstrated subject area competency” (ed.gov). The core academic areas are English, reading, language arts, mathematics, science,

arts, foreign language, civics and government, economics, history, and geography (ed.gov). In addition to hiring teachers who meet the requirements of the law, high needs school systems need teachers who “believe that all of their students can succeed rather than that failure is inevitable for some.... They help students make connections between their local, national, racial, cultural, and global identities” (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 25).

The nation’s schools need to have the best teachers possible in every classroom if we are to maximize educational opportunities for all students (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Sanders & Rivers, 1996) as “students taught by unqualified teachers are punished for their lack of academic achievement”(Lewis, 1998, p. 181). The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA) has as one of its most important educational promises that “all students will have a highly qualified teacher” (Education Trust, 2003, p. 1).

A growing body of evidence confirms that quality teaching is the single most influential determinant of student academic success (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Education Trust, 2003; Ingersoll & Curran, 2004). The National Commission on Excellence in Education’s issuance of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 highlighted a variety of educational challenges. The Commission report outlined recommendations for change in five areas:

- Curriculum content,
- Standards and expectations of students,
- Time devoted to education,
- Teacher quality, and
- Educational leadership and the financial support of education. (U.S. Department of Education, 2008)

Even then, the issue was raised that all teachers did not have the knowledge, skills, and training they needed to teach all of the children effectively.

Concern with the quality and qualifications of teachers is neither unique nor surprising. Elementary and secondary schooling are mandatory in the U.S., and it is into the custody of teachers and teaching that children are legally placed for a significant portion of their lives. The quality of teachers and teaching is undoubtedly one of the most important factors shaping the learning and growth of students (Ingersoll, 2004, p.5).

The quality of elementary and secondary school teachers is increasingly recognized as the critical element in improving the quality of the basic education received by many Americans (Berry, Hoke, & Hirsch, 2004; Sunderman & Kim, 2004; U.S. Department of Education, 2004). In the competition for educational investment, the evidence points to the centrality of teacher quality to educational improvement (Berry et al., 2006). “The impact of a highly qualified caring teacher in every classroom has become the focal point of the continuing evolution and implementation of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act” (Education Alliance, 2006, p. 1).

There is not just one definition of teacher quality or effectiveness. The federal No Child Left Behind Act defines a highly qualified teacher “as one who (1) has at least a bachelor’s degree, (2) has full state licensure or certification, and (3) demonstrates competence in each subject he or she teaches” (Azordegan & Coble, 2004, p. 1). However, every state has the responsibility to develop its own definition for “highly qualified teacher” so long as the definition honored the core set by the law—a bachelor’s degree and proficiency in the area taught. NCLB requires states and districts to annually collect and report highly qualified teacher data (SECTQ, 2004). Each state determines what tests prospective teachers must take and sets minimum passing scores. Alabama is among the states which use their own testing service for

certification purposes requiring both the Alabama Prospective Teacher Test and the Praxis (ALSDE).

The requirement to have a highly qualified teacher in every classroom is many times hard to meet. However, following the directive to ensure that minority and low-income students are served to the same extent as other students by equally qualified and experienced teachers seemed often a non-entity in systems with demographics such as these in the study. All are largely high minority (ALSDE). All are located in the high-poverty Black Belt region of Alabama. Having successfully met many past challenges related to demographic, social, and policy changes, teachers and administrators in the rural schools beyond urban and suburban borders were facing perhaps the greatest challenge of all—and there was a deadline for meeting it” (Osterholm, Horn, & Johnson, 2006, p.1).

Policymakers in these high needs school systems, seeking to address teacher quality, face many serious challenges. Among these challenges are the lack of consensus on what makes teacher quality, the vast size and decentralized organization of K–12 education, and rural specific problems related to teacher supply and demand.

“Teacher expertise is one of the most important variables affecting student achievement” (Sparks, 2002, p. 14). Numerous definitions of teacher effectiveness, teacher expertise and quality teaching can be found. The strongest guarantee of teacher effectiveness is a combination of verbal ability, knowledge in the subjects taught, academic ability, professional knowledge and experience, enthusiasm, flexibility, perseverance, concern for children, and having available a knowledge of many specific teaching practices (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003). However, having a positive impact on student achievement is arguably the most important quality of quality teaching.

Alabama holds quality teaching as the “engine that drives increased student achievement,” with the first recommendation of the Governor’s Commission on Quality Teaching being the immediate adoption and implementation of the Alabama Quality Teaching Standards (Governor’s Commission on Quality Teaching, 2006, p. 7). Those standards (see Appendix 3) served as the foundation for the work of the GCQT. Adoption of the Alabama Quality Teaching Standards (AQTS) made the reconsideration of the Alabama Professional Education Personnel Evaluation (PEPE) program a necessity. EDUCATEAlabama is the formative teacher evaluation program being used beginning in school year 2009–2010 (ALSDE).

Officials in Alabama addressed teacher and leader quality issues with improved and enhanced standards for both. In Alabama, the Governor’s Commission on Quality Teaching (GCQT) began its work in January, 2006, accepting its charge from the governor to

- examine, recommend, and work to implement laws, policies, and practices affecting teachers and teaching effectiveness to ensure student success in Alabama’s public schools; and
- promote the aggressive recruitment, preparation, support, retention, and growth of quality teachers in order to raise student achievement in Alabama. (Governor’s Commission on Quality Teaching: Overview 2006).

The GCQT identified four major challenges that it would have to address as the state worked to achieve its Vision for Alabama Education:

- Increased student achievement;
- Teacher effectiveness;
- Teacher retention; and
- Teacher distribution (Governor’s Commission on Quality Teaching: Overview 2006).

As state definitions for highly qualified teachers vary, states accept people into teaching from a variety of alternative certification routes (SECTQ, 2006). In some cases, new teachers come into teaching positions after serving as paraprofessionals or substitute teachers. They are usually familiar with classroom environment and are better prepared to actually teach in rural, low performing, high-poverty classrooms than new teachers coming from other routes. Many times, new teachers come to the classrooms in this region with little or no classroom experience. The results are not always positive (Cooper & Alvarado, 2006). “Although ensuring that our nation’s classrooms are all staffed with qualified teachers is a perennially important issue in our schools, it is also among the least understood” (Ingersoll, 2003, p. 5) especially as this relates to rural, high needs classrooms.

Over the past decade, dozens of studies, commissions, and national reports have bemoaned the qualifications and quality of our teachers. As a result, reformers in many states have pushed tougher teacher education and certification standards. Moreover, a whole host of initiatives and programs have sprung up that are designed to recruit new and talented candidates into teaching. Among these are programs designed to entice professionals into mid-career changes to teaching; alternative certification programs, whereby college graduates can postpone formal education training, obtain an emergency teaching certificate, and begin teaching immediately; and Peace Corps-like programs, such as Teach for America, which are designed to lure the “best and brightest” into understaffed schools (Ingersoll, 2003). “Unfortunately, evidence of the effectiveness of the various efforts is scant” (Cooper & Alvarado, 2006, p. 5).

‘The depth and breadth of the training and preparation of prospective members of the teaching force vary widely; and, according to contemporary theory, disadvantaged school districts, unable to match the salaries, benefits, and resources offered by more affluent schools,

have difficulty competing for the more qualified teaching candidates, leading in turn to lower student achievement “(Ingersoll, 2002, p. 3). Research shows that teacher quality varies across schools and school systems depending on school system characteristics, urban, rural, or suburban; student demographics; and school system recruitment and retention strategies (Lankford, Loeb, & Wycoff, 2002).

NCLB’s ‘highly qualified’ teacher requirements correctly target schools serving the most disadvantaged students first by requiring states to ensure that poor and minority children are not taught by inexperienced, unqualified or out-of-field teachers at higher rates than other children. It also calls for higher standards for paraprofessionals and requires states to ensure that all teachers are participating in ‘high quality’ professional development. (SECTQ, 2004, p. 3)

Student performance in the classroom depends heavily on the abilities and efforts of the teachers and the students (NCTAF, 1996). “While NCLB puts great pressure on schools and school districts to improve student learning, the law does not include incentives or consequences for students themselves” (Hess & Petrelli, 2006, p. 30). Meeting the teacher quality requirements of NCLB is subject to mandate. However, whether the teaching-learning exchange is successful requires more than mandate. “Student learning in this country will improve only when we focus our efforts on improving teaching” (NCTAF, 1996, p. 5). There is no magic formula or special recipe to ensure success in education. However, when all is said and done, if students are to be well taught, knowledgeable and well-supported, teachers will make the difference (NCTAF, 1996).

As recognized in NCLB, having a highly-qualified, well-prepared teacher impacts student learning and student test scores (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002).

Leaders in Alabama acknowledge the importance of teacher quality and focus on providing every child in Alabama a highly qualified teacher (The Governor's Commission on Quality Teaching, 2006).

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act has held its major focus to be effecting academic improvement for all students. Its last reauthorization, the No Child Left Behind Act, has at its core improvements in reading and mathematics performance for children who have not always achieved well in public schools with a deadline for demonstration of evidence.

Title II funds had been used throughout the systems to reduce class size, but systems have had to shift funds from class size reduction to offer activities designed to improve teachers' subject matter knowledge and instructional skill (GAO-06-25). "An important part of supporting all teachers is having strong professional development programs meeting their individual needs" (Reed & Kochan, 2006) and the needs of their students.

The most effective way to improve the achievement of our students is to improve the quality of teaching. No effort to improve the quality of education for all students, especially for the most disadvantaged, can succeed unless it changes the way in which teachers teach and students learn (Sparks & Hirsh, 2000, p. 5). An approach to strengthening teacher skills and impacting student performance is having teacher learning programs developed in collaborative partnerships with universities (Reed & Kochan, 2006).

While the federal government does not set state level policies or certification requirements, the federal government, primarily through the U.S. Department of Education (ED), provides substantial resources to strengthen the K-12 teaching force. Recently, the focus of federal support has expanded beyond in-service training to include greater emphasis on teacher

preparation, recruitment, and hiring. Further, the federal government is attempting to strengthen accountability for teacher quality.

Across the nation, states are raising their expectations for what students should know and be able to do. Increasingly, students must meet those expectations to graduate from high school or move on to the next grade. But states have not been as rigorous in ensuring that students have teachers who know their subjects and can teach. To the contrary, the deck is often stacked against those children who need help the most. (Olson, 2003, p. 1)

Students in high-poverty, high minority, and low performing schools are less likely than other pupils to be taught by teachers trained in their subjects (Ansell & McCabe, 2003). Gloria Ladson-Billings (2008) refers to this situation as an “accumulated educational debt” and says that children of color and poverty will continue to be left behind.

Another practice that impacts small, rural schools is out-of-field teaching. Often systems resort to placing teachers in areas other than the ones for which they are licensed. Ingersoll (2003) reports this as a crucial situation “because highly qualified teachers may actually become highly unqualified if they are assigned to teach subjects which do not match their training or education” (p. 5).

In his research relating to the recruitment and retention of teachers in rural areas, Collins (1999) uses an earlier definition of the ideal highly qualified rural teacher as one who can teach several subjects, can teach students at different grade levels, and can teach in a classroom of students who have a wide range of abilities in that one classroom (Lemke, 1994; Collins, 1999). Teachers in small rural schools are having to teach two full grade levels of students and must satisfy quality standards for both levels. Questions have not been adequately addressed regarding teachers who teach in multiple environments and grade levels; however, flexibilities were

extended by the Department of Education for teachers to achieve highly qualified status in all areas taught (Purcell, East & Rude, 2005). “Having every teacher ‘highly qualified’ by deadline was probably the most problematic requirement for rural districts to reach” (Northwest Regional Education Laboratory, 2003) and continues to be problematic past the deadline

Professional Development

“The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 requires that states ensure the availability of ‘high quality’ professional development for all teachers” (Borko, 2004, p. 3) whether the teachers are new or experienced. NCLB emphasized the importance of effective professional development and offered significant funding for training teachers and principals (ed.gov).

Much is being done to recruit teachers for rural, high poverty, high minority schools. There is still not much being done to make certain that the teachers recruited are the best and most qualified to meet the needs of the students of the high needs schools and/or high-needs classrooms (SECTQ, 2004). In spite of professional development and reform efforts, “teachers mostly continue to teach as they have in the past. In the absence of substantial professional development and training, many teachers naturally gravitate to the familiar methods they remember from their own years as students” (Sparks & Hirsh, 2000, p1). Despite recognition of its importance, the professional development currently available to teachers is woefully inadequate” (Borko, 2004, p. 3).

Though there is clear need for teacher-initiated and directed learning and teachers express their desire to learn new skills, current professional development programs are often largely inadequate (French, 1997). This failure may be due to one-shot workshops and schoolwide presentations of new methods that lack connections to the challenges teachers face in the classroom. For years, the only form of ‘professional development’ available to teachers was

‘staff development’ or ‘in-service training’ usually consisting of workshops or short-term courses that would offer teachers new information on a particular aspect of their work (Villegas-Reimers, 2003).

The litany of lackluster staff development offerings is familiar to most teachers: workshops from the district catalog that do not link directly to student or school needs; one-shot sessions with little feedback; uninspiring summer graduate courses, or “drive-by” inservice delivered on the fly to weary (and wary) faculty at the end of a long school day. (Working Toward Excellence, 2002, p. 1)

Professional development helps prepare teachers for the complexities of educating the millennial generation with the advanced skills and knowledge they will need for the unknown future. It helps teachers enhance their knowledge of content so they are better able to answer students’ questions, make lessons come alive, and help students solve problems. “It expands teachers’ repertoire of instructional skills so they can determine the best method to match an individual student’s specific needs and helps principals and other administrators learn new ways to lead and inspire” (Sparks & Hirsh, p. 5).

In order to allow professional development to play an effective part in educational reform, policies must be supportive of the changes that teachers are asked to make (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). If efforts are to be successful and embraced, professional development will need to be collaboratively planned for personnel of school systems by personnel of the school systems and their partners. “Professional development programs cannot succeed if they are something done to teachers, if teachers are passive recipients instead of active participants” (French, 1997, p. 38).

No Child Left Behind requires every state to provide guidance in the development of high quality professional development that:

- increases teachers' knowledge of the academic subjects they teach, and enable teachers to become highly qualified
- improves classroom management skills
- Supports the recruiting, hiring and training of highly qualified teachers, including teachers who became highly qualified through states and local alternative routes to certification
- Advances teacher understanding of effective instructional strategies that are based on scientifically based research, and improve student academic achievement or substantially increase the knowledge and teaching skills of teachers
- Gives teachers and other instructional staff the knowledge and skills to provide instruction and appropriate language and academic support services to limited-English-proficient children
- provides training for teachers and principals in the effective classroom use of technology
- Provides instruction in methods of teaching children with special needs
- Strengthens the ability of teachers and principals to use assessment results and other data to inform and improve classroom practice
- Improves the ability of school personnel to work more effectively with parents.

(Azordegan & Coble, 2004, p. 2.)

NCLB requires that professional development activities be sustained, intensive and classroom-focused to have a positive and lasting impact on classroom instruction—and not be an

occasional isolated, daylong workshop or conference. These activities should be regularly evaluated for their impact on teacher effectiveness and student achievement, with the findings of the evaluations used to improve the quality of professional development (ESEA Section 9101 (34), 2000).

Effective professional development helps teachers make connections between subject matter and pedagogy. It expands teachers' repertoire of research-based instructional methods to teach that content and help students master new skills. Such programs create regular opportunities for serious collaborative planning, develop classroom assessment skills, and connect teachers to other professionals within and beyond their schools (Sparks & Hirsh, 2000, p 5).

Alabama State Department of Education leaders have developed new standards for instructional leaders, quality teaching , and professional development with the primary "mission of improving the academic achievement of all students in the public schools of Alabama" (ALSDE). Professional development offerings must be in keeping with Alabama's Quality Teaching Standards and Alabama's Standards for Professional Development. As closely as possible, activities planned should reflect the teachers' needs as the new EDUCATEAlabama personnel evaluation results indicate.

A system of professional development must offer more that includes the interconnections between:

- the goals, objectives and purposes of professional development;
- the context in which professional development is to take place;
- the personal and professional characteristics of the participants of the system;
- the models, techniques, and procedures to be implemented;

- a determination of who is to make which decisions;
- a process to evaluate and assess the effectiveness of professional development on different constituencies;
- a determination of infrastructure support for professional development (Villegas-Reimers, 2003, p. 16)

A new culture of learning connectivity must be created “in these relationships among and between students, teachers, and the community so that all are more meaningfully connected to one another and to the school as a place of learning. Connectivity is about focused professional development and creating a learning community for educators within the school and across school lines” (Housman & Martinez 2001, p. 7).

High quality professional development is crucial to the future of education. Staff development must focus on local schools, be specific to identified needs, and continue through ongoing follow-up support (Kent, 2004). Education remains a local responsibility and many of the new, more powerful forms of collaborative professional development need to take place in local districts and schools.

Any plan to improve local educators’ professional development will need to focus on change at the local level—encouraging schools to make more time available, increasing collaboration among staff, and altering the culture of the school to one that supports learning for students and staff members. “The era of isolated teaching is over. Good teaching thrives in a collaborative learning environment created by teachers and local leaders (Wong, 2004, p. 52).

It is about connecting schools with expertise from both internal and external sources, and building capacity in the schools (Housman & Martinez, 2001). Increasingly, the evidence base is pointing towards the possibilities and potential of learning communities to generate the capacity

for school improvement (Hargraves, 2003). If professional development programs in the rural, geographically isolated school systems of the Black Belt region of Alabama are to result in marked student performance improvements, system leaders and partners from colleges and universities must connect to plan and implement a program of data driven, ongoing activities.

Today's teachers instruct students, develop lesson plans and much of the curriculum, integrate computers and other forms of technology into their teaching, adapt the course content to students with special needs, find multicultural elements in their subject, and help students cope with increasingly turbulent lives. These conditions require increasingly sophisticated teacher development and continuous learning (French, 1997, p. 39).

But ignoring ways to help teachers develop their skills and knowledge ignores the critical link between student performance and teaching (Sparks & Hirsh, p. 2). "Schools rarely provide teachers with the opportunity and incentives to learn how to incorporate new methods into their instruction" (French, 1997, p. 40). "Changing teacher beliefs about how students learn can be one of the most powerful ways to create fundamental changes in a school (Housman & Martinez, 2001, p. 6).

Teachers remain in teaching when they belong to professional learning communities that have, at their heart, high quality interpersonal relationships founded in trust and respect (Wong, 2004, p. 50). Leaders must work to develop a comprehensive program of professional development for new teachers in their systems. The professional development conducted should have major goals of increasing teacher retention and effectiveness. Professional development must be conducted to place "emphasis on skills such as understanding the developmental stages

of student learning, using multiple types of student assessment data, and revising instruction on a daily basis” (SECTQ, 2005, p. 5).

States bear primary responsibility for public education (West Ed, 1993) and that includes addressing issues related to teacher quality. States are charged under NCLB to plan and implement effective professional development as the legislation emphasizes the importance of and offers significant funding to states for training teachers and principals (Alabama Education Policy Primer, 2008).

Professional development is critical to ensuring that teachers keep up with changes in statewide student performance standards, become familiar with new methods of teaching in the content areas, learn how to make the most effective instructional use of technologies for teaching and learning, and adapt to shifting school environments and an increasingly diverse student population. (Lawless & Pellegrino, 2007, p. 575)

As recognized in NCLB, having a highly-qualified, well-prepared teacher impacts student learning and student test scores (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002). Leaders in Alabama acknowledge the importance of teacher quality and focus on ensuring that “every child in Alabama has a highly qualified teacher. No exceptions. No excuses” (The Task Force on Teaching and Student Achievement, 1999, p. 3). Recent federal legislation and funding initiatives have focused on the provision of professional development for inservice teachers as a vehicle for changing teacher practice and improving student achievement (Lawless & Pellegrino, 2007, p. 575).

Without carefully thought out professional development programs that address the specific needs of local school systems and the needs of local teachers and students, school

systems “will not have effective teachers who can produce student achievement results” (Wong, 2004, p. 47).

In the end, education remains a local responsibility and many of the new, more powerful forms of collaborative professional development need to take place in local districts and schools. Therefore, a plan to improve educator staff development will need to focus on change at the local level—encouraging schools to make more time available, increasing collaboration among staff, and altering the culture of the school to one that supports learning for all staff members as well as students. (Sparks & Hirsh, 2000, p. 10)

Recruitment and Retention

America faces tremendous challenges as it seeks to reform the nation’s educational system with the goal of leaving no child behind. Few would argue that, while the challenge must be addressed through a variety of strategies and approaches, one of the most critical elements in achieving success in this endeavor is the need to attract to and retain highly qualified and effective teachers (Joftus & Maddox-Dolan, 2002, Executive summary, p. 1). Few educational problems have received more attention in recent times than the failure to ensure that our nation’s elementary and secondary classrooms are all staffed with qualified teachers (Ingersoll, 2001).

The problem of staffing classrooms requires school systems to be able to recruit teachers to the classrooms and be able to work with teachers for effectively instructing students. “Widespread teacher shortages in high-poverty schools and key academic areas as well as impending mass teacher retirements have created a sense of urgency around teacher recruitment, preparation, and induction, and rendered policy and practice ripe for rethinking” (Hess, Rotherham & Walsh, 2004, p. 2). The issue of teacher shortages is much more complex than simply matching qualified candidates with job openings (Hess, Rotherham & Walsh, 2004, p. 2).

One of the nation's leading researchers, Darling-Hammond, was quoted by Lewis (1998) as advising "school systems to refuse to hire unqualified teachers" (p. 179), but when faced with a classroom of students and no highly qualified teacher, what is an administrator to do? As has been found the case in many instances in rural systems, personnel to provide special services, special education teachers and special education paraeducators are not available even though the systems have the funds to hire such personnel thereby causing a major problem for the school systems (Purcell, East & Rude, 2005). This is especially important as special education students are seeking regular diplomas and are required to meet the same accountability standards for it (alsde).

Finding and retaining good teachers may pose a challenge for all of the rural school systems of the Black Belt at one time or another. As indicated by Arnold, Newman, Gaddy & Dean (2005),

Given that NCLB requires that all teachers of core subject areas must be highly qualified by the 2005-2006 school year, there is a heightened concern among rural administrators that they will be unable to fill teaching positions. In commenting on the highly qualified teacher provision of NCLB, Gene Carter (2003), executive director of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, notes that "as teacher quality provisions of NCLB increase the demand for licensed teachers, rural communities will face greater difficulty recruiting and retaining qualified teachers" (p. 1).

Three broad areas related to the quality of rural teachers were suggested as areas to be explored:

- (1) recruiting highly qualified teachers and inducting them effectively into the rural schools;

- (2) providing effective teacher professional development that is aligned with research-based strategies and school improvement goals; and
- (3) retaining teachers in geographically isolated schools. (As cited in Arnold, Newman, Gaddy & Dean, 2005).

Other challenges include attracting teachers to communities where medical services, entertainment, and other amenities are limited and non-existent (Ballou, Podgursky & Larsen as cited in Holloway, 2003). Geographic isolation is detrimental in hiring personnel and providing continuing education programs.

In recent years, a wide range of initiatives has been implemented to recruit new candidates into teaching—especially to schools serving low-income students.

In terms of hard-to-staff schools, additional strategies are being implemented. These include bonuses for teachers of mathematics, special education, and other shortage fields, bonuses for teachers who teach in high poverty schools, financial support for graduate study, and partnerships between local education areas and colleges to help such areas ‘grow their own’ teachers. (Cooper & Alvarado, 2006, p. 5)

While teacher supply in the United States is sufficient on the whole to meet demand (Ingersoll, 2001), the recruitment of effective highly qualified applicants for positions in high poverty, rural school systems is many times unsuccessful. Recruitment efforts are impacted by issues such as the following:

- shortages in particular fields such as mathematics, science, special education and bilingual education;
- rural areas suffer quality of life issues;
- teacher working conditions are not attractive;

- inequities in revenues and expenditures

The recruitment of teachers to teach in the rural, high poverty schools of the researcher's system had become a cycle of recruiting, conducting new teacher and mentoring sessions, holding required meetings, and working to help the teachers settle into the rigors of instruction required for our students' success only to have the teachers leave at the end of the year. The process hindered the district's ability to move professional development to higher levels as so much time and extensive resources were expended in the recruitment efforts. No Child Left Behind's emphasis on accountability and sanctions was affecting all aspects of our personnel efforts.

These high needs schools present recruitment and retention challenges. To recruit highly qualified teachers, rural schools will need to emphasize the benefits of rural life, adopt proactive recruitment strategies that target those wanting to live in rural areas, develop local talent, improve the hiring process and offer incentives for working in the hardest-to-staff schools or subject areas. (GAO-03-631)

“While many states and districts have launched efforts to attract and retain skilled teachers, few of those initiatives focus on matching well qualified teachers with high-need schools” (Ansell & McCabe, 2003, p. 3). Despite evidence that a significant teacher quality gap does exist, most states do not track and inform the public about the dearth of efforts to help leaders in high needs schools with finding and matching skills of qualified teachers with their needs across different types of schools (Ansell & McCabe, 2003, p. 3).

The demographic characteristics of rural schools and districts affect the availability of funding and access to programs, services, and training opportunities. The Department of Education defines small rural schools as those schools eligible to participate in the Small Rural

Schools Achievement program with fewer than 600 students or districts in which all schools are located in counties with a population density of fewer than 10 persons per square mile (Rural Community Trust). Using that description, rural America comprised 2,052 counties. One in three students attending public school in the United States attends a school in a rural area or small town of fewer than 25,000 people; more than one in five attend school in places of fewer than 2,500 (Williams, 2003). Nearly one third of our public schools and public school teachers, and close to one half of public schools districts are in rural locations (Beeson & Strange, 2005).

The economic and social character of rural places varies greatly across the United States. The economy of some rural areas still depends on employment in farming, mining, and timber work—traditional rural extractive industries. Many of these communities face declining job opportunities and population loss. Shrinking economies force workers to find new ways of making a living, often in metropolitan cities. Low density settlement patterns in rural areas often make it more costly for communities and businesses to provide critical services (Economic Research Service, 2003). Ninety-eight percent of the poorest counties in the U.S. are rural (Truscott & Truscott, 2005, p. 127). Lack of adequate research and impact evaluations, together with definitional inconsistencies severely limit policy makers' ability to know either the effect of federal, state, and local programs on rural schools or whether rural interests are being equitably addressed (Stern, 1994).

To retain highly qualified teachers recruited to the school systems, rural districts will need to develop comprehensive induction programs that include mentoring, work with institutions of higher education to provide teachers with easy access to certification and professional development options, and involve the community in supporting teachers once recruited (AEL Policy Briefs, 2003). The greatest teacher shortages exist and are expected to

escalate in urban and rural districts enrolling low-income, low performing, and primarily minority students (Reed & Kochan, 2006).

The schools in this study are considered hard-to-staff as they are largely small rural schools according to their enrollment numbers, and are high poverty rural schools according to the percentage of students who qualify for free and reduced meals. Rural districts faced some challenges in meeting NCLBA provisions to a greater extent than nonrural districts. Rural districts were more likely than nonrural districts to report challenges presented by having a large enrollment of students from low income families living in communities with few resources such as libraries (Jimmerson, 2003; Schwartzbeck, Prince, Redfield, Morris & Hammer, 2003). This lack of access plays a large role in the ability of rural districts to build local capacity to comply with NCLB (Reeves, 2003).

Too often teachers who are not fully certified, have emergency licenses, or are out-of-field have been used to fill vacancies in hard-to-staff schools. New teachers have been assigned to classes of lowest performing students. Otherwise qualified teachers were assigned to teach classes outside their subject-area training (Ingersoll, 2004). In a study of rural schools in the North West (NWREL), districts “identified small school size and geographic isolation” as challenges to implementing NCLBA and reported additionally that limited access to teacher training facilities and Internet difficulties “impeded NCLBA implementation efforts” (GAO-04-909, 2004).

Research also shows that teacher turnover is higher in high poverty schools and schools serving low-performing students (Hanushek, Kain, & Rivken, 1999; Ingersoll, 2004). There is also a need for special education and general education teachers who can be successful with multiple roles and assignments (Schwartzbeck & Prince, Redfield, Morris & Hammer, 2003).

Teachers in rural districts at all levels are required to teach more than one academic subject (Darling-Hammond, 1999; Jimmerson, 2003; Schwartzbeck & Prince, Redfield, Morris & Hammer, 2003) and often leave for easier assignments. Ingersoll (2004) indicates that teachers leave poor rural schools for the following reasons:

- salaries,
- poor administrative support,
- lack of teacher influence and autonomy, and
- student discipline problems (p. 11)

In a McRel study, Arnold, (2004) poses questions related to recruiting teachers and inducting them into the rural schools, providing effective professional development, and retaining teachers in geographically isolated areas schools. He asks, “How will systems work to address the problematic situation of having ‘highly qualified’ teachers who are incapable of delivering higher quality teaching for the students in these classrooms?” He also suggests that additional knowledge is needed about the effects of state policies on rural teacher quality and on how higher education institutions can assist in improvement efforts.

Like all schools, rural schools face many pressures. Increasingly diverse student backgrounds, learning styles, and needs; new federal and state accountability requirements; and debates about the allocation and availability of education funding are challenges in every U.S. community. But rural schools face a unique set of challenges, largely due to their geographic isolation. Although some rural schools have successfully met these challenges, many still struggle. The need to attract and retain highly qualified teachers, for example, is especially pronounced in rural schools. Given the demonstrated link between teacher quality and student achievement, the need for evidence-based

guidance concerning teacher recruitment, preparation, and professional development is even more paramount for superintendents and principals in rural communities. Rural school leaders also are eager for information about research-based interventions and strategies that enhance student success in rural communities. (Arnold, Newman, Gaddy, & Dean, 2005, Introduction)

“How state legislatures address teacher recruitment and retention depends on circumstances that vary from state to state, or even from district to district, such as the availability of economic resources, the cultural priorities of the local community, population density, and terrain” (AEL, 2003). Observers and analysts must agree, as put forth by Ingersoll (2004), that the inability of schools to adequately staff classrooms with qualified teachers is directly connected to societal stratification processes. Researchers consistently find that children from minority racial/ethnic backgrounds begin school with different types of preparation, often exhibit lower levels of achievement than their White peers beginning in kindergarten and continuing over time, and have increased risks of severely impoverished living conditions, and are more likely to be in single parent families.

According to Darling-Hammond (2007),

At a time when the percentage of Americans living in severe poverty has reached a thirty-two year high, NCLB seeks to improve the schools poor students attend through threats and sanctions rather than the serious investments in education and welfare such an effort truly requires. (p. 13)

Many families that have experienced poverty for generations may have acquired negative views toward the value of school and work (Truscott & Truscott, 2005). Threats and sanctions may not work.

Jimmerson (2003) in her research showed that “recruitment and retention of teachers to rural, high poverty schools remains difficult”. Systems, such as those of rural Alabama are “finding it increasingly difficult to attract and retain well-qualified teachers”. Of the new teachers recruited from area colleges to work in rural, high poverty systems, “there is little evidence that these programs incorporate specifics related to teaching in such schools (Harmon, Henderson, & Royster, 2003). Ingersoll (1999) found that “the most qualified teachers tend to teach in districts with more economically advantaged students.”

As we begin a new century, the rural South continues to struggle with problems that have plagued it through the twentieth century—persistent poverty and uneven development. Geographic areas of concentrated poverty are scattered across the South from Appalachia through the Lower Rio Grande Valley and including the Black Belt from Virginia to Texas. Every southern state except Delaware contains a group of contiguous counties with relatively high poverty rates, and these counties lag behind the rest of the United States on key indicators of socioeconomic well-being. (Allen-Smith, Wimberley, & Morris, 2000, p. 319)

After *Brown v Board of Education*, The United States of America was forced to correct a history of racial exclusion in education (State of the South, 2004). Today the future, not the past, compels the South, its leaders, and its citizens to focus on providing public education that is effective for every child (Dodson, 2004). Although, the South has changed a lot since 1954, and public education in all of the United States has changed since the *Brown* ruling, some things have not changed. “Many Southern students face unequal and inadequate educational opportunity because they are poor, Black or Latino, or live in inner cities or rural areas (MDC, Inc, 2004). “Too many students—especially in schools with a heavy majority of students from

low income, African American, or Latino homes—do not get the education they need to thrive in today’s economy and to participate as citizens in our democracy” (MDC, Inc. 2004, p. 2).

A child’s chances for success are directly related to the quality of education he receives and depend greatly on where he lives with Virginia, Connecticut, Minnesota, New Jersey, Maryland, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire ranking highest and Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee, Texas, Arizona, Louisiana, and New Mexico ranking lowest (Education Week, 2007). The effects of poverty are many. “Children of poverty often need more but get less (Truscott & Truscott, 2005, p. 126). Schools in communities where student poverty is rampant tend to receive much less funding (Biddle & Berliner, 2002). “The amount spent on each public school child in a poor community may be only half as much as the amount spent per pupil in a wealthy community” (Slavin, 1997 as quoted by Nelson, Palonsky, & Carlson, 2000, p. 44).

“The long standing practice in America has been for the public schools to obtain their financial support from their communities” (Nelson, Palonsky, & Carlson, 2000, p. 44). Most commonly, communities use property taxes to support their schools (Goertz et al., 1982). The tax base for many rural schools is so low that the systems have difficulty keeping financially afloat. “Because state school systems throughout America depend on local property taxes for much of their revenue, districts with poor property valuations are finding it especially hard to meet tightened curricular standards, or to prepare students to do well on state assessment tests” (Null, 2003).

Recognizing that providing quality education and having quality teachers requires systems to have funds is a primary step to leveling educational playing fields. Local systems and states must work to overcome negative effects of poverty acknowledging that differences in the amount of funds available for education within and across states make it difficult for all schools

to provide the same quality of education for all students and impair students' ability to all meet higher standards" (Goertz, 2001, as cited by Fuhrman). Title I alone cannot make everything equal (Goertz, 2001, as cited by Fuhrman). As a result, in recent years, school staffing inadequacies and inequities have been cast as major social problems, received widespread coverage in the national media, and been the target of a growing number of reform and policy initiatives (Ingersoll, 2004).

In earlier poverty- related research, Wimberley and Morris (1995) posited that poverty had three r's which are "race, region and rurality". "Poverty and other quality-of-life conditions are neither evenly nor randomly distributed across the United States; they are concentrated in the South" (Wimberley & Morris, 2002, p. 294).

As we begin a new century, the rural South continues to struggle with problems that have plagued it through the twentieth century—persistent poverty and uneven development.

Geographic areas of concentrated poverty are scattered across the South from Appalachia through the Lower Rio Grande Valley and including the Black Belt from Virginia to Texas, (Allen-Smith, Wimberley, & Morris, 2000, p. 319).

Within the South, however, there is an even larger but often unrecognized subregion that covers nearly half of the South, overlaps most of the southern Mississippi Delta and claims a surprisingly large part of the Appalachian South. This is the historic Black Belt.

The Black Belt "is an area rich in cultural traditions and the strength of its people. In the roughly two hundred counties comprising today's Black Belt, over half the population is African American" (Black Belt Fact Book, 2002, p. 4). Unfortunately, however, it is also an area in dire need, confronted with economic stagnation, declining population, and insufficient health care and schools (Black Belt Fact Book, 2002, p. 4).

Alabama's Black Belt region is an area of high poverty, high unemployment, high minority enrollment, rural geographic isolation, and other quality of life issues that require educational decision makers and leaders to address as they plan educational opportunities to address the demographics of their placement (Lee & Summers, 2003). In these places, as in more affluent places with more positive quality of life indicators, "teachers are the fundamental resource of education, the essential element of any successful long-term strategy to help students learn" (Education Trust, 2003, p.2).

Alabama's Black Belt stretches throughout the central region of the state, consisting of 12 of Alabama's 67 counties, and is generally characterized by "white flight", poverty rates exceeding 20%, high unemployment rates and low population growth (Adams ,2005). The school systems in this region include twelve county school systems and three city school systems. Almost all of the rural, small or isolated schools in this study reported difficulty in hiring and retaining teachers because of low salary scales, little or no employment opportunities for a spouse, and lack of inservice programs.

Living in the "pockets of poverty" of the Black Belt region of Alabama "diminishes the chances of adults and especially children (Allen-Smith, Wimberley & Morris, 2000). In their study of America's forgotten people and places, these researchers report that persistently poor counties and uneven development are problems in every region of the country; however, "the greatest concentration of poverty is in the South" (p. 319).

The Black Belt subregion of the South holds far more of the nation's poor than any of the other major regions of the country. Consequently, over time, poverty is quite disproportionately over represented in both the larger South and its 11-state Black Belt subregion. (Wimberley & Morris, 2002, p. 297)

Overall the Black Belt is by far, the largest region of U.S. poverty (Wimberley & Morris, 1996). Poverty is generally higher in rural areas such as those of the Black Belt and South, and services there are more difficult to provide (Wimberley & Morris, 2002, p. 301).

Many rural communities in Alabama's Black Belt lack some, if not all, of the services (health, education, recreation, safety, justice, water, wastewater treatment, solid waste disposal, energy, telecommunications, fire safety, and others) people have come to rely upon for meeting their daily needs. (Zekeri, 2004, p. 12)

High needs schools are defined as those high poverty, high minority, or low performing schools. An examination of the 2005 population data in the systems of this study shows that of the ten systems, all have 50% or more of students qualifying for free or reduced price meals. All are high minority systems having 50% or more minority students enrolled. All experience some level of low performance and must work toward improvement according to student test results. All are high needs, at-risk, hard-to-staff school systems, according to demographic data (ALSDE). Typically at-risk, high needs, hard-to-staff schools are found in core urban areas and isolated rural areas (Rowland & Coble, 2005).

High poverty, rural, and urban areas have always found it difficult to attract teachers. They do not have the resources to compete with wealthier schools for their pick of teacher candidates (Barlow, 2006). Schools such as these are often staffed with inexperienced, ill-prepared teachers (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003). The schools, which typically can least afford it, must constantly pour money into recruitment and professional support for new teachers, many of them untrained, without reaping the benefits from the investments (Shields, 2005).

Rural schools have difficulty recruiting and retaining new teachers, not just as a result of the highly qualified teacher requirements, but also because of teacher conditions unique to rural

schools (Monk, 2007). Varying economic conditions can make a major difference from one rural community to the next. Because of the small size of school districts and schools, teachers sometimes have to teach multiple subjects and possibly multiple grades sometimes in multiage, mixed classrooms (p. 2).

“In recent years, however, there has been a growth in support, guidance and orientation programs—collectively known as induction—for beginning elementary and secondary teachers during the transition into their first teaching jobs” (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004, p. 28). The best way to support, develop, and cultivate an attitude of lifelong learning in beginning teachers is through a new teacher induction program focused on teacher training, support, and retention (Wong, 2002, p. 52). Induction programs are designed for those who have already completed much training already and serve “as a bridge from student of teaching to teacher of students” (Ingersoll, 2004, p. 29).

In general, research suggests that induction programs can:

- improve instructional effectiveness and promote a sense of satisfaction in novices;
- fulfill state mandates to provide induction experiences in school districts and to certify teachers;
- provide a way to share the culture of the school and district with beginning teachers; and
- increase short-term retention rates. (Griffin, Winn , Otis-Wilborn, & Kilgore, 2003)

Teacher induction can refer to a variety of different types of activities— classes, workshops, orientations, seminars, and especially, mentoring.

“One of the espoused purposes of mentoring is to foster the development of individuals to fulfill their potential” (Zhao & Reed, 2003, p. 400) and keep quality teachers once recruited.

When new teachers are hired for classrooms, most meet the state's requirement that they be highly qualified. The State Department of Education established requirements for identifying acceptable mentor teachers. Training and support were to be provided for every system by the regional inservice centers. School systems chose mentoring liaisons to work among state department, regional inservice and school system personnel to affect the success of the school system's mentoring program.

“The overall objective of teacher mentoring programs is to provide newcomers with a local guide” (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004, p. 30). No longer can systems afford to employ the “sink or swim” (p. 30) attitude toward teacher success with current recruitment and retention specifics (Darling-Hammond, 1984). Mentoring programs vary according to content and to the teachers they serve. “Some include anyone new to a particular school, even those with previous teaching experience, whereas others focus solely on inexperienced candidates new to teaching” (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004, p. 30.)

Leaders in every Alabama public school system are responsible for assigning an experienced, competent teacher to serve as mentor for every new teacher. A new teacher in Alabama is defined as a teacher who has had no prior public school teaching experience (ALSDE). A mentoring program such as the Alabama program pairs veteran teachers in a school with beginning teachers in the school. The veteran teacher provides support for the beginning teacher for the first year and receives a small stipend. Mentoring assignments are impacted by a number of factors including student enrollment, past staffing history, teaching assignments, and scheduling. The Alabama State Department of Education implemented its program of mentoring for new teachers beginning in school year 2007–2008.

Many times, these new teachers had years of experience in neighboring school systems and did not meet the state's definition of a new teacher for assignment of an official mentor to receive stipend. Systems may need to develop mentoring relationships for experienced teachers who are new to their classrooms without funding from outside sources “ to help develop teachers' sensitivity to and understanding of the community ... and promote unity and teamwork among the entire learning community” (Wong, 2002, p. 52). Effective implementation of the mentoring program should result in growth as evidenced by personnel evaluation results for both the beginning and the mentoring teacher.

EDUCATEAlabama is a less cumbersome and more concise process than the PEPE process with dialogue between the teacher and the principal required “with the sole purpose of improving the effectiveness of instruction in the classroom and the skill level of the teacher” (alsde.edu).

“States and school districts have developed and are implementing a number of initiatives directed at improving the preparation, recruitment, and retention of highly qualified teachers for low-performing and at-risk schools” (The Education Alliance, 2006, p. 5). Among the initiatives are numerous activities related to having incentives touting activities of National Board for Professional Teaching Standards which include:

- National Board Certification
- class size reduction
- additional personnel to allow collaboration
- retirement credit
- college tuition assistance
- money

- restructuring teachers' staff development time
- seeking legislative/policy changes

Local districts currently design and implement their own recruitment programs. Isolated recruitment approaches such as those employed by school systems in the Black Belt region often result in competition among systems in the region for the same few applicants. Qualified applicants who are willing to teach in the region are few and the winning system is usually the system with the most resources and the most attractive geographic location. "Many teaching candidates prefer suburban districts. They are unwilling to teach in many urban and rural schools" (Hirsch, 2001, p. 5).

The organization of State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO) recruitment and retention report lists several areas to consider for improving teacher recruitment:

- increase salaries
- strengthen early outreach
- develop 'grow your own' programs
- provide student aid
- support alternative routes to teaching
- streamline hiring, and
- lure back retired teachers

When teachers-both new and experienced- are pleased with their jobs and their workplace, they are better able to do their job in spite of difficulties and shortages resulting from limited funds. Leaders then, must do all that they can to improve in ways that do not require funding.

Policymakers are increasingly recognizing teacher working conditions as an essential element for retaining teachers and improving student achievement" (Emerick & Hirsch, p. 1).

Constantly recruiting teachers for classrooms only to have them leave is a problem for improving student performance. “Movers,” whom Ingersoll (2001) defines as teachers who leave one school or district for another and “leavers”, who leave teaching for a while or permanently, “particularly affect schools serving poor and minority students” (Ingersoll, 2001, p. 516). According to researchers, recruiting new teachers only to have them leave within three to five years “is as if we were pouring teachers into a bucket with a fist-sized hole in the bottom” (NCTAF, 1996, p. 26).

Summary

It will take nothing less than a concerted and coordinated effort of the federal government, states, and districts to overhaul the way we recruit, license, induct, and support teachers to ensure that we have not only a highly qualified teacher but also high quality teaching in every classroom, every day (SECTQ, 2004, executive summary). If we are to have quality teaching and improved student achievement in all public schools among all students, school leaders and policy makers must recruit wisely and provide “a professional development program that improves professional skills for educators at every point in their careers” (Wong, 2004, p. 48).

Rural teacher recruitment and retention problems vary from place to place, but some challenges are common among almost all rural schools: isolation, lower teacher pay, and the need for teachers who are certified to teach multiple subjects or grade levels. To recruit highly qualified teachers, rural districts will need to emphasize the benefits of rural life, adopt proactive recruitment strategies that target those wanting to live in rural areas, develop local talent, improve the hiring process, and offer incentives for working in the hardest-to-staff schools or subject areas. (AEL Policy Briefs, 2003, p.6)

The questions to be answered now for these systems are what happens when teachers are not highly qualified or when teaching is not high quality. For rural, geographically isolated, small systems to meet the accountability requirements for teachers on both teacher supply and teacher capacity, systems must “examine the complexities of teacher recruitment, retention, and professional development” (Holloway, 2002, p. 139). If districts focus on teaching quality—recruiting or developing well-prepared teachers and investing in their continued professional growth—the highly qualified requirement will be met” (SECTQ, 2004).

CHAPTER III. METHODS

Introduction

This study was designed to assess the Title I and Title II compliance experiences of rural, high poverty school systems in the Black Belt region of Alabama. Specifically, the study explored the perception of central office administrators and school principals in ten systems regarding their efforts to meet No Child Left Behind mandates for having highly qualified teachers in all core areas and for providing high quality professional development for instructional personnel.

A researcher-developed survey, The No Child Left Behind Survey of Compliance Trends, was used to gather data on the perceived benefits to the systems and challenges experienced by the systems as part of their efforts to comply with ESEA mandates to have highly qualified teachers and provide high quality professional development. This survey instrument had both Likert-type and open-ended items to gather data about the perceived benefits to the systems when complying with the mandates and the perceived challenges to their systems as a result of the compliance efforts.

For this study, the term compliance trend refers to common patterns of activities. The compliance activities are those undertaken by more than one of the systems in their efforts to recruit and retain teachers when vacancies occurred in core academic areas, to provide training to

aid existing personnel in achieving highly qualified status, and to provide training sessions in general to strengthen teaching and learning results.

Administrators invited to participate in the study included those central office administrators who are directly involved in recruiting, retaining, and training teachers serving in K–12 public school core academic classrooms, and principals of K–12 schools in the selected systems.

Research Design

A survey was deemed the best method to use to gather information about administrators' perceptions of the most beneficial and most challenging aspects of the No Child Left Behind quality teacher and quality professional development mandates for the high poverty, rural school systems in Alabama's Black Belt Region due to the vast geographic area covered by the study. Time and costs were primary reasons for using a survey (Babbie, 1998). The survey was designed to require no more than thirty minutes to complete. Respondents should have incurred no cost when completing the survey.

The researcher used the survey as a tool to determine if a statistically significant relationship existed between various aspects of the compliance experience for all systems in the study and if the experiences occurred frequently enough to suggest patterns of best practice strategies for recruitment and retention of highly qualified teachers. Another planned use of survey data was to identify collaborative professional development tactics for providing comprehensive, data driven professional development for teachers in these school systems. Both uses could result in improvements in student achievement.

The researcher developed the survey with the assistance of school system administrators, one of her professors, and fellow graduate students. At the outset, the survey process involved

the use of two instruments—the first for the superintendents to use prior to giving permission for involvement of personnel from the school system and the second for use by school system personnel. After developing the first instruments, the researcher shared copies of the instruments with the professor and a team of three central office administrators and three principals. It was during this part of the process that the two instruments were combined and items were revised. At the suggestion of a College of Education professor, the response format was revised and the number of items was reduced. The suggestion was also made to use an instrument that could be completed in less than an hour. During the last revision, the items from the Alabama State Department of Education’s highly qualified teacher/equity plan templates were used to replace the earlier items that had been written to determine what areas of recruitment had presented the greatest difficulty.

The purpose of this research was to explore administrators’ perceptions of certain No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act mandate compliance efforts undertaken in their school systems and to enhance teaching and learning for all students so both Likert-type and open-ended questions were included on the survey. “The difference in purposes of evaluating the quality of studies in quantitative and qualitative research is one of the reasons that the concept of reliability is irrelevant in qualitative research” (Golafshani, 2003, p. 601). “Qualitative research uses a naturalistic approach that seeks to understand phenomena in context-specific settings” ... Though reliability and validity are treated separately in quantitative studies, the terms are not viewed separately in qualitative research and terminology such as credibility, transferability, and trustworthiness are used (p. 600).

Research Questions

The questions in this study addressed four major areas:

- The Elementary and Secondary Education Act and the No Child Left Behind highly qualified personnel and high quality professional development mandates;
- The importance of having effective, highly qualified teachers
- The effects of being high poverty, high minority, rural school systems on recruiting and retaining quality teachers; and
- Identifying some best practices for recruiting and preparing teachers for success in these high needs schools.

The process of narrowing the focus of the study to four research questions involved consideration of several areas of possible research including, among others, the recruitment of highly qualified teachers and providing an induction program to prepare them for success in rural classrooms; providing ongoing professional development based on best practices and pertinent rural schools research; and retention strategies directly related to schools in geographically isolated areas. Additionally, the researcher considered research areas addressing the special needs of school personnel in the Black Belt region of Alabama; identifying and addressing the needs of teachers who are new to living in rural areas; and implementing collaborative professional development among the systems in the region. After reviewing these areas of possible research, four questions were identified and were utilized to conduct the study:

1. What do administrators perceive to be barriers to NCLB compliance?
2. What do administrators perceive to be benefits of NCLB compliance?
3. In which core academic areas did the school systems experience greatest difficulty meeting the NCLB mandate to have highly qualified teachers?

4. What are best practices for the recruitment, retention, and improvement of teachers in rural areas as described by administrators?

As a central office administrator, the researcher participated in Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) training sessions; in discussion groups conducted by various specialists, presenters, or school system personnel; and during informal conversations among peers from high poverty, rural systems and from low poverty, suburban systems. During these sessions, it was commonly reported that finding teachers in certain content areas and arranging professional development for experienced certified teachers were two areas of concern resulting from the No Child Left Behind mandates. This was an especially significant problem for these school systems in the Black Belt region with few, if any, colleges or universities in their immediate geographic area.

Situating Self as Researcher

Conducting this study was especially important to a central office administrator responsible for facilitating quality professional development for teachers when observation results or student performance data indicated a particular need. Participation in college level coursework, seminars, and other training activities for personnel was challenging and hindered by the distance from schools and offices in the Black Belt region to major colleges and universities. Noted lecturers and professors were often reluctant or unable to travel to school system facilities to conduct professional development sessions or teach classes. Teachers' duty schedules often extended beyond the time of day when they needed to leave the school if they were to get to the university class or presentation on time. This became especially pertinent as the researcher sought to complete advanced studies in educational leadership and became even more aware of the difficulties encountered.

Recruitment of competent teachers for rural school systems has been highly competitive for years because several of the small systems have fewer resources than many systems and their remote locations discourage many applicants (Schwartzbeck, et al., 2003). The few who are willing to teach in the area are sought by many neighboring systems which heightens the competitions among the systems. Marketing of certain areas and extolling the advantages of rural living could serve as a counter to difficulties that impact recruiting results as the best and brightest are drawn to larger more prosperous systems in areas near shopping outlets, with employment opportunities for the spouse, having numerous medical facilities and recreational outlets (Osterholm, Horn & Johnson, 2006).

Prior to NCLB, recruiting teachers with certificates had been challenging for rural districts. When certificated but not always competent teachers had been hired in previous years, it was necessary to provide much more intense professional development to equip these teachers to teach in our high needs schools. With NCLB's requirement for highly qualified teachers came an even more difficult recruitment situation as many experienced, already hired teachers had to have coursework and test preparation professional development in order to become highly qualified.

School system leaders scrambled to find teachers from colleges and universities to teach the higher level mathematics, writing, and science classes needed to assist teachers in attaining highly qualified status. When courses could not be brought to the system, many teachers in this system had chosen to retire rather than travel hours to the nearest college to take the classes and travel additional hours after class to go home. Questions arose about whether this situation affected personnel in neighboring systems to the same degree or not as in the researcher's system and what circumstances accounted for any major differences if the situation was not the same.

Research Design/Analysis

The thirty-one item No Child Left Behind Survey of Compliance Trends was mailed to superintendents in fifteen Black Belt Region school systems. Superintendents in twelve of the systems gave permission for administrator participation in this study. Administrators from ten of these systems completed and returned survey instruments.

Part I of the survey contained nine items related to the demographics of the school system, personal information about the respondent, and information about each administrator's school site if the administrator was a school principal. Part II of the survey had two sections. Section A contained 15 questions related to the highly qualified teacher mandate. Eleven of the items were Likert-type questions; four were open-ended questions. Section B contained seven items related to professional development. Three of the items were Likert-type questions; four were open-ended questions.

Part II, Section A of the survey asked participants to provide information about probable areas of core academic teacher vacancies and the extent to which there were any recruitment challenges experienced since the 2002–2003 school year. Part II, Section B asked respondents to provide information about the professional development experience, the use of incentives for recruiting teachers, and the influence on the system or school's culture as a result of the use of Title II, A-C funds. The researcher chose to include open-ended items in both Part II sections, A and B, in order to allow respondents to use language that adequately communicated their perceptions of the benefits to the system and/or challenges to the system of the highly qualified teacher and high quality professional development mandates efforts.

Content validity of the instrument was addressed by aligning the items with terminology and categories included on the Alabama State Department of Education's highly qualified

teacher documents. The teacher vacancy areas included in Part II, Section A were those identified in the guidance communication accompanying the ALSDE Highly Qualified Plan document (ALSDE).

Procedures

Before undertaking the survey of administrators, the researcher completed an IRB application at Auburn University and received the response that approval was not required and research could begin. A letter (see Appendix A) was mailed to superintendents of the fifteen Black Belt systems asking permission to conduct the survey in the system. After receiving permission from the superintendents, the researcher conducted a query of the Alabama State Department of Education's online directory of all Alabama school systems to determine the names and mailing addresses of all school principals, special education directors, curriculum directors, federal program directors, and directors of personnel/human resources in the selected systems. These administrators and the superintendents were mailed a copy of the No Child Left Behind Survey of Compliance Trends (see Appendix B). The mailed packet contained the survey, a cover letter of introduction, instructions for completing and returning the survey, and a pre-addressed, stamped envelope for return of the instrument.

The cover letter assured participants that all information provided would be confidential and no information directly identifying the school system or its schools would be used. Later, when it was determined that too few responses had been received, a subsequent distribution of the survey packet was conducted at a meeting of the Black Belt Superintendents' Coalition with permission from its chairwoman. This packet contained an updated cover letter, the survey, and a self-adhesive manila mailer. The cover letter contained instructions for participants to place

the completed instrument in a special box that had been prepared and placed on a table in the room.

Summary

In order to examine the perceptions of administrators related to their employing Black Belt school systems' efforts to comply with NCLB quality personnel mandates. A researcher-developed survey was used to gather data about administrators' feelings about certain recruitment, retention and professional development activities. Specifically, administrators were to respond to their having to complete certain actions and conduct supportive sessions in order to have highly qualified teachers in all core academic classes and improve student academic performance were benefits of receiving NCLB funds or additional challenges to be encountered.

The No Child Left Behind Survey of Compliance Trends was mailed to principals and central office administrators directly responsible for ensuring that all core classrooms have highly qualified teachers. The survey included both Likert-type and open-ended items to allow administrators a variety of response options. Four research questions were identified to focus the gathering of data. Wording Likert-type items with much of the same as found in the Alabama teacher quality reports sent to the Alabama State Department of Education impacted the validity of the instrument and permitted administrators to use information they were already having to gather. This increased the likelihood of their completing the survey and made their involvement in the research more supportive for the concept of a regional approach for recruitment, retention, and professional development. The data shared should be reliable for addressing the problems identified (Creswell, 2008). In order to address the dependability of the data, the researcher worked to ensure applicability and transferability (Golafshani, 2003).

In order to enhance the academic performance of the high poverty, high minority students enrolled in the rural, geographically isolated school systems of Alabama's Black Belt region, every core classroom must be staffed with an effective teacher who is highly qualified according to mandate and highly skilled in teaching diverse learners. Chapter IV will present the findings of this study.

CHAPTER IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

In a time of globalization and marketplace economics, it is imperative that all children have access to quality public education. Education is the only assurance our children have of acquiring the skills and capacities they will need to compete in the global marketplace, to have the ability to process large amounts of information, and to participate in the democratic process. (Puriefoy, 2005, p. 250)

Introduction

Public schools across the country face the requirements of meeting personnel and accountability mandates of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 which President Bush signed into law in 2002. The rural, high poverty school systems of Alabama's Black Belt Region struggle to recruit highly qualified teachers for all core academic classes although personnel in these districts face many barriers in the process. As an administrator in a small, rural system, this researcher had to grapple with the annually recurring difficulties of recruiting highly qualified teachers to serve in the classrooms of the system, training them to successfully provide instruction to meet the special needs of high minority, low performing, isolated schools only to have them leave within a year or two of their initial employment. Among the recruitment challenges was having to compete among other rural, Black Belt Region systems for the same few applicants whenever there was a vacancy.

The Black Belt school systems included in this study are rural systems with high percentages of minority students who qualify for free or reduced meals. These school systems are located in areas of high unemployment, little industry, and limited opportunities (Task Force on the Development of Economically Distressed Counties, 2001). The systems all depend upon the federal funds available through Title I, Title II, and other initiatives as local funding for education is minimal (ALSDE, 2006). Several are located in counties with dual educational systems—public schools largely enrolling Black students and private schools largely enrolling White students (Adams & Reed, n.d.). The intended outcome of the study was to gather information that would be useful as the school systems collaborate to identify ways to meet federal personnel mandates, retain federal funding for education, and improve the quality of education offered and, subsequently, the quality of life for the region.

The researcher used a researcher developed survey as a tool to determine if compliance experiences undertaken to meet the mandates were peculiar to one system or if the experiences were common enough to suggest patterns. The researcher was interested in determining if identifiable patterns among activities conducted suggest best practice strategies for improving recruitment and retention of highly qualified teachers for regional schools.

Four research questions guided this study:

1. What do administrators perceive to be barriers to NCLB compliance?
2. What do administrators perceive to be benefits of NCLB compliance?
3. In which core academic areas did the school systems experience greatest difficulty meeting the NCLB mandate to have highly qualified teachers?
4. What are best practices for the recruitment, retention, and improvement of teachers in rural areas as described by administrators?

As director of professional development and instruction in a small, rural, high poverty school system receiving Title II funds, the researcher understands the importance of having highly qualified teachers in the core academic classrooms. This researcher works directly in the implementation and supervision of induction and mentoring activities. Extensive mentoring is required to get new teachers ready for success in the classroom when the teachers have had few, if any, education courses and/or completed no teacher internship. This administrator experienced difficulty finding teachers when teachers had only to meet the requirements for a teaching certificate. The added NCLB requirement for finding highly qualified teachers had proven difficult for this system. Personnel in these small rural systems of the Black Belt expended much time and effort in recruitment efforts as they often competed for teachers among the same pool of applicants.

According to State Department of Education school system report cards (ALSDE), school systems are still hiring teachers who do not meet the highly qualified teacher status at the time of their employment. When hired, these teachers often need much professional development if the teaching-learning experience is to be successful. Each of the systems in this study tried individually to provide high quality professional development. For each system, the availability of funds was an issue and Title II funds were not being used exclusively for professional development and teacher recruitment.

Black Belt school systems were using funds to support programs and personnel. Data show that increases in student accountability expectations related directly to increased teacher performance expectations, which meant increased district expectations to support both groups. No longer could school leaders use one-time workshops which addressed favorite topics of the principal as professional development. Decision makers used teaching and student performance

data to plan and implement ongoing programs of professional development. “Obtaining access to professional development programs has been a particular problem in rural areas” (Pittinsky, 2005, p. 3). The systems studied could benefit by developing strategies to make best use of their funds by analyzing their collective data, forming learning communities and collaborating for the most effective delivery of a program of regional professional development addressing the needs of personnel in all of the systems.

Participant Data

Administrators from ten school systems participated in the survey. A total of 41 participants responded, including 6 superintendents, 3 federal program directors, 3 special education directors, 3 curriculum directors, 3 human resources directors, 19 principals, and 4 who indicated “Other” as their position. Twenty-five participants indicated that the enrollment in their school system was 2500 students or fewer. Fourteen respondents indicated enrollment of between 2,501 and 5000 students. Twenty-one participants indicated that 90 to 100% of students qualified for free or reduced meals; fifteen indicated that 60 to 89% of students qualified for free or reduced meals; and one respondent stated that 30 to 59% of students qualified for free or reduced meals. Table 1 illustrates enrollment and poverty level information of the systems participating in the study as provided by respondents.

Table 1

School System Information

System	Enrollment Category	Poverty Level %
A	0–2500	90
B	2501–5000	84
C	0–2500	51
D	2500–5000	73
E	0–2500	91
F	0–2500	89
G	0–2500	86
H	2500–5000	68
I	0–2500	93
J	0–2500	90

Among the respondents were nineteen school site administrators (principals) and twenty-two central office administrators. Twenty-two female and nineteen male administrators responded. Of the principals, there were seven elementary principals, three junior high principals, six senior high principals and five who chose “Other” as the level of the school. The number of years experience among respondents who answered this item ranged from 1 year to 29 years experience as an administrator, with twenty-two having ten years or less experience and seventeen having more than ten years experience. Table 2, Table 3, and Table 4 show the demographic information of the respondents including their gender, administrative positions, and the number of years of administrative experience.

Table 2

Gender of Respondents

	N	% of Respondents
Number of Females	22	54%
Number of Males	19	46%
Total Number of Respondents	41	100%

Table 3 data indicate the number of school site administrators and the number of central office administrators participating in the study. Of the central office administrators submitting completed surveys, six were superintendents, three federal program directors, three special education directors, three curriculum directors, and three human resources directors.

Table 3

Types of Administrative Positions

	N	% of Respondents
Principals	19	46%
Central Office*	22	54%
Total Administrators	41	100%

* Six superintendents participated in the survey.

While 41 administrators participated in the study, the responses of only 39 of them in response to the number of years served in administration could be used and only 40 in response

to the number of years served in their present employing system could be used. Table 4 shows these data.

Table 4

Years of Administrative Experience

Number of Years	Served in Administration	Years in Present System
0–5	12	17
6–11	11	11
12–17	09	06
18–22	03	04
23–29	04	02
Total Responses*	39	40

* One personnel director indicated that the position is not considered administrative in the employing system. One school system administrator listed N/A for number of years as a school administrator.

There were four research questions guiding the research. Survey items addressed all of the four research questions. Five items were related to the question, “What do administrators perceive to be barriers to compliance?” Two items were related to the question, “What do administrators perceive to be benefits of compliance?” Eleven items were related to question three, “In which core academic areas did the school systems experience greatest difficulty meeting the No Child Left Behind mandate to have highly qualified teachers?” Two items were

related to the fourth question, “What are best practices for the recruitment, retention, and improvement of teachers in rural areas as described by administrators?”

The survey included three sections. Part I asked questions about respondents demographics. Part II, section A, included eleven Likert-type items and four open-ended type items that addressed highly qualified teacher recruitment. Part II, section B included both Likert-type and open-ended items addressing high quality professional development related issues. In Part II, respondents were asked questions addressing benefits and challenges of implementing No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and about perceived changes in school culture resulting from NCLB.

Filling vacancies was a problem for every system. School site administrators were most frequently aware of the vacancy information for positions in areas at the grade levels represented at their school site and responded to whether or not filling the vacancy had been a challenge. Central office administrators were more likely than principals to know of vacancy information for all grade levels. Mathematics, science and special education positions were sources of difficulty more frequently than other areas. For the eleven items in Part II, section A, of the survey, the five point Likert-type responses were: 1 = great difficulty, 2 = some difficulty, 3 = little difficulty, 4 = no difficulty, and 0 = no data.

Additionally, participants were asked to judge the degree of difficulty experienced as their system worked to comply with the NCLB mandate for providing high quality professional development. A review of the data shows that 40% of systems responded that they experienced either great difficulty or some difficulty providing professional development for teachers already on staff who did not meet the highly qualified status; 70% experienced either great difficulty or some difficulty providing professional development related to test preparation; and 80%

experienced either great difficulty or some difficulty providing professional development for strengthening the instructional program.

Actions taken to offer professional development included:

- coaching and mentoring to prepare teachers to be better in their area of responsibility providing a wide variety of professional development within the local educational agency (LEA)
- being able to incorporate trainer-of-trainer models,
- training in the use of technology in classroom to support hands on learning,
- training in the use of hands on activities to improve achievement levels and help with student achievement,
- providing more training in the implementation of scientifically research based programs which consequently have positive impact on student achievement,
- holding courses for some teachers to meet highly qualified status,
- being able to have additional professional development,
- trying to implement a job embedded model for professional development,
- having access to increased venues for professional development,
- training in collaboration and innovation to affect more teamwork among teachers,
- focusing more on children and learning styles,
- varying activities to make better teachers,
- implementing high-quality, on-going professional development opportunities for teachers, and
- having more in-house and local professional development opportunities

These systems faced many challenges providing professional development activities to build teachers' content knowledge and teaching skills in ways that have the greatest impact on student achievement and teacher retention. This raised the question, "How can these systems work together to raise student achievement while ending the attitude of competition among the systems?"

Participating administrators were asked to give their perceptions of the impact on the school system culture resulting from the NCLB compliance efforts. Largely, administrators expressed positive perceptions of impact as indicated by responses such as "The level of expertise has improved," and "It has the full attention of all stakeholders who are involved in the education process" with a greater effort to educate the child as a greater focus. Some few negative respondents felt that "NCLB placed too much emphasis on testing" and that "special needs students have suffered."

Participant data were presented earlier in this chapter. The next sections present the quantitative findings which focus on teacher recruitment and retention related issues. The remaining sections present findings from the open-ended questions which address perceived benefits and barriers associated with implementation of NCLB as well as perceived changes in school culture associated with NCLB implementation.

Findings

Review of data from all systems in response to Part II, A, Highly Qualified Teacher, items 1 to 11 shows that of the systems responding, 70% experienced great difficulty or some difficulty recruiting primary and elementary level teachers; 80% in elementary special education; 60% in secondary reading and language arts; 100% in secondary mathematics and science; 70%

in secondary social studies; 90% in secondary special education; 80% in secondary fine arts and 90% in secondary foreign language. Table 5 shows these data.

Table 5

Recruitment of Teachers

	Response	1	2	3	4	0
Teaching Areas	Frequency of Response					
Primary		02	08	09	12	07
Elementary core academic		02	10	12	11	05
Elementary Special Education		13	10	08	04	04
Secondary Reading		09	04	08	04	04
Secondary Language Arts		07	11	09	03	05
Secondary Mathematics		29	03	01	0	02
Secondary Science		25	05	03	01	02
Secondary Social Studies		04	12	12	04	04
Secondary Special Education		19	07	05	03	03
Secondary Fine Arts		08	06	04	02	15
Secondary Foreign Language		16	05	02	03	11

Note. Possible Responses: 1 = great difficulty; 2 = some difficulty; 3 = little difficulty; 4 = no difficulty; 0 = no data

Participants were asked to list benefits experienced as a result of their working to meet the personnel mandates of the legislation. Responses were often identical and included the

following among directly personal benefits offered to personnel: salary incentives, tuition assistance, test preparation/tutoring, and test registration. Among benefits to the school system listed were: being able to afford highly qualified teachers; to hire additional teachers to reduce class sizes; and to offer mentoring and induction programs for new and novice teachers. Table 6 shows the frequency of the most common responses considered to be benefits.

Table 6

Benefits Experienced

Response	Frequency of Response
Receiving funds to take college course work	7
Being able to have high quality professional development	6
Salary incentives	5
Financial assistance for Praxis II fees	4
Recruiting teachers	3
Hiring highly qualified teachers	3
Class size reduction	2
Funding programs that the system could not previously afford	2
Holding personnel accountable for their work	2
Being more aware of data	2

Note. Additional responses were related to the systems' having more highly qualified teachers, tutoring, mentoring and helping students.

Participants were then asked to list difficulties or barriers experienced while working to meet the personnel mandates. The most frequent response was finding highly qualified teachers. Other responses similar to that one were having enough money to compete with wealthier systems for teachers and retaining effective, highly qualified teachers once they had been recruited. One personnel director indicated that having to verify transcripts and completing other paperwork by deadlines posed difficulties. Another wrote “most of my federal dollars go to teacher units, not much is left for bonuses.” Table 7 lists the responses given.

Table 7

Difficulties or Barriers Experienced

Response	Frequency of Response
Securing highly qualified teachers	16
Recruiting teachers to a rural area	3
None	3
Having little money for bonuses	2
Deadlines set	2
Additional work	2
Teachers leaving for better salary	1
Teaching time	1
Meeting academic accountability	1

The survey asked administrators to indicate the number of teachers of core academic subjects they had on staff at the end of the 2005–2006 school year who did not meet highly

qualified status requirements. Typical responses ranged from 0 to 20 teachers, with responses from central office administrators showing larger numbers of teachers who were not highly qualified by the end of the 2005–2006 school year than responses from school principals. Table 8 shows the most frequent responses.

Table 8

Number of Non-Highly Qualified Teachers

Response (Number of Teachers)	Frequency of Response
0	5
1	3
2	4
10	3
20	2

Note. The responses “don’t know” and “not sure” were also given

The survey asked administrators to list reasons teachers gave for leaving the system since NCLB became law. Some few responses were related to “traveling from home” and the “cost of gas”. Several said that teachers felt additional stress or felt increased liability as a result of their students’ lack of ability. Additionally, responses included the lack of administrative support, moving into another non-teaching educational position, and reasons not related to NCLB. The most frequent responses are provided in Table 9.

Table 9

Reasons for Leaving

Response	Frequency of Response
Salary	13
Location	11
Better working conditions	5
Retiring	5
Teachers were unwilling to go back to school	3

Note. “Wanted more city and less rural” and “changing employment areas” were also among responses.” Five administrators indicated that no teachers left because of the law.

Responses to items in Part II, Part B of the survey are related to the systems’ requirement to provide high quality professional development. One item, Number 16, asked respondents to rate the degree of difficulty experienced in compliance with the mandate to provide training for existing personnel. Another item, Number 17, asked the respondents to address the degree of difficulty experienced in compliance with the requirement to provide test preparation sessions. The third item, Number 18, asked respondents to address the degree of difficulty experienced providing professional development focused on strengthening the instructional program. Table 10 shows the frequency of responses for these items.

Table 10

Professional Development-Related Difficulties/Barriers

Item # 16 — Existing Personnel	
1 = great difficulty	1
2 = some difficulty	3
3 = little difficulty	19
4 = no difficulty	14
0 = no data	0

Item # 17 — Test Preparation	
1 = great difficulty	1
2 = some difficulty	11
3 = little difficulty	14
4 = no difficulty	7
0 = no data	4

Item # 18 — Instructional Program	
1 = great difficulty	3
2 = some difficulty	8
3 = little difficulty	13
4 = no difficulty	13
0 = no data	0

Participants were asked to list benefits related to providing professional development. The most frequent responses were those related to the systems' having more funds and being

able to offer more and better job-embedded professional development activities. Respondents also thought highly of the hands-on and technology related activities undertaken based on the scientifically based research program information they had examined. Several noted that sessions were provided to improve teaching and learning and indicated that teachers were able to achieve highly qualified status. One administrator remarked, “Professional development mandates enabled the school system a variety of activities to make better teachers.” Another wrote of the “increase in the amount and variety of professional development available.” Table 11 shows the frequency of responses related to activities perceived to be benefits to professional development.

Table 11

Professional Development Benefits

Response	Frequency of Response
Wider variety of professional development	7
Improved professional development with Title II funds	7
Systems’ being able to conduct more scientific research based training	6
Developing skills and attitudes of expertise	5
Having more consultants	3
Funding	2
Training in the use of technology	1
On-going support	1
Teachers became more confident	1

These same participants were also asked to address the difficulties encountered while meeting professional development mandates. The most frequent responses addressed logistical matters such as scheduling professional development activities, getting presenters to come to the region, and having quality substitutes to cover classes while teachers were in professional development sessions. Other concerns included having to schedule many sessions related to tests rather than addressing other instructional implementation areas. The most frequently offered responses are provided in Table 12.

Table 12

Professional Development Difficulties

Response	Frequency of Response
None	10
Problems arising from teachers' having to travel	7
Having time to schedule activities during the school day	5
Getting substitutes to cover classes	2
Limited funding	2

Note. Additionally one respondent indicated that the “professional development placed too much emphasis on test results at the expense of teaching.”

Respondents were asked to list incentives used to attract teachers to their system. The most frequently used incentives all related to funding. One novel response was buying supplies for the teacher as an incentive. Table 13 shows the most frequent responses.

Table 13

Incentives Used to Attract Teachers

Response	Frequency of Response
Providing no incentives	9
Incentive pay	8
Signing bonuses	7
Tuition assistance	3
Student loan forgiveness	2
Registration	2
Dual certification approach to develop teachers in demand	1
Low cost of living in area	1
Providing extra supplies	1

While most participants responded that addressing NCLB personnel and professional development mandates had major positive impact on the culture of their systems, others wrote of their having more tension and stress among personnel and recruitment concerns. Some referred to the increased “emphasis on teaching all students” and “having more qualified teachers” as positive benefits. Several responded that their school culture had changed as “both teachers and administrators were made more accountable with NCLB raising the bar on standards”. Another response addressed “having the full attention of all stakeholders who are involved in the educational process—parents, community leaders, business partners, etc.” Table 14 shows these responses

Table 14

School Culture

Response	Frequency of Response
Positive Impact school/system having raised standards	9
Personnel being more accountable	5
Making finding teachers more difficult	6
Creating more tension	4
Losing good teachers	2
Overlooking real student achievement as a result of test focus	2
Having to do more paperwork	1
Increased purchases	1
Having more professional development	1
Using actual data to improve	1

Note. One respondent indicated that compliance resulted in “little impact on the culture.”

Summary

The analysis of the data from the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Survey of Compliance Trends suggests that administrators in the high poverty, rural school systems of Alabama’s Black Belt region view actions taken in compliance to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act’s (ESEA) hiring and professional development teacher quality mandates as largely beneficial. The responses also indicate that personnel encountered some barriers as they sought to comply with the mandates.

Open-ended responses to the first question, “What are administrators’ perceived barriers to compliance?” suggest that leaders viewed their systems’ inability to recruit and retain highly-qualified teachers as the most common barrier. Additionally the geographic location and specifics of rural life presented other barriers to their successfully meeting the highly-qualified teacher and high quality, job-embedded professional development mandates of NCLB. Many respondents indicated that there were no difficulties/barriers to report as a result of the added requirements for professional development.

In response to the second question, “What do administrators perceive to be benefits of compliance?, most of the benefits identified by respondents were related to the systems having additional funds available. Responses ranged from teachers’ being helped by receiving tuition and registration fee assistance, to systems’ being able to use funding incentives to recruit teachers, and to the schools and systems being better able to afford high quality professional development for instructional personnel.

The third question asked administrators to indicate “In which core academic areas did the school systems experience difficulty meeting the No Child Left Behind mandate to have highly qualified teachers?” Responses were directly related to the grade levels represented in the schools. At the primary and elementary levels, most indicated that they did experience difficulty recruiting primary and elementary level teachers, and special education teachers. At the secondary level, leaders indicated that they experienced difficulty recruiting reading and language arts, mathematics and science, social studies, special education teachers, fine arts and foreign language teachers.

The responses to question four “What are best practices for the recruitment, retention, and improvement of teachers to rural areas as described by study participants?” include

responses from the items related to perceived benefits items and the school/system culture areas. Among best practices were using financial incentives and telling of the advantages of coming to live in rural areas; conducting mentoring and induction activities; helping all personnel to be more accountable; providing materials and supplies for teachers' classrooms; raising standards overall; providing job-embedded professional development opportunities; and using data to inform teachers.

Chapter Five provides a discussion of the findings of this study. In addition to listing strategies for increasing the effectiveness of personnel recruitment and retention activities, the researcher will present suggestions for the systems developing a regional learning community, partnership approach for providing professional development. This should enable system leaders to collaborate in ways that will make professional development comprehensive, on going, and data driven for teachers in the systems. The ultimate outcome of better recruitment, retention and professional development approaches should be higher student achievement and enhanced quality of life in the region.

CHAPTER V. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This study of Alabama's Black Belt region public school system administrators was undertaken to ascertain their perceptions related to activities pursued by their employers in compliance with the No Child Left Behind Act's quality personnel mandates. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a discussion of the findings; present the conclusions; and discuss the implications for improving teacher recruitment, retention and professional development practices. Recommendations are offered to policy makers regarding the high needs school systems of the Black Belt region of Alabama. This chapter ends with recommendations for further research.

The purpose of the study was to assess perceptions of public school system administrators in the high poverty, rural school systems of the Black Belt regarding their systems' efforts to comply with No Child Left Behind (NCLB) personnel quality mandates. Specifically, administrators were asked to share their perceptions about their employing school systems' experiences related to hiring highly qualified teachers in all core academic classes and providing high-quality professional development. The research considers how or if both of these tasks contributed to increases in student academic achievement. Completing the No Child Left Behind Survey of Compliance Trends allowed administrators to provide the data indicating

which required compliance activities were considered beneficial or challenging for the school systems.

This chapter includes a brief review of content presented in earlier chapters along with a discussion of how the research questions guided the process, informed the types of survey data collected, and influenced general conclusions reached. The chapter also provides a discussion of the data findings and suggestions about regionally relevant implications for identifying strategies and best practices for the school systems of the region and elsewhere.

Hiring highly qualified teachers and providing high quality professional development for instructional personnel were both made part of the school site and central office administrators' operational directives with the NCLB reauthorization of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). "Recruiting and retaining good teachers for high-needs schools may be the most vexing problem facing America's educational policy makers" (Berry, 2008, p. 766). NCLB included these mandates in order to enhance teaching and learning in all classrooms—especially high needs classrooms such as those in the study.

A major challenge is that high poverty, high minority, rural school systems experience great difficulties attracting highly qualified teachers for vacancies in core academic areas (Collins, 1999; Ingersoll, 2004; Jimmerson, 2003; McClure & Reeves, 2004; Sunderman & Kim, 2005). A second challenge is that these school systems experience difficulties implementing quality professional development which could increase the likelihood of their retaining highly qualified teachers for their classrooms (Ingersoll, 2004; Pittinsky, 2005; Sunderman & Kim, 2005).

When NCLB changed the teacher recruitment landscape to require that every teacher of core academic subjects be highly qualified, the recruitment and retention difficulties became

documented personnel-related problems for administrators. All teachers—even those who were already licensed and teaching in the classrooms—had to meet the highly qualified teacher requirement. Some teachers left rather than do additional coursework; some went back to school; some were recruited away by other school systems. An additional problem for the rural systems was providing high quality professional development that:

- addressed the needs of existing personnel who were seeking to meet the highly qualified teacher requirement;
- assisted newly hired teachers in addressing the instructional needs of high poverty, minority students in the rural, geographically isolated schools located in Alabama’s Black Belt region; and
- increased the likelihood that the highly qualified teachers would continue their employment in the systems.

Review of Methodology

Directly involved in these personnel areas specifically related to the NCLB compliance experience in her employing system, the researcher sought to determine whether or not there was a common pattern among area school systems with similar demographics. A survey was developed to gather information from school site administrators and central office administrators responsible for the recruitment and professional development of teachers. Four research questions were identified to conduct the study:

1. What do administrators perceive to be barriers to NCLB compliance?
2. What do administrators perceive to be benefits of NCLB compliance?
3. In which core academic areas did the school systems experience greatest difficulty meeting the NCLB mandate to have highly qualified teachers?

4. What are best practices for the recruitment, retention, and improvement of teachers in rural areas as described by study participants?

After securing university human subjects research approval and receiving permission from superintendents in twelve public school systems of the region, The No Child Left Behind Survey of Compliance Trends was mailed to the superintendents, personnel directors, federal program directors, special education directors, curriculum directors and principals in Black Belt school systems. Participating administrators mailed completed surveys to the researcher in the self-addressed, stamped envelope included in the survey packet.

Part I of the survey contained nine items related to the demographics of the school system, the schools, and the administrators completing the survey. Part II of the survey had two sections. Section A contained 15 items related to the highly qualified teacher mandate. Section B contained six items related to professional development and one item related to the impact of the overall compliance effort on the culture.

Part II, Section A of the survey asked participants to provide information about probable areas of core academic teacher vacancies and the extent to which there were any recruitment challenges experienced since the 2002–2003 school year. Part II, Section B asked respondents to provide information about the professional development experience, the use of incentives for recruiting teachers, and the influence on the system or school's culture as a result of the use of the No Child Left Behind Act funds.

Findings

The following sections provide a brief review of key findings which were presented in chapter four. The four sections included are (1) perceived barriers to NCLB compliance, (2) perceived benefits of NCLB compliance, (3) core academic areas in which school systems

experienced greatest difficulty having highly qualified teachers, and (4) best practices for recruitment, retention, and improvement of teachers?

Perceived Barriers and Challenges to Compliance

Responses to survey questions provided data of administrators' comments on the recruitment mandate compliance actions school systems had to undertake in order to have highly qualified teachers. Administrators also commented on activities undertaken by systems seeking to comply with the high quality professional development requirement. Additionally, administrators were asked to respond to one item asking them about the impact of their compliance activities on the culture of the system. Sometimes the responses to the culture item were negative responses such as "everyone feels pressure as we strive to meet AMOs each year" and "caused several experienced teachers to retire" were viewed as challenges/barriers to compliance.

Based on the opinions of the responding administrators, recruitment activities would have been difficult to achieve because of demographics or circumstances that were peculiar to the location of the system and impossible for the system to overlook or correct without help from entities other than the school system. Responses such as "wanted more city, less rural" and "traveling from home" related to the geographic isolation of the school system location as a challenge. Also, the absence of medical facilities, recreational outlets, and shopping malls were quality of life issues perceived to be barriers. McClure and Reeves (2004) suggest the importance of community "rootedness" when countering rural isolation affecting recruitment and retention. Recruiting and developing local talent is seen as a strategy with high potential for rural areas because candidates are already familiar with the rural lifestyle and already connected to the community (McClure & Reeves, 2004).

Professional development activities were often difficult to schedule many times as school systems were located miles from colleges and universities and other training facilities. Having few substitute teachers available often hindered teachers' participation in professional development activities. As rural teachers were often required to teach more than one subject, providing a comprehensive program of professional development for experienced and new teachers was challenging.

Perceived Benefits of Compliance

Responses to survey questions provided information about the activities that administrators perceived to have benefited the system in spite of or because the system had to comply with the mandate in order to continue receiving federal funds. Activities such as "having additional funding to provide nationally known consultants to help teachers plan lessons for all students", "reimbursement for college courses", and "provided funds for the Praxis II" were perceived to have been beneficial. Positive responses to the question about how compliance impacted culture, such as "improvement in schools' curriculum", "meeting the needs of students", and "students' scores on reading and math tests are rising" were perceived benefits to the school culture.

Difficult to Fill Teaching Positions in Core Academic Areas

Responses to eleven Likert-type questions provided specific data regarding teacher recruitment difficulties in areas considered core instructional areas according to NCLB. Data showed that school system administrators' responses showed their having the greatest difficulty recruiting teachers in the following areas, in order of frequency:

<u>Teaching Area</u>	<u>Area of Greatest Difficulty</u>
• secondary mathematics	29
• secondary science,	25
• secondary special education,	19
• secondary foreign language	17
• elementary special education,	13
• secondary reading	9
• Secondary Fine Arts	8
• Secondary Language Arts	7
• secondary social studies	4
• elementary education	2
• Primary	2

Administrators' responses showed that they experienced some difficulty recruiting in the following areas, in order of frequency:

<u>Teaching Area</u>	<u>Area of Some Difficulty</u>
• secondary social studies	12
• Secondary Language Arts	11
• elementary special education	10
• elementary education	10
• Primary	8
• Secondary Fine Arts	6
• secondary special education	6
• secondary science,	5

<u>Teaching Area</u>	<u>Area of Some Difficulty</u>
• secondary foreign language	4
• secondary reading	4
• Secondary mathematics	3

Responses to open-ended items about recruitment difficulty were included on the survey to determine if responses would be the same as or different from the recruitment challenge areas responses listed for school systems. Response information for these survey questions could also be used to help systems plan collaborative recruitment activities. “Murphy and DeArmond (2003) recommend that districts remove organizational barriers and responsive recruitment policies and consider joining with other districts to create a regional human resource institution” (as cited in McClure & Reeves, 2004, p. 13).

Best Practices for the Recruitment, Retention, and Improvement of Teachers in Rural Areas

School systems used a limited number of incentives to attract teachers. The most commonly reported incentive was offering signing bonuses in the hard-to-staff areas of secondary mathematics and science. One principal indicated that teachers were allowed to purchase classroom supplies as an incentive. Additionally, school systems supplied mentoring resources as part of the induction process and provided assistance for teachers who completed college coursework. Some systems offered no financial incentives.

The school systems in these rural settings could benefit from working collaboratively to identify collective strategies and best practices for recruitment and retention of teachers to the region. Analyzing the responses to survey questions relating to professional development, incentives offered, and the reasons teachers gave for leaving could prove useful in addressing the

teacher shortage areas. Although some of these strategies are utilized in individual districts, a regional approach may be of benefit in the Black Belt. Participant responses were similar to those suggested by McClure and Reeves (2004) when offering rural specific recruitment and retention practices. Specifically, this information could be helpful as this group of school systems planned professional development for teachers in the region.

Among the suggestions McClure and Reeves offer for regional implementation are the following, many of which are already being used by Black Belt school systems individually:

- Collect state and local data on teacher supply and demand
- Base recruitment efforts on data analysis
- Increase the pool of candidates
- Include all vital partners in collaborative efforts
- Offer targeted incentives
- Evaluate efforts regularly
- Invest in “grow-your-own” initiatives to develop teachers
- Encourage universities to customize teacher education programs
- Include building-level staff in the hiring process
- Institute formal induction programs
- Offer incentives for staying
- Improve the schools
- Involve the community, and
- Invest in school leadership development (p. 16)

Regionally, the systems could collaborate to “target candidates with rural backgrounds or with personal characteristics or educational experiences that predispose them to live in rural

areas” (Collins, 1999, p. 7). Systems could plan for implementation of chosen practices such as offering high school career and technical education classes for future teachers and working with colleges to offer distance learning and satellite classes for substitutes and paraeducators who want to pursue teacher certification.

“The changing demographics of American school children suggest an increasing demand for effective teachers of color in particular and, in general, for teachers who are effective at raising the achievement of students from disadvantaged or minority backgrounds” (Murnane & Steele, 2007, p. 5). Working collaboratively with other school systems in the region to develop a pool of prepared candidates to address recruitment and professional development concerns raised in this study should lessen the effects of competition among systems for the available applicants when vacancies occur.

One activity that was listed among benefits as a result of the systems’ receiving NCLB funding was being able to offer signing bonuses in hard-to-staff areas such as mathematics, science and special education. Additionally, respondents indicated that they were able to offer higher quality professional development and invite professionally renowned presenters as more professional development funds were available. Unfortunately, only a few administrators indicated these strategies were used in their school systems.

Several responses were viewed both as benefits and barriers, including funding, quality of life, and professional development. In many instances, the responses indicated that activities were viewed differently by principals and central office administrators employed in the same system. Principals listed having to provide substitutes among difficulties encountered while central office administrators listed having funding to provide substitutes among the benefits

received. Central office administrators responded that mentoring was being provided sometimes while principals listed mentoring and induction as desired activities.

Recommendations

While having a competent, effective teacher is important for all students, staffing rural, high poverty, high minority classrooms with highly qualified teachers requires more than a mandate to achieve. “Ensuring that low-income and minority students have access to high quality teachers is confounded by structural barriers to attracting and retaining teachers to schools” (Sunderman & Kim, 2005, p.11). Recruiting the teachers is difficult and is only part of the focus of No Child Left Behind Act personnel quality mandates. Retention and development are the remaining areas for focus. According to Murnane and Steele (2007),

The unequal distribution of effective teachers is perhaps the most urgent problem facing American education. Poor children and children of color are disproportionately assigned to teachers who have the least preparation and the weakest academic backgrounds, and this pattern is long standing. (p. 15)

“Successful teachers, especially in hard-to-staff schools, must have strong leaders” (Wong, 2004, p. 55). For that reason, leaders were surveyed for this study rather than teachers. The purpose of the study was to determine the perceptions of school leaders regarding the activities undertaken by their employing school systems related to the systems’ having quality teaching in all academic classrooms and successful student academic achievement for all students. As Murnane and Steele report,

Teacher turnover is high in schools that serve large shares of poor or nonwhite students.

The work in these schools is difficult, and the teachers who attempt to do it are often the

least equipped to succeed and often lack the working conditions necessary to succeed.
(p. 15).

“Without carefully thought out professional development programs, school districts will not have effective teachers who can produce student achievement results” (Wong, 2004, p, 47). In a 2004 Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) report, *Resolve and Resources To Get a Qualified Teacher in Every Classroom*, researchers admit that for years, education leaders “have known that we need to get a qualified teacher in every classroom” (p. 1). The organization’s president at the time of the report shares that states in the South have:

- Set higher standards for teachers;
- Raised teachers’ salaries;
- Begun to use technology to bring qualified teachers “virtually” into classrooms;
- Developed alternative routes for persons to become teachers;
- Started to help new teachers on the job, right from the start, in some states;
- Paid at least a small part of teachers’ salaries for doing different kinds of teaching jobs or for improving student performance rather than basing all of their salaries on years of experience and degrees earned; and
- Made many well-intentioned changes ... one by one, disconnected from other changes (SREB, 2004).

Little research is available related to recruitment and retention of teachers to school districts similar to Black Belt region school systems. While minimal recommendations have been made related to providing teachers for rural school systems, little research attention has addressed the impact of regionally tailoring teacher recruitment and retention activities to the

specific conditions of this region of Alabama or other rural areas with equally high concentrations of poverty and minority populations.

In spite of the fact that many of these public school systems are located in counties with double digit unemployment levels, some higher than 20 percent, public school stakeholders should work with community leaders to develop a package of incentives such as delaying deposits for utilities for teachers moving into the area. Additionally, city or county leaders could work with area vendors to provide coupons to be used at area stores. Another strategy could be permitting new teachers to pay reduced rental deposit amounts when moving into area rental units—all attempts to attract teachers to the schools.

As geographic isolation and poor quality roads hinder teacher participation in professional development activities held at sites away from the region and discourage consultants from traveling to sites in the region, research is needed on the impact of developing additional strategies for improving and expanding distance learning for delivery of professional development sessions. Additionally, universities could further support teachers and administrators by holding university-level coursework at various sites within the Black Belt. Data should be kept on whether or not regional personnel actually participate in sessions and the extent that any appreciable levels of student achievement increases result from such professional development.

“The era of isolated teaching is over. Good teaching thrives in a collaborative learning environment created by teachers and school leaders” (Wong, 2004, p. 52). The school systems in the region should benefit from a regionally inclusive approach to professional development with teachers, school system leaders, community leaders, community college, university, and state department of education stakeholders working collaboratively among the school systems to

develop a professional learning community. “Few states have developed specific programs to address the problems of rural teacher recruitment and retention” (Collins, 1999, p. 2). School systems in the Black Belt may benefit from specific studies conducted on recruitment, retention and professional development studies specific to the region. Data resulting from such studies should add to the scarcity of information available. A much needed outcome of the recruitment effort should be developing ways to improve the content of local area descriptions accompanying vacancy advertisements to show better the advantages of rural living.

Implications

Many of the problems related to attracting and retaining high quality teachers are only marginally, if at all, related to whether or not teachers meet the No Child Left Behind definition of “highly qualified” (Sunderman & Kim, 2005, p. 13). Teacher shortages are often geographic or are more pronounced in certain academic areas. Teachers also leave teaching altogether because of poor working conditions and low salaries. According to Sunderman and Kim (2005), “NCLB may worsen inequities in the distribution of qualified teachers if skilled teachers avoid or leave low-performing schools that are identified as in need of improvement and subject to federal sanctions” (p. 13). There is also research to show that teachers avoid positions in high minority, high poverty, lower performing rural, inner city schools whenever possible (Hanushek, et al. 2001). State education agencies are aware that districts with high needs demographics may experience difficulty attracting and retaining highly qualified teachers, but they do not always see that situation as “within their domain” (Sunderman & Kim, 2005). Many school systems experience difficulty attracting teachers to work in their schools. Regionalization may be a viable approach to addressing the challenges of recruiting highly qualified teachers and providing high quality professional development for instructional staff.

While there are certainly competent, dedicated teachers who go beyond the regular call of duty to ensure that their students achieve excellence and master the knowledge and skills required for success, many teachers arrive at schools unprepared to effectively provide the level of instruction required for success for all of the students. “Research has shown that, when it comes to the distribution of the best teachers, poor and minority students do not get their fair share” (Peske, & Haycock, 2006, p. 1).

The school systems in this study are located in the Black Belt region of Alabama—an area “characterized by high poverty and related economic problems” (Calhoun, Reeder, & Bagi, 2000, p. 1). The Black Belt is known for its concentration of Black people and for being home to persistent poverty, poor employment, unemployment, limited education, poor health, single parenthood, and heavy dependence on public assistance programs (Zekeri, 2005). A number of counties in the Black Belt are referred to by the United States Department of Agriculture as counties of “persistent poverty”.

Why Rural Matters (2009) reports that “Alabama has sizable populations of rural students and rural minority students, very high poverty, and a high proportion of students qualifying for special education services” (p. 33). Alabama is located in the South. “Poverty in the United States is not randomly distributed. Places with the worst poverty levels tend to cluster together. In fact, U.S. poverty is concentrated in certain regions and subregions and is located mainly in the South” (Allen-Smith, Wimberley, & Morris 2000; Wimberley & Morris, 1997, 2002). Alabama’s Black Belt region is one of these places with the worst poverty levels as referenced above.

In order to begin comprehensive improvement in the Black Belt region, people must shy away from quick fixes to address the region’s “quality of life issues” by employing “sustained

efforts to overcome distress rooted in illiteracy, teenage pregnancy, high school dropout rates, drug use, poor performing schools, and inadequate health care. In fact, nothing is as important for rural economic development as improving rural public schools” (Lee & Summers, n.d., p. 11).

Finding and retaining good teachers is a challenge for all schools, yet rural schools are at a considerable disadvantage in an increasingly competitive market for teachers. The most effective way to improve the achievement of our students is to improve the quality of teaching. No effort to improve the quality of education for all students, especially for the most disadvantaged, can succeed unless it changes the way in which teachers teach and students learn (Sparks & Hirsh, 2000, p. 5).

The Black Belt region’s schools need to have the best teachers possible in every classroom if we are to maximize educational opportunities for all students (Darling-Hammond, 2005; Sanders & Rivers, 1996) as “students taught by unqualified teachers are punished for their lack of academic achievement” (Lewis, 1998, p.181). “Poverty and other poor quality-of-life conditions are neither evenly nor randomly distributed across the United States; they concentrate in the South” (Wimberley & Morris, 2002, p. 294).

The children of Alabama’s Black Belt region of the South deserve the best education possible if they are to be prepared to live better lives as adults. The children of the region’s schools are everyone’s children and as school administrators, we must do all that we can to provide high quality education. Our students must not be punished for their race, their region or their rurality as it relates to the quality of education provided for them (Wimberley & Morris, 2002). Whether or not No Child Left Behind is reauthorized, school systems in the region would benefit by collaborating regionally to offer quality education. Schools must provide children

lessons taught by highly qualified, skilled, caring teachers. Teachers must be supported by leaders who respect teachers and their expertise, students, their families, and the communities in which they work; and honor the need to continuously provide data-driven, ongoing, quality professional development for enhanced academic performance for all students.

Limitations and Areas for Further Research

While the survey was an excellent approach for obtaining the data, the research would probably have had more respondents if the instrument had been sent out electronically. The use of technology has increased with the State Department of Education using web seminars and electronic podcasts to deliver and gather information. Administrators have become more accustomed to quickly responding to requests for information via computer. The number of school systems participating in the study should be increased to include a few more of the systems that are located in the Black Belt. If replicated, this study should provide an opportunity for evaluation of teacher retention and student performance data after the systems collaboratively implement a regional professional development, learning community approach.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act has not been reauthorized since No Child Left Behind in 2001. Still a work in progress, the 2007 reauthorization date has come and gone with proposals for reauthorization evoking widespread emotional responses and the legislation is still the subject of controversy (Education Week, February 22, 2010). Recent peeks at information about omissions, combinations and replacements do not yet indicate the extent to which the highly qualified teacher and high quality professional development mandates are to be impacted in the reauthorization. Once finalized, a follow-up study examining similarities in perceived barriers and benefits may be useful.

The research on the perception of administrators in rural, high poverty areas could be expanded to include school systems of the Black Belt being compared with some systems from another high poverty region such as the Delta region. A comparison of the findings could be made using either survey or interview research methods.

Additionally, it would be interesting and valuable to note whether changes in teacher quality standards for entry into the field will result in more or fewer recruitment challenges for high poverty, high minority school systems. Currently, work is under way to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Efforts are already evident from groups with special interests related to what is expected to be included in the new legislation, such as charter schools and common curriculum standards. An interesting area of research for the region would address whether or not changes in teacher quality standards in the legislation will result in more or fewer recruitment challenges for high poverty, high minority school systems and in which academic areas.

One major criticism of the currently used teacher quality effort has been of its lack of a standard definition for highly qualified teachers. An interesting area for research of interest to the Black Belt region, the state, and the South would be what changes, if any, will be made in the definition of quality teaching and what implications any revisions will have on teacher recruitment and retention for rural systems as a result of ESEA reauthorization.

Already acknowledged is the fact that teacher quality student learning (Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002). Additionally acknowledged is “that teacher quality varies across schools and districts, with some better able to attract and retain high-quality teachers than others” (Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff as cited in Sunderman & Kim, 2005, p. 11). With talk of possible common standards, research could focus on addressing what additional skills teachers will need

to meet the curriculum changes of the present decade if common standards are developed. How will professional development change for educators in the region as changes are made in curriculum?

Summary

The purpose of the study was to gather information from school site administrators and school system central office administrators as their school systems worked to meet No Child Left Behind (NCLB) compliance requirements related to quality teaching. The ultimate desired outcome of the study is increased student academic performance and success.

The high poverty, rural, high minority school systems chosen for the study all receive NCLB funds. The availability of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) funding has allowed systems to support programs and personnel for a number of years. Most still depend on continued receipt of the funds for programs and personnel. The information gathered is significant for leaders in these systems as operating without NCLB funds would negatively impact the financial well-being of these systems and the quality of education offered for students.

The systems use the funds to offer signing bonuses and other incentives to teachers who are willing to accept a teaching position whenever there are vacancies especially in the areas of mathematics, science, and special education. NCLB funds are being used to offer a higher quality program of professional development for instructional personnel as schools work toward meeting instructional accountability requirements for student performance.

Rather than having to work individually, leaders in all of the school systems could work collaboratively including colleges and universities to organize professional learning communities

in order to decrease the attrition rate among newly recruited teachers and increase the level of instructional effectiveness among all teachers.

The study allowed administrators to identify those compliance efforts that they considered to be benefits and identify those activities that they considered challenges or barriers. The perceptions of the superintendents, principals, and other administrators at central office are important as these administrators are directly responsible for ensuring that all classrooms have teachers who meet certification requirements and are prepared to deliver the level and quality of instruction required for the success of all students.

High quality public education is especially crucial today, as advances in the United States economy have made cognitive skills more important than ever in determining labor market success. But today's public schools are not equipping all students with the skills needed to thrive in a rapidly changing economy, and the economic consequences are becoming more serious for students who leave school without critical skills. (Murnane & Steele, 2007, p. 1)

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Appendix 1

Letter of Introduction

Dear Superintendent _____

I am Rosa Marie Ashmon, a central office administrator in the Wilcox County school system and an Auburn University graduate student. As a doctoral dissertation requirement, I am collecting information related to my particular area of interest: Administrators' Perceptions of the Impact of the No Child Left Behind Act on High Poverty, Rural School Systems. The Purpose of this study is to determine administrators' perceptions of both the advantages and difficulties experienced by Black Belt Region school systems as a result of their compliance with No Child Left Behind Title II mandates.

I am requesting your permission to survey personnel in your school system. If you agree, I will deliver the No Child Left Behind Survey of Compliance Trends according to your instructions for completion by the superintendent, the personnel director, special education director, federal programs director, curriculum director(s), and principals in the system. After completion of the survey, personnel will be asked to return the document to me by mail in the self-addressed, stamped mailer provided.

All information will be used anonymously. Results of the study will be shared among Black Belt Region system superintendents and personnel of the Truman Pierce Institute of Auburn University. While data will be included in my dissertation, I will not identify information specific to your system. Your considering my request is greatly appreciated. If you have questions or need additional information, you may contact me by email at ashmorm@auburn.edu or telephone at (334) 996-9441. You may also contact my dissertation committee chairwoman, Dr. Cynthia Reed, by email at reedcyn@auburn.edu or telephone at (334) 844-4488.

Sincerely yours,

Rosa Marie Ashmon

Attachment

Appendix 2

No Child Left Behind

Survey of Compliance Trends

Part I

System _____

Student enrollment in system:

- 0 – 2,500 students 2,501 – 5,000 students
 5,001 – 7,500 students 7,501 – 10,000 students
 more than 10,000 students

Percent of students qualifying for free/reduced meals:

- 0—29% 30—59% 60—89% 90—100%

Current Position: (please check below)

- Superintendent Personnel/Human Resources Director
 Special Education Director Curriculum Director
 Federal Programs Director Principal
 Other (please list): _____

Gender: Male Female

How many years have you been a school administrator? _____

How many years have you been an administrator in this system? _____

If you are a principal, please complete the following grade level information.

Your school includes grades _____ to _____.

Classification of school: ___ Primary ___ Elementary

 ___ Junior High ___ Senior High

 ___ Other (please list) _____

Part II

A. Highly Qualified Personnel — Teacher

Please use the following scale to respond to the questions below.

1 = great difficulty 2 = some difficulty 3 = little difficulty 4= no difficulty 0 = no data

The response “no data” indicates that since school year 2002–2003, no teacher has been recruited and no teacher has left the system in this area of instruction.

Since the 2002–2003 school year, what has been the degree of difficulty in your system of having to recruit and/or maintain Highly Qualified teachers in the following areas?

1. Primary teachers _____
2. Elementary core academic teachers _____
3. Elementary Special Education teachers _____
4. Secondary Reading teachers _____
5. Secondary Language Arts teachers _____
6. Secondary Mathematics teachers _____
7. Secondary Science teachers _____
8. Secondary Social Studies teachers _____
9. Secondary Special Education teachers _____

10. Secondary Fine Arts teachers _____

11. Secondary Foreign Language teachers _____

12. **If you received Title II funds, please list benefits experienced by your system while meeting highly qualified personnel mandates.** _____

13. **If you received NCLB Title II funds, please list difficulties experienced by your system while meeting highly qualified personnel mandates.**

14. **How many non-highly qualified teachers of core subjects did you have on staff at the end of the 2005–2006 school year?** _____

15. **Since NCLB became law, what reasons did teachers give for leaving your system?**

B. Professional Development

Please use the following scale to respond to the question below.

1 = great difficulty 2 = some difficulty 3 = little difficulty 4= no difficulty 0 = no data

The response "no data" indicates that since school year 2002–2003, no professional development sessions were provided in relation to No Child Left Behind personnel compliance.

Since the 2002-2003 school year, what has been the degree of difficulty experienced in your system's efforts to comply with the NCLB mandates for providing high quality professional development in the following situations?

16. Providing professional development for existing personnel _____

17. Providing professional development test preparation sessions _____

18. Providing professional development for strengthening the instructional program _____

19. **If you received NCLB Title II funds, please list benefits experienced by your system while meeting professional development mandates.** _____

20. **If you received NCLB Title II funds, please list difficulties experienced by your system while meeting professional development mandates.** _____

21. **What incentive(s) have you used to attract teachers to your system?** _____

22. **How has the NCLB compliance effort impacted the overall school system/school culture in your district ?** _____

If additional space is needed for an item, please write the item number and response on a separate sheet of paper and attach it to the survey. Please place the survey in the self-addressed, stamped mailer and mail it to:

Rosa Ashmon

P.O Box 457

Orrville, Alabama 36767

If you would like a copy of the results from this study, please complete the following information:

Name: _____

Email: _____

Thanks for your participation

Appendix 3
Alabama Quality Teaching Standards

ALABAMA QUALITY TEACHING STANDARDS

Pursuant to the mission of improving the academic achievement of all students in the public schools of Alabama, teachers will align their practice and professional learning with the following standards

Standard 1—Content Knowledge: To improve the learning of all students, teachers master the disciplines related to their teaching fields including the central concepts, important facts and skills, and tools of inquiry; they anchor content in learning experiences that make the subject matter meaningful for all students

Rationale. Researchers identify a strong relationship between teachers' content knowledge and the achievement of their students. Three dimensions of content knowledge contribute to effective teaching: (1) deep knowledge of the academic disciplines related to the subjects of instruction, (2) an understanding of pedagogical content knowledge that is required to make the subject understandable and meaningful for all learners, and (3) knowledge of the state standards and district curriculum for subjects taught at particular instructional levels

Key Indicators

A. Academic Discipline(s)

1. Knowledge of the structure of the academic disciplines related to the subject-matter content areas of instruction and of the important facts and central concepts, principles, theories, and tools of inquiry associated with these disciplines.
2. Knowledge of ways to organize and present content so that it is meaningful and engaging to all learners whom they teach (pedagogical content knowledge).
3. Ability to use students' prior knowledge and experiences to introduce new subject-area related content.
4. Ability to identify student assumptions and preconceptions about the content of a subject area and to adjust instruction in consideration of these prior understandings
5. Ability to help students make connections across the curriculum in order to promote retention and transfer of knowledge to real-life settings.

B. Curriculum

1. Knowledge of the content standards and of the scope and sequence of the subject areas of one's teaching fields as defined in the Alabama courses of study for those teaching fields
2. Ability to provide accommodations, modifications, and/or adaptations to the general curriculum to meet the needs of each individual learner.
3. Ability to select content and appropriately design and develop instructional activities to address the scope and sequence of the curriculum.

Standard 2—Teaching and Learning: To increase the achievement of every student, teachers draw upon a thorough understanding of learning and development, recognize the role of families in supporting learning, design a student centered learning environment, and use research-based instructional and assessment strategies that motivate, engage, and maximize the learning of all students.

Rationale. Instruction and assessment are the vehicles by which teachers design and deliver rigorous and relevant learning experiences for all learners. Research provides compelling evidence relating student achievement to teachers' use of appropriate instructional strategies selected from a rich repertoire based in research and best practice. Researchers have also found a strong classroom learning culture that is strategically organized and managed to be essential to effective use of these strategies.

Key Indicators

A. Human Development

- 1 Knowledge of the physical, emotional, and social development of young people and of the relationship of these to learning readiness and to cognitive development.
- 2 Knowledge of the role of language in learning
- 3 Knowledge of the general characteristics of disabilities and of their impact on cognitive development and learning.
- 4 Knowledge of developmentally appropriate instructional and management strategies.
- 5 Ability to teach explicit cognitive, metacognitive, and other learning strategies to support students in becoming more successful learners.
- 6 Ability to use knowledge about human learning and development in the design of a learning environment and learning experiences that will optimize each student's achievement
- 7 Ability to recognize individual variations in learning and development that exceed the typical range and use this information to provide appropriate learning experiences

B. Organization and Management

- 1 Knowledge of the importance of developing learning objectives based on the Alabama courses of study and the needs, interests, and abilities of students
- 2 Knowledge of the principles underpinning a sound age-appropriate classroom organization and management plan and of supportive behavior management strategies.
- 3 Knowledge of the components and characteristics of collaboratively designed and implemented individual behavioral support plans.
- 4 Knowledge of conflict resolution strategies, school emergency response procedures, and juvenile law
- 5 Ability to plan and implement equitable and effective student access to available technology and other resources to enhance student learning
- 6 Ability to plan teaching and learning experiences that are congruent with the Alabama courses of study and appropriate for diverse learners.
- 7 Ability to collect and use data to plan, monitor, and improve instruction

8. Ability to organize, allocate, and manage the resources of time, space, and activities to support the learning of every student.
9. Ability to organize, use, and monitor a variety of flexible student groupings and instructional strategies to support differentiated instruction.

C. Learning Environment

1. Knowledge of norms and structures that contribute to a safe and stimulating learning environment.
2. Knowledge of factors and situations that promote or diminish intrinsic motivation.
3. Ability to develop a positive relationship with every student and to take action to promote positive social relationships among students, including students from different backgrounds and abilities.
4. Ability to communicate with parents and/or families to support students' understanding of appropriate behavior.
5. Ability to create learning environments that increase intrinsic motivation and optimize student engagement and learning.
6. Ability to use individual behavioral support plans to proactively respond to the needs of all students.
7. Ability to create a print-/language-rich environment that develops/extends students' desire and ability to read, write, speak, and listen.
8. Ability to encourage students to assume increasing responsibility for themselves and to support one another's learning.

D. Instructional Strategies

1. Knowledge of research and theory underpinning effective teaching and learning.
2. Knowledge of a wide range of research-based instructional strategies and the advantages and disadvantages associated with each.
3. Knowledge of strategies that promote retention as well as transfer of learning and the relationship between these two learning outcomes.
4. Knowledge of the importance of parents and/or families as active partners in planning and supporting student learning.
5. Ability to select and support the use of instructional and assistive technologies and to integrate these into a coherent instructional design.
6. Ability to make developmentally appropriate choices in selecting teaching strategies to assist diverse learners in meeting instructional objectives.
7. Ability to evaluate, select, and integrate a variety of strategies such as cooperative learning, discussion, discovery, problem-based learning, and direct instruction into a coherent lesson design.
8. Ability to adjust instruction in response to information gathered from ongoing monitoring of performance via formative assessment.
9. Ability to use questions and questioning to assist all students in developing skills and strategies in critical and high order thinking and problem solving.
10. Ability to use strategies that promote the independence, self-control, personal responsibility, and self-advocacy of all students.

E. Assessment

1. Knowledge of the purposes, strengths, and limitations of formative and summative assessment and of formal and informal assessment strategies.

2. Knowledge of the relationship between assessment and learning and of how to integrate appropriate assessments into all stages of the learning process.
3. Knowledge of measurement-related issues such as validity, reliability, norms, bias, scoring concerns, and ethical uses of tests and test results
4. Knowledge of current Alabama assessment requirements and procedures
5. Ability to design and use a variety of approaches to formal and informal assessment to plan instruction, monitor student understanding and progress toward learning, modify teaching and learning strategies, and measure and report student progress related to learning objectives.
6. Ability to collaborate with others to design and score common assessments and to use results to share and compare instructional practice and plan new instruction
7. Ability to collaborate with others to incorporate accommodations into all assessments as appropriate.
8. Ability to provide a variety of ways for students with diverse needs, including students with disabilities, to demonstrate their learning.
9. Ability to develop rubrics and to teach students how to use them to assess their own performances.
10. Ability to develop and select appropriate performance assessments.
11. Ability to engage all students in assessing and understanding their own learning and behavior.
12. Ability to interpret and use reports from state assessments and results of other assessments to design both group and individual learning experiences.

Standard 3—Literacy: To improve student learning and achievement, teachers use knowledge of effective oral and written communications, reading, mathematics, and technology to facilitate and support direct instruction, active inquiry, collaboration, and positive interaction.

Rationale. Research clearly indicates that one of the strongest correlates to effective teaching is a high level of literacy. Not only do effective teachers demonstrate effective use of the spoken and written language, reading, mathematics, and technology, they also model and actively teach their students the fundamentals of reading, writing, and oral communications across all content areas. Additionally, in this culture where technology is ubiquitous, teachers demonstrate mastery of appropriate instructional technology and integrate technology into instruction of their subject areas.

A. Oral and Written Communications

1. Knowledge of standard oral and written communications.
2. Knowledge of the impact of native language and linguistic background on language acquisition.
3. Knowledge of media communication technologies that enrich learning opportunities.
4. Ability to model appropriate oral and written communications.
5. Ability to demonstrate appropriate communication strategies that include questioning and active and reflective listening
6. Ability to foster effective verbal and nonverbal communications during ongoing instruction using assistive technologies as appropriate
7. Ability to integrate skill development in oral and written communications into all content areas that one teaches
8. Ability to use effective nonverbal communication and respond appropriately to nonverbal cues from students

B. Reading

1. Knowledge of strategies associated with accelerated, highly specialized, explicit instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension that significantly expands and increases students' pace of learning and competence in reading, writing, speaking, and listening.
2. Knowledge of assessment tools to monitor the acquisition of reading strategies, to improve reading instruction, and to identify students who require additional instruction.
3. Ability to integrate reading instruction into all content areas that one teaches.
4. Ability to stimulate interest in and foster appreciation for the written word, promote reading growth, and increase the motivation of students to read widely and independently for information and pleasure.

C. Mathematics

1. Knowledge of the role that mathematics plays in everyday life.
2. Knowledge of the concepts and relationships in number systems.
3. Knowledge of the appropriate use of various types of reasoning, including inductive, deductive, spatial and proportional, and understanding of valid and invalid forms of reasoning.
4. Knowledge of both metric and customary measurement and fundamental geometric concepts, including shapes and their properties and relationships.
5. Ability to solve problems using different strategies, to verify and interpret results, and to draw conclusions.
6. Ability to communicate with others about mathematical concepts, processes, and symbols.

D. Technology

1. Knowledge of available and emerging technologies that support the learning of all students.
2. Knowledge of the wide range of technologies that support and enhance instruction, including classroom and school resources as well as distance learning and online learning opportunities.
3. Ability to integrate technology into the teaching of all content areas.
4. Ability to facilitate students' individual and collaborative use of technology, including classroom resources as well as distance and online learning opportunities when available and appropriate.
5. Ability to use technology to assess student progress and manage records.
6. Ability to evaluate students' technology proficiency and students' technology-based products within content areas.

Standard 4—Diversity: To improve the learning of all students, teachers differentiate instruction in ways that exhibit a deep understanding of how cultural, ethnic, and social background, second language learning, special needs, exceptionalities, and learning styles affect student motivation, cognitive processing, and academic performance.

Rationale. Teachers who respect and build upon diversity create a learning environment in which all students feel valued and supported in their learning. Respect for diversity grows out of knowledge of differences, including differences in students' cultural, ethnic, language, social, and experiential backgrounds; differences in their physical, emotional, and social development; differences in their readiness for a particular curricular goal; and differences in their learning styles and strengths. Teachers have a rich understanding of these and other important areas of diversity as well as knowledge of curricular and instructional modifications that improve the learning of the wide range of individual learners in their classrooms.

Key Indicators

A. Cultural, Ethnic and Social Diversity

1. Knowledge of the ways in which student learning is influenced by individual experiences and out-of-school learning, including language and family/community values and conditions.
2. Knowledge of cultural, ethnic, gender, linguistic, and socio-economic differences and of how these may affect individual learner needs, preferences, and styles.
3. Knowledge of the characteristics of one's own culture and use of language and of how they differ from other cultures.
4. Ability to develop culturally responsive curriculum and instruction, i.e., model, teach, and integrate multicultural awareness, acceptance, and appreciation into ongoing instruction.
5. Ability to communicate in ways that demonstrate sensitivity to diversity such as appropriate use of eye contact, interpretation of body language and verbal statements, and acknowledgement of and responsiveness to different modes of communication and participation.

B. Language Diversity

1. Knowledge of the process of second language acquisition and strategies to support the learning of students whose first language is not English.
2. Ability to differentiate between learner difficulties that are related to cognitive or skill development and those that relate to language learning.
3. Ability to collaborate with teachers of English language learners and to assist those students with full integration into the regular classroom.

C. Special Needs

1. Knowledge of the major areas of exceptionality in learning, including the range of physical and mental disabilities, social and emotional disorders, giftedness, dyslexia, and attention deficit disorder.
2. Knowledge of the indicators of the need for special education services.
3. Ability to identify and refer students for diagnosis for special services.
4. Ability to address learning differences and disabilities that are prevalent in an inclusive classroom.

D. Learning Styles

1. Knowledge of research and theory related to learning styles and multiple intelligences.
2. Knowledge of a range of curricular materials and technologies to support the cognitive development of diverse learners.

3. Ability to help students assess their own learning styles and to build upon identified strengths
4. Ability to design learning experiences that engage all learning styles.

E. General

1. Knowledge of how personal/cultural biases can affect teaching and learning
2. Ability to involve families, community agencies and organizations, and colleagues in helping support academic achievement of diverse learners.
3. Ability to create a learning community in which individual differences are respected
4. Ability to assess and diagnose individual student's contexts, strengths, and learning needs and to tailor curriculum and teaching to address these personal characteristics

Standard 5—Professionalism: To increase the achievement of all students, teachers engage in continuous learning and self improvement, collaborate with colleagues to create and adopt research-based best practices to achieve ongoing classroom and school improvement, and adhere to the Alabama Educator Code of Ethics and federal, state, and local laws and policies

Rationale. Current research relates teacher collaboration, shared responsibility for student learning, and job-embedded learning in professional community to higher levels of student achievement. This research challenges the independence and isolation that has historically characterized the teaching profession and calls for deprivatization of practice. An underlying premise of professional learning communities is the power of ongoing, continuous learning that takes place in a culture where risk and experimentation are rewarded. In schools where there is a strong professional community, teachers actively participate in creating and sustaining such a learning environment and in maintaining its focus upon improved student learning. Beyond collaboration, teachers exhibit professionalism by demonstrating a personal commitment to continuous learning and improvement, by adhering to high ethical standards, and by maintaining currency with regard to federal, state, and local laws and policies. Teachers assume increased leadership for schoolwide improvement initiatives and for mentoring of colleagues as they move along their professional pathways.

A. Collaboration

1. Knowledge of the purposes, processes, structures, and potential benefits associated with collaboration and learning
2. Knowledge of the roles and responsibilities of members of different types of teams including, but not limited to, Building Based Student Support Teams
3. Knowledge of roles and responsibilities of para-educators and other paraprofessionals
4. Ability to involve parents and/or families as active partners in planning and supporting student learning.
5. Ability to share instructional responsibility for students with diverse needs, including students with disabilities, and to develop collaborative teaching relationships and instructional strategies
6. Ability to share responsibility for all students' learning across the school and collaborate with colleagues to support every student's growth

7. Ability to participate as reflective members of different types of teams including, but not limited to, Building Based Student Support Teams.
8. Ability to collaborate in the planning of instruction for an expanded curriculum in general education to include Individual Education Plans and other plans such as Section 504 goals for students with disabilities.
9. Ability to communicate and collaborate effectively with colleagues, students, parents, guardians, and significant agency personnel who are included and valued equally as partners.
10. Ability to exhibit the professional dispositions delineated in professional, state, and institutional standards while working with students, colleagues, families, and communities.

B. Continuous, Lifelong Professional Learning

1. Knowledge of a range of professional literature, particularly resources that relate to one's own teaching field(s).
2. Knowledge of a range of professional learning opportunities, including job-embedded learning, district- and state-sponsored workshops, university offerings, and online and distance learning.
3. Knowledge of the processes and skills associated with peer coaching and mentoring.
4. Ability to articulate and reflect on a personal philosophy and its relationship to teaching practice and professional learning choices and commitments.
5. Ability to use best practices, professional literature, and collegial assistance to improve as a teacher and a learner.
6. Ability and willingness to inquire into one's own practice by designing action research to determine the effectiveness of identified instructional strategies.
7. Ability to participate in the creation and nurturance of a learning environment that supports standards-based inquiry, reflective practice, and collaborative learning for teachers at all stages of their careers.

C. Alabama-Specific Improvement Initiatives

1. Knowledge of current and emerging state initiatives and programs including, but not limited to, the Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI); the Alabama Math, Science, and Technology Initiative (AMSTI); Alabama Learning Exchange (ALEX); and Alabama Connecting Classrooms, Educators and Students Statewide (ACCESS) and their relationship to student achievement.
2. Knowledge of Alabama's state assessment requirements and processes.
3. Ability to integrate statewide programs and initiatives into the curriculum and instructional processes.
4. Ability to communicate with students, parents, and the public about Alabama's assessment system and major state educational improvement initiatives.

D. School Improvement

1. Knowledge of research relating collective responsibility for student learning to increased achievement for all students.
2. Knowledge of the principles of individual and organizational change and a commitment to assume personal responsibility for leading and supporting others in results-oriented changes.
3. Ability to participate in school improvement planning by working collaboratively with teams focused on specific improvement initiatives.

4. Ability to assume increased leadership responsibility in school, district, and state improvement initiatives over the course of one's professional career.

E. Ethics

1. Knowledge of appropriate professional behavior and dispositions expected of professionals as outlined in the Alabama Educator Code of Ethics.
2. Knowledge of safe, responsible, legal, and ethical uses of technologies including fair-use and copyright guidelines and Internet-user protection policies.
3. Ability to use and maintain confidential student information in an ethical and professional manner.
4. Ability to practice safe, responsible, legal, and ethical use of technology and comply with school and district acceptable-use policies including fair-use and copyright guidelines and Internet-user protection policies.

F. Local, State, Federal Laws and Policies

1. Knowledge of laws related to students' and teachers' rights and responsibilities and the importance of complying with those laws, including major principles of federal disabilities legislation (IDEA, Section 504 and ADA), as well as Alabama statutes on child abuse and neglect, and the importance of complying with those laws.
2. Ability to access school, community, state, and other resources and referral services.
3. Ability to access resources to gain information about federal, state, district, and school policies and procedures.
4. Ability to keep accurate records including IEPs, especially records related to federal, state and district policies, and other records with legal implications.