Exploring the Perception of Self-Efficacy Among Teachers and Principals in Meeting

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EXPLORING THE PERCEPTION OF SELF-EFFICACY AMONG TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS IN MEETING THE DEMANDS OF CONTEMPORARY SCHOOL REFORM INITIATIVES

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by

Brian F. Carroll

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education Specializing in Education Leadership and Policy Studies

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Accepted by the Faculty of the Graduate College, The University of Vermont, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education specializing in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies.

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Abstract

Exploring The Perceptions Self-Efficacy Among Teachers and Principals in Meeting The Demands of Contemporary School Reform Initiatives

Public schools in the United States are facing unprecedented pressures to account for the achievement of all students. The mission and purpose of public schools are being heavily scrutinized and the demand for accountability is intense and growing. Given these high demands, the ways in which principals and teachers perceive their own sense of self-efficacy can have important impact on successful outcomes of school change. The literature defines self-efficacy as how one judges his or her own capabilities to reach goals and to persist in the face of obstacles and challenges (Bandura, 1977). Studies have shown that there is a connection between a teacher’s or principal’s beliefs about their sense of self-efficacy and their persistence to reach their goals for school reform (Anderson, Greene, & Loewen, 1988; McCormick, 2001; Tschannen-Moran, M., & Barr, M. (2004).

The purpose of this qualitative study is two fold: to explore how teachers in three rural communities in the northeastern part of the country perceive their self-efficacy and its relationship to meeting the expectations and mandates placed on public schools to successfully educate all students. Additionally, principals' perceptions of their ability to support teachers and lead their schools to meet these demands were examined. Through the methods of a narrative inquiry, eight teachers and two principals representing various backgrounds and experiences from grades K-12 were interviewed about their perceptions of school reform, their own aspirations, their sense of personal/collective efficacy, and their commitment to the profession related to their success and feelings of achievement in their schools.

Results of data analysis indicate that teachers perceive their efficacy in very unique and personal ways. Teachers’ sense of self-efficacy was influenced by their own philosophy of teaching, opportunities for collaboration, instructional challenges they faced, learner outcomes, rural community considerations, and the school’s sense of collective efficacy. With respect to principals, a number of themes emerged that influenced their sense of self-efficacy including their perceived sense of autonomy, leadership role style, external pressures for accountability, and the overall sense of the school’s collective efficacy.

Overall, this study provides an understanding of ways in which rural school teachers and administrators perceive their sense of self-efficacy in relationship to how they engage in efforts toward school reform. Given that this study was limited to teachers and principals from rural schools, further research that examines the experiences of educators who work in more urban settings would add to the understanding of how urban cultures may influence perceptions of efficacy in bringing about school change. Further research that explores the relationship of teachers’ perceptions of self-efficacy with student achievement may also add to the literature base.
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INTRODUCTION

Pressure for increased school accountability is a distinctive hallmark of the present period of educational reform... Growing political and fiscal pressure on schools lies behind this conception of accountability. This political pressure stems from the increasing visibility of school performance as a policy issue at the state and local levels and the increasing capacity of states and localities to measure and monitor student achievement.


As reflected in the above quote, these are intense and challenging times for public school educators. The mission and purpose of public schools are being heavily scrutinized and the demand for accountability intense and growing. Our globe continues to shrink, or flatten, as Friedman (2006) describes and changes are occurring in our society at an unprecedented pace, placing extraordinary expectations on U.S. public schools to compete internationally. Political influences in public education continue to put pressures on schools to succeed globally by attending to the basic academic skills that can be readily measured, in particular in areas of science, mathematics, and technology. Achievement towards proficiency in the basic academic skills drives some of the discourse among policy makers, while others in education espouse to broader outcomes such has combining higher-order thinking and analytical skills with basic academic skills (Silva, 2008). Add to this the fact that standardized test scores across the nation and in the state of Vermont reveal a widening of the achievement gap, especially in achievement outcomes between those students with resources to support learning and those from poorer families (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2010; Vermont Department of Education, 2010).
It is a bitter irony that the egalitarian rhetoric of American orthodoxy has fostered inequality. All recent social observers in the United States have condemned the widening economic gap between rich and poor, and have noted its correlation with a gap in educational achievement (Hirsch, 1996, p. 4). Whether the context is local, state, or national, the challenge of narrowing the gap is a formidable challenge for public schools (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

Educational research is replete with strategies, methods, and pedagogies designed to help schools and teachers improve public education (Hebert, 2003). Consequently, there are leaders in the field who strongly recommend fundamental change in how we teach children. Schmoker (2007) believes that principals in public education do a “token job” (p. 45) of supervising teachers, resulting in ineffective student learning. In the opinion of Elmore, Abelman, Even, Kenyon, and Marshall (2004), the educational establishment needs to change teacher’s beliefs, norms and values if it wants to improve instructional practice. Leaders in education are faced with question of whether they can change ones’ values, beliefs and norms and whether they support instructional practices that represent those beliefs? According to Guskey (as cited in Elmore et al., 2004), “Teaching practices change attitudes to be more responsive to the challenges of teaching all students. Marzano (2007), a leading researcher in student learning, challenges teachers to improve instructional organization, increase communication and engagement with students, and establish high expectations for learning.

From a policy perspective, public education has received harsh criticism since the release of the report, A Nation At Risk (1983), charging public education with failing
our students in the critical content areas of math and reading especially when comparing achievement scores to other industrialized countries. Since that period, political initiatives such as Goals 2000 (1987) and federal legislation such as No Child Left Behind (The Commission On No Child Left Behind, 2007) have attempted to reform education in response to these criticisms. As a result, many states and local school districts have implemented numerous types of reform initiatives in their schools designed to offer teachers more opportunities to improve their instruction. Yet, educational professional development is often cast as slow, resistant, or unable to make necessary changes that result in higher levels of learning for more students. This response raises questions about the effectiveness of professional development in improving teaching and learning.

Mike’s Story

I recently ran into a 27-year veteran high school teacher, “Mike” from rural Virginia whom I had not seen or spoken to in 10 years. I was curious to ask how his teaching was going. In the late 1990’s Mike was lamenting that kids were different now and they just did not appreciate the opportunities he was providing in his science class. In this recent conversation, there was another lament. This time he was quick to point out that it is the “district mandates” preventing him from teaching effectively, not mentioning anything about challenges students were presenting. This was expressed in the context of looking forward to retirement. It struck me as unfortunate for Mike and for the profession to see that an apparently bright, committed veteran public teacher would continually attribute his perception of failures to external reasons such as “kids these days” and district mandates.
Moving Teaching Forward

Spillane (1999) describes a phenomenon known as teachers’ zone of enactment, or “that space where the reform initiatives mobilized by the school system, construed broadly, interact with the world of practitioners and practice” (p. 159). This may be an indication as to how teachers rationalize whether they change their practices to meet higher demands and if so, how. In some ways, this idea is reflective of Mike’s story in that his comments about the pressures of district change initiatives left him feeling ineffective as a teacher. Other researchers have also looked at teacher perceptions of school reform. In their study of teacher perceptions of school reform, Kalin and Valencic Zulzan (2007) concluded that, along with other factors, a teacher’s perception of the main goal of reform influences their motivation to change. Just as we know students need incentive and motivation to learn, it appears obvious that teachers need similar conditions to move their teaching forward.

For educators, moving teaching forward can be a difficult concept to embrace. Delhi and Fumia (2002) asked teachers to describe how ideas such as teaching effectiveness, school improvement, and accountability are interpreted, assimilated, and implemented in their teaching routine. They concluded that current reform and restructuring of education to meet the changing demands of student learning have “brought about an important set of shifts in teachers’ daily work” (p. 22). They found that current reforms required teachers themselves to become change agents and that they do so in complicated and unpredictable ways. It appears there may be personal variables that influence how complicated or unpredictable teachers implement their ideas of change. In
their study of teachers’ emotions in relation to the situational demands of their teaching role, Van Veen and Sleegers (2006) found that teachers required a “congruency between their professional orientations and the current changes…” (p. 106). They also found that teachers using different pedagogical approaches yielded different emotional responses to their jobs. For instance, teachers with a learning- or child-centered approach with an open relationship with the school tended to have positive responses to change while those who were more teacher-centered with a restricted orientation to the school held a more negative approach to change.

Another consideration is the teacher as a person. How do personality, educational background, and life experiences influence a teacher’s ability to change? What part might emotions play in motivating how teachers interpret the requirement to change their teaching? How does change and/or reform relate to a teacher’s perception of risk? What are the critical supports that principals should provide to move teaching and schools forward?

Given the mounting evidence that suggests competent and willing teachers are critical to the success of schools, it is a formidable challenge for any principal to cultivate the needed consensus of teachers to move a school forward. Although there is evidence that suggests why educators resist change, there has been little practical application of this evidence to help principals who counter resistance establish a culture among teachers that embraces change.
Moving Schools Forward

What does moving forward mean for schools? Scholars and reform experts will characterize such reforms in a variety of ways; however, there are some themes that appear to be foundational for schools to succeed. For example, a school doing what is needed to bring equitable and meaningful opportunities for all students to achieve might be considered a foundational theme of current reform efforts. Among many factors, Scheurich and Skrla (2003) define equity reform through changes in the teacher. They ask teachers to confront their own feelings that might contribute to biases towards students and families from different backgrounds than their own. “Rather than trying to find deficits or negatives that we can posit as causes for achievement gap, we need to understand and focus on the assets…” (p. 18). Within the context of Vermont, standardized test scores show disparate results between those with greater resources and those who come from lower socio-economic backgrounds. In describing a principal as a change leader, Fullan (2002) refers to school reform in terms of establishing a moral purpose, improving relationships among faculty, building “enduring greatness” within schools.

Marzano (2003) emphasizes the critical responsibilities teachers have in fostering student achievement through instructional design. He researched sound pedagogical practices among teachers and compared usage between effective and ineffective teachers. For the effective teachers groups, students achieved an average in the 75th percentile, while those considered ineffective achieved in the 25th percentile, demonstrating the strength of the teacher variable.
Each of these examples of current reform represents significant change for many teachers. Simply put, Marzano (2003) calls it “doing the right work” (p. 76). He calls on schools to adopt practices based in research and, “provides proven methods for student learning, teaching and school management” (p. 77). These changes require teachers to consider ideas and practices beyond the limiting context of their classroom. It requires them to consider student factors as well as school-level factors in fulfilling the requirements and outcomes of their jobs. For some teachers, this may be a welcome opportunity for one to expand his/her horizons on the job; however, as the literature shows, many teachers find such comprehensive changes in teaching to be extremely challenging (Guskey, 1987; McCormick, Ayers, & Beechy, 2005).

As much emphasis as this and other studies put on teacher responsibility, it would be myopic to ignore the role principals play in moving schools forward. As cited by Marzano (2003), Schmoker (2007), and Gray and Streshley (2008), the principal’s role in supporting teachers to be the best is equally as critical to student achievement as the teacher’s role. Each of these researchers describes the role of principal as evolving to a position of instructional leader rather than the more traditional role of building and personnel manager. In their book, Gray and Streshley (2008) identify several critical responsibilities of contemporary principals. Among the over-arching themes they talk about the importance of “building relationships with and among teachers (collaboration); establishing a culture of discipline (vision of student achievement); hiring the right people; and possessing a genuine humbleness” (pp. 1-13).
For the purpose of this study, moving schools forward involves several considerations in public education. First, given the variance of student ability and socio-economic conditions, rural public schools have the challenge to provide all students the opportunities to possess high aspirations and equal opportunity to achieve those aspirations. In Vermont, the equity gap between those students who have resources and those who do not, illustrates the current problem. Schools can meet reasonable expectations for students who come through the door already prepared to learn the prescribed content. For those students arriving to Vermont’s schools ill prepared, progress toward achievement is not as apparent. Thus, classrooms must be environments that stimulate different types of learning with different students. Teachers must be high performing professionals who possess the technical abilities to design curriculum/instruction and human qualities to engage and motivate a diverse population of students to achieve. Second, moving schools forward involves an increasing dependency on collaboration and the communication skills that result in strong partnerships among and between teachers, administrators, students, and parents. “The professional self is developed in a community of persons involved in teaching…the process of collaboration in innovation is part of the process of reform…” (Olson, 2002, p. 133). Teachers must play a more active role in their own self-development and principals need to know how teachers will make use of the critical feedback they provide (Zepeda & Pontecelli, 1998).

In small rural schools, there is evidence that teachers may exhibit even more resistance to change than their urban and suburban counterparts. A study by Harris,
Holdman, Clark, & Harris (2001) found differences between the two groups. They found rural teachers tended to “reflect a more traditional profile” emphasizing community and collaboration among students. They found rural teachers were more “open-minded” and tended to operate with lesser concrete outcomes with their students, often focusing on student relationships over clear learning outcomes. By contrast, urban/suburban teachers were more apt to develop clear classroom rules and consequences in a more objective manner. Whether these results significantly show rural teachers are more prone to resistance to reform is yet to be established. However, it does raise the question as to how we help teachers to embrace reform and their own sense of how well they feel they can bring about needed change in schools.

The Vermont Context

In a report to the Department of Education (Arnold, 2004), it was stated that rural schools face unique challenges in meeting the goal that all children will reach proficiency in reading and math by 2014. One of the critical themes of the report is that little research characterizes the “condition of rural education” (p. 1). How might teachers be oriented to these skills? Does school curriculum adequately support their instruction?

In addressing the issue of quality teaching, this section of my proposal will address a fundamental question, “Do those who teach in poor, rural settings face significantly different challenges than teachers in more populated, prosperous areas?” Using a structure of school action planning, Harris and colleagues (2001) compared the perceptions of urban and rural teachers in a series of studies called Project Launch. They studied over 100 first year teachers and found some interesting differences between the
two teacher groups in three general areas. Urban teachers were significantly more likely to attain their goals in an action plan than their rural colleagues. In addition, it was evident that rural teachers concentrated more on goals related to establishing good relationships while urban teachers focused more on content goals in the action plan.

Second, in further examination of goals relating to classroom management, differences were found between the two groups. Urban teachers implemented class rules with clear consequences resulting in meeting of the goal. Rural teachers wrote goals addressing the motivations of students that were not easily met. In short, the goals written by urban teachers were focused on more specific outcomes where responsibilities were within the teachers’ purview while rural teachers’ goals were “open-ended” (p. 16) and beyond the control of teachers who developed the goals.

Third, Harris et al. (2001) reported that rural teachers found collaborating with peers to be more challenging than did their urban counterparts. Rural teachers reported that their involvement in this study was a source of conflict because their colleagues at schools were envious or resentful of their being out of the school building, suggesting that promoting collaboration and community in schools may be more difficult than previously believed. Did they discuss other aspects of collaboration beyond participation in this study? It would be good to see more evidence to support the opening point of this paragraph.

From another perspective, Howley and Howley (2004) found small, rural schools offered a “cooperation among teachers” (p. 4) that enabled instruction to evolve naturally within the school environment. This apparent familiarity by students with their
teachers was found to be beneficial for learning. With respect to teacher recruitment, they found staffing for such schools coming from primarily the local community. In their argument, both of these conditions posed a unique challenge for rural schools. Since the recruiting pool for teachers is limited to the local community, cultivating good teachers is dependent on effective professional development, which in Howley and Howley’s opinion, is not often focused on a local paradigm. They suggest the typical professional development in these schools tends to focus on the larger context of education, often at the expense of local needs. Howley and Howley examined the dynamics inherent in rural schools and found some unique issues relative to the ethic of critique. They found the social and instructional practices of rural teachers relied heavily on experiences cultivated by their upbringing, as opposed to external influences. Together with the close-knit, more informal interactions of rural community, they suggested that rural teachers tend to “foster acceptance rather than critique of the behavior of others” (p. 5), resulting in their preferring tradition over change.

It is clear that any attempt to improve teaching and learning in public education and efforts to “move schools forward” is dependent on the effectiveness of teachers and principals. Research shows that many initiatives and efforts toward reform have failed due to either a lack of professional development or the perceived resistance of teachers to change. This problem is particularly evident in small rural schools. Given the current era of accountability and school reform, teachers and principals are faced with increased demands for change and face numerous state and national mandates pushing on their schools. Ways in which teachers and principals respond to these forces raises important
questions about how they perceive their roles in “facilitating learning environments that are conducive to student success” (Furney, Godek, & Riggs, 2004, p. 568). Thus, an exploration of how teachers and principals perceive their own sense of self-efficacy to meet demands of school reform initiatives is an important focus of study.
CHAPTER 1: PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Statement of the Problem

Given the high demands, increased accountability, and urgency facing public schools in rural settings, the purpose of this study was to explore how rural teachers’ perceptions of self-efficacy in their jobs related to their abilities to meet expectations, demands, and mandates placed on public schools. In addition to the study of teacher perceptions, the study examined how school principals perceived their efficacy to support their teachers and lead their schools to meet demands of school reform. For purposes of this study, self-efficacy is defined according to an aspect of social cognition presented by Bandura (1997) where it is described as “beliefs about one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (p. 3). Bandura goes on to say that the effort one puts forth in given endeavors, how long he or she will persevere in the face of obstacles, and resilience to adversity all contribute to one’s sense of self-efficacy. To adequately study the relationship between self-efficacy and performance among teachers and principals, this study considered those issues, pedagogies, and expectations viewed critical for teachers and principals in meeting the needs of all students and to move their schools forward.

A goal for this study was to gain deep insights into teacher and principal perceptions of their own sense of efficacy through open-ended interviews that inquired into the complexity of perceptions as they relate to efficacious outcomes. Through qualitative research methodology, using narrative inquiry with eight teachers and three principals, the following research questions guided this study:
1. How do rural teachers’ perception of self-efficacy in their jobs relate to the degree in which they engage in public school reform?

This question addresses a teacher’s individual or personal perception of self-efficacy as previously defined. It examines the rural teacher’s personal efficacy relating to their confidence and belief that they can make a difference in their students’ learning, particularly those who are under-achieving due to poverty and/or disabilities. Implicit in this question is whether teachers believe in their ability to adapt their teaching to higher professional standards that relate to high student achievement.

2. How do rural teachers’ perceptions of self-efficacy relate to the degree in which they collaborate with colleagues, and are their perceptions of collaboration in their schools the same as their principals’?

This question focuses on how teachers feel about the increased emphasis on collaboration and teamwork rather than the more traditional, autonomous role of teachers that fostered teacher independence. Since evidence suggests collaboration among teachers requires change and more investment of time, this question addresses the possibility that it may be easier to fulfill the more traditional role rather than having to share responsibilities with colleagues.

3. How do rural teachers’ perceptions of self-efficacy relate to how they maintain high aspirations and commitment to their profession and what supports do they feel enhance their aspirations and commitment?

This question gets to the heart of how teachers perceive their professional abilities. As with learners, teachers need aspirations for accomplishment to sustain their
skills and commitment. Are there experiences, beliefs, and supports that enhance or deter a teacher’s aspiration?

4. What is the relationship between a teacher’s self-efficacy and his/her perception of a school systems’ collective efficacy?

This question is based on what Bandura (1977) refers to as collective efficacy, or a belief and/or confidence that the larger school environment can make a difference in student learning, which might speak to their commitment to issues of collaboration, school culture, climate, etc. It addresses the role the organization plays in a teacher’s perception of self-efficacy and will also address the role a principal plays in this perception.

5. How do principals perceive their own efficacy to successfully influence and support their teachers and schools to move forward?

This question is central to exploring how principals perceive their evolving role and how this role compares to the collective efficacy of the school to move forward. As suggested by Tschannen-Morn and Gareis (2007), “The principal is a key agent at the school level. He or she sets the tone and direction for the school, initiates change, provides expertise, marshals resources, unifies partners, and maintains effort” (p. 89).

Significance of the Study

By focusing on teachers and their feelings and opinions of their skills to effectively teach all students, this study can provide some insights into several areas of education reform. From a human resources perspective, this study can help to inform educational reform on two levels. With respect to teachers, this study can help to
establish a deeper context for determining how teachers can most effectively be
supervised and directed through the challenges of change that school reform demands.
Given the time constraints of teaching, teachers have little time in their jobs to self-assess
and reflect on their teaching. These interviews with teachers are their reflections to
questions that are not often posed. They provide some thoughtful analysis. With respect
to principals, this study addresses the changing role of principals to become more
instructional leaders. It provides some analysis for how this role is perceived understood
by both principals and their teachers.

From an organizational perspective, this study can inform us as to how teachers
and principals view their school’s efficacy and whether it is contemporary reform that
demands significant changes in how our schools are organized and function. This study
can inform the discourse as to refining and redefining the role of principals.

And finally, from a teacher training perspective, this study can begin the
conversation and stimulate further study into what skills might teachers be cognizant of
in order to be effective teachers. This should be of interest to college and university
teacher training programs that are under pressure to produce highly qualified teachers.

Limitations of the Study

The most obvious limitation of this study is the relatively small number of
participants. Although interviews provided some deeper understanding of teachers’
feelings and perspective, none of the data should be used to generalize applications to all
teachers and principals. Another significant limitation was the unforeseen unavailability
of the principal and the additional teacher from Johnson City School. Although numerous
attempts were made to arrange the interviews, it was very apparent that the individuals contacted were not able to meet the interview expectations. Although no direct evidence is apparent, it is felt by this researcher that the school had been experiencing a fair amount of stress organizationally that contributed to the lack of availability.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The review of the literature provides insights into several areas in education that relate to the purpose of this study. Foremost in this review are those reform initiatives addressing challenges to education ranging from broad issues of equity and global competition issues to more localized issues of effective instruction and curriculum and how the role of the teacher is changing to meet these demands. Issues related to teachers’ aspirations and their commitment to the profession of teaching are addressed. Many of these educational reform initiatives define practices that emphasize instructional practices that promote attributes such as student engagement, meaningful instruction, cohesive curriculum, and teacher leadership.

Secondly, and a major emphasis of the review of literature, is an expansion on Bandura’s (1977) concept of self-efficacy and how it is related to the context of public school teachers in rural communities. The review examines research that considers perceptions, skills, and experiences that contribute to a teacher’s beliefs, emotions, confidence, and motivation to manage changes resulting from school reform. The review also examines research addressing how teachers perceive their responsibilities in view of the changing education paradigm.

Finally, this review addresses how teachers relate the concept of their self-efficacy to the larger school system and examine systemic factors that may inter-relate with a teacher’s self-efficacy. Individual factors such as teacher skills, competence,
emotionality, and job satisfaction are explored as well systemic issues such as the role of principals, staff/professional development, school climate/culture, and school mission.

Education Reform, Initiatives and Organizational Change

*Holding teachers responsible or ‘accountable’ for meeting these standards is a vexing matter. Though politicians and legislators often look toward standardized test scores, student retention rates, and graduation statistics, teachers wonder whether such quantitative indices adequately capture their most crucial skills and abilities. Clearly, the responsibility and professional status of a teacher is unresolved.*

*(Fischman, DiBara, & Gardner, 2006, p. 384)*

In reviewing education reform initiatives that drive the purpose of this study, it is important to examine the apparent reasons, rationale, and intent of such reforms. To put it simply, public schools are being asked to “do more with less” and the following issues drive educational reform efforts in public schools.

*Federal/State Mandates*

The demand for quality education and high expectations for students and educators has maintained an intense level of public discourse for over two decades. Since the 1982 publication of *A Nation At Risk*, public schools have faced an ever-increasing amount of scrutiny and accountability to achieve successful outcomes for all students while doing so in an efficient manner. In a recent report (The Commission on No Child Left Behind, 2007), teacher quality was prominently discussed throughout. “One of the foundational principals of NCLB is the idea that teacher quality is the single most important school factor in student success” (p. 30). The report describes studies that show how students being taught by “good teachers” achieve at higher standards than those
being taught by less effective teachers. Although the report refrains from describing characteristics of good teachers in any detail, it continues to support the concept of a “highly-qualified teacher” as primarily one who meets the requirements of certification and possesses a “demonstrated knowledge of the subjects they teach” (p. 32). But are those criteria adequate in defining a highly qualified teacher in this era of high standards and accountability for educating a diverse population of students?

Much has been written about how the restricted mandates of NCLB are a greater challenge to small rural schools, than urban schools, (Jimerson, 2005). Consequently, it is believed by some that schools in rural areas suffer from these restricted mandates that narrow curricular focus to standardized measures of reading and math rather than the more comprehensive mission of developing greater breadth of learning outcomes that characterize small, rural schools (Mathis, 2003). In Vermont, there are educational standards that guide educators to attend to the more interpersonal aspects of child development that appear directly related to the ethics of justice and critique. Within the Vermont Framework of Standards and Learning Opportunities (Vermont Department of Education, 2000), students are expected to learn concepts such as Worth and Competence, Making Decisions, Relationships (teamwork) and Roles and Responsibilities (pp. 3.1-3.2). As important as these standards are to the development of our students, they do not directly relate to the NCLB standards. There is the expectation that teachers shall skillfully develop instruction that either integrates these skills throughout more traditional content or they teach to these standards in a head-on fashion.
In either case, it would appear that teachers themselves should possess the skills to demonstrate and articulate clear outcomes to their students in these standards.

**Organizational Challenges**

Current reform efforts appear as a complex endeavor that poses many challenges to measuring the success of public education. In their studies of reform, Hargreaves and Fink (2000) defined it as needing to meet three criteria: 1) Depth: Does reform improve significant aspects of learning as opposed to superficial?; 2) Length: Is the reform sustainable over time; and 3) Breadth: Can the reform extend beyond a few schools? With these criteria, the researchers used a study by the Spencer Foundation to examine how reform initiatives were implemented and sustained over time in two high schools in Canada that appeared to exemplify serious reform efforts, Lord Byron and Blue Mountain Schools. The Lord Byron school opened in 1970 and was staffed by young a young faculty “hand-picked by a charismatic principal” (p. 31). They observed this faculty to be excited and committed to concepts such as colleague collaboration and professional satisfaction. According to the researchers, they described their jobs as “exhilarating, enriching, exciting, and challenging” (p. 31). This study of school reform was unique in that it investigated the sustainability of the reform over a two-decade period. According to Hargreaves and Fink, the Lord Byron School “over-extended itself” (p. 31) in its pursuit of extensive reform and was then forced to “revert[ed] defensively to conventional structures that made it largely indistinguishable from the secondary schools around it” (p. 31). They attributed this failure to several problems but, for the purpose of this study, two of the identified problems are related to how teachers perceive their self-
efficacy as well as how they perceive their school systems’ abilities to meet increased expectations for student achievement. Hargreaves and Fink identified “Leadership Succession” as contributing to Lord Byron’s reform failure, citing the inability of the school to find an equally charismatic principal that first opened the school. Without such a principal, teachers had no vision to follow and less commitment and loyalty to the reform outcomes. The second problem considered germane to this study involved “Staff Recruitment and Retention”. Similar to the situation with the charismatic principal, the first teachers were handpicked and aware of their role in fulfilling the school’s mission. Subsequently, with teacher turnover, “later appointed staff seldom had the same commitment to the school’s philosophy, were baffled by the constant references to the school’s golden age, or were attracted to the school’s surface laissez-faire image” (p. 31). What ultimately resulted was a split in the faculty between newer teachers, considered outsiders, and the veteran teachers who were beginning to lose their own commitment and loyalty to the school, resulting in high teacher turnover.

The nearby Blue Mountain School also made strong attempts to improve its mission. Like the Lord Byron School, it had a charismatic principal who handpicked the faculty that participated in an innovative attempt at school reform. Unlike most secondary schools, Blue Mountain had no subject-defined departments and espoused to a philosophy that no particular subject dominated or was viewed more important than other subjects. The leadership structure at Blue Mountain departed from the traditional Department Head roles by creating process leaders in areas of technology, assessment, and evaluation emphasizing the priorities of integrating technology with student
As with the Lord Byron School, Blue Mountain School faced some unintended consequences from their reform efforts. Hargreaves and Finks (2000) found that Blue Mountain experienced problems involving staff retention and turnover, integrating effective policy structure and managing community relations. Specifically, increased enrollment required increase in staff that “…did not always understand or share the vision…” (p. 32). Early retirement of veteran teacher exacerbated this issue. From a policy and structure perspective, researchers found government policies limiting the amount of time teachers could spend planning for instruction and mandated curriculum challenged the policy of “no subject-defined departments. Lastly, Blue Mountain’s attempt to build strong community relations had more negative consequences with parent panic fueling the local media to characterize the school as in crisis.

Globalization

A Report of the Commission on the Whole Child (ASCD, 2007) suggests that preparing today’s students for the future will require significant changes in how we teach. We live in a global economy increasingly driven by consumer demand for customization and technology that facilitates both competition and collaboration…today’s students must be prepared unlike any generation before to “think critically and analytically while acting with innovation and creativity” (p. 7).

Thomas Friedman (2006) describes scenarios where global influences will touch rural students in the U.S. more today than ever was conceived 15 years ago. He argues the case that a “flat world”, brought about through advances in areas such as personal
technology, immediate global communication, and a global market will expose our students to highly competitive job and education markets.

Related to the issue of globalization, the ASCD (2007) report emphasized the importance and need for students to attend post-secondary education, both to further develop critical skills mentioned previously and to be able to compete with the growing number of college graduates globally. The same report gave some sobering statistics that further drive the reform movement. For example, for every 100 students entering 9th grade in Vermont, 67 complete high school in four years. Of that group, 38 directly enroll in college with 26 returning to college after their freshman year. Within that group, 18 complete bachelor’s degree within six years or an associate’s degree with three years.

Clearly these data represent challenges to education in rural communities. If a school’s mission is to prepare youth for the global community, then rural schools have an added challenge to build higher aspirations oriented to a knowledge base that extends beyond the immediate community. The question remains as to how effective teachers and schools are in expanding aspirations in students.

*Student Aspirations*

As a researcher in the area of student and teacher aspirations, Quaglia (2008) developed three guiding principles found critical to the areas of learning and teaching. Using these three principles, he surveyed over 500,000 students (grades 6-12) and over 20,000 teachers. According to Quaglia, (2008) in order for students to succeed in education, they need to possess feelings of “Self-Worth, Active Engagement, and Purpose”. From these student surveys, Quaglia captures evidence of why students may
not work to their highest potential. Surveys of teachers implicate the changing functions of schools and the roles of teachers. Below, are a sampling of student responses statements and the percentages of those students who responded in total agreement to the statements:

**Self-Worth Condition**

Teachers care about my problems and feelings- 47.5%
Students respect teachers- 28.0%
Teachers care about me as an individual- 56.9%
Teachers care if I am absent from school- 40.8%
Teachers respect students- 44.7%
I put forth my best effort in school- 62.5%

**Active Engagement Condition**

I enjoy being in school- 55.8%
Teachers enjoy working with students- 47.8%
Teachers make school an exciting place to learn- 25.1%
School is boring- 52.7%
My teachers present lessons in different ways- 62.0%
At school, I am encouraged to be creative- 46.3%
Students are supportive of each other- 37.1%

**Purpose Condition**

I see myself as a leader- 61.0%
Other students see me as a leader- 43.5%
Teachers encourage students to make decisions - 63.9%
Teachers expect me to be successful - 76.1%
I know the goals my school is working on this year - 32%
School is preparing me well for my future - 58.5%.

*Issues of Equity*

When examining the challenges and expectations facing public school teachers, it is impossible to ignore the significant expectation placed on public schools to meet the educational needs of an academically, socio-economically, and ethnically diverse population of pupils. When phrases such as “education for all” and “No Child Left Behind” are used to express the values of equity in our education system, it generally implies that all students have equal opportunities to achieve and learn through a quality education. In the context of this study, equity illustrates the focus on opportunities students have to receive quality instruction from competent teachers and that instruction will be void of bias and discrimination based on stereotype.

Among the school indicators that may demonstrate inequity for students, Skrla, Scheurich, Skrla, Garcia, and Nolley (2004) found four indicators on which to assess equity. First, they consider high school drop or high school completion as representing data on which to assess equity. As stated in the previous section, opportunities for students to continue post-secondary education are non-existent for those students who have dropped out and data show that students from poverty are six times more likely to drop out (Boykin, 2008). Secondly, Skrla et al. examined the practice of tracking or
placing students in classes based on a narrow perspective. This practice of assigning students to tiers that represent lower standards result in lowered student achievement. Skrla et al. submit that a significantly lower percentage of students from minorities and poor backgrounds attend college preparatory courses because of tracking.

Standardized tests represent another indicator of inequity. Currently used in all states to measure school effectiveness, federal law requires states to disaggregate student achievement score by socio-economic (SES), ethnic, and disability status. In Vermont, for example, data from the New England Comprehensive Assessment (Vermont Department of Education, 2005) have shown a consistent equity gap throughout the state with little progress in the past three years (see Appendix E).

The fourth and final set of indicators recognized by Skrla et al. (2004) are Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), Advanced Placement (AP) and American College Test (ACT) scores. Students representing minorities and low-income groups typically score lower than other students. They also found that those students from lower SES and minority backgrounds in AP classes often received inflated grades in their classes representing a disconnect between perceived and actual achievement.

The issue of educational equity can be considered a moral and ethical imperative. In their research, Shapiro and Stefkovich (2001) examined ethics and teaching through the lenses of justice, critique, care, and professionalism. They used these distinct but related concepts to help define these virtues in the contemporary role of education (p.19).
Regarding the ethic of justice, they viewed teachers as having responsibility, involvement, and concern for the broader school community. With respect to the ethic of critique, they viewed educators as agents of change who question whether they and their schools perpetuate inequities rather than mitigate them through enlightened curriculum and instruction. The ethic of caring defines the school’s role in a more nurturing model fostering a protective role for their students and finally, the ethic of professionalism clearly defines the responsibility of teachers to adhere to standards that may be separate from their personal values.

Self-Efficacy in Education

_The most powerful teacher attribute in the Rand analysis teacher sense of efficacy- a belief that the teacher can help even the most difficult or unmotivated students._

_(McLaughlin & Marsh, 1978, p. 85)_

Albert Bandura (1977) was one of the first to develop a theoretical framework of self-efficacy and was interested in uncovering psychological factors that influence the behaviors of individuals. Within the context of how one copes psychologically, he theorized that expectations of one’s performance, as a cognitive process, influences when, how, and for how long an individual will employ successful coping mechanisms. To the extent to which individuals have control in their lives, Bandura related self-efficacy to one’s human agency or the extent one operates with intention. He characterized a lacking of human agency as negatively impacting one’s function, “…the inability to exert influence over things that adversely affect one’s life breed apprehension, apathy, or despair” (p. 2).
Within an employment context, Bandura (1997) relates self-efficacy to the degree a worker successfully completes his/her tasks and assignments. Stating that one needs to understand task demands before determining self-efficacy, he stresses the importance of the worker understanding task demands, “…if one does not know what demands must be fulfilled in a given endeavor, one cannot accurately judge where one has the requisite abilities to perform the task” (p. 64).

**Teacher Self-Efficacy**

With respect to the tasks facing educators, Bandura (1997) maintains that educators’ beliefs in their abilities to teach influence how they shape the environment for learners. Citing research from Gibson and Dembo (1984) that measured teachers’ belief in their efficacy, Bandura believes teachers with a high sense of efficacy operated on a belief that all students, even difficult ones, are teachable and those with a lower sense believed their influence over students who are unmotivated is limited. Gibson and Dembo’s research involved a micro analytic study of the differences between teachers with a high and low sense of efficacy. A summary of Gibson and Dembo’s (1994) findings is in Table 1:
Table 1: Efficacy in Teachers

| Teachers with high sense of efficacy | - Devote more time to academic activities.  
|                                      | - Provide struggling students with the guidance they need to succeed.  
|                                      | - Praise their academic accomplishments.  
|                                      | - Create mastery experiences for their students.  
| Teachers with low sense of efficacy | - Devote more time to non-academic activities.  
|                                      | - Easily give up on struggling students.  
|                                      | - Criticize students for their failures.  
|                                      | - Create a classroom environment likely to undermine students’ ability to judge their own abilities and cognitive development.  

In a study of self-efficacy as it relates to a teacher’s adaptability to using new and innovative instructional strategies, Guskey (1987) surveyed 120 elementary and secondary school teachers from three school districts, each representing urban, suburban, and rural schools respectively. Using his Responsibility for Student Achievement Scale (RSA) in conjunction with a development program on mastery instructional strategies, teachers were given the survey after a “half-day presentation” and discussion on the theory and application of mastery learning procedures” (p. 4). Analysis of the data obtained following results:

- Teachers expressed greater efficacy when considering positive results for students rather than negative.
- In general, most teachers expressed positive attitudes and high confidence levels with teaching.
• They identified an awareness with the mastery learning strategies presented although indicated it would take considerable work for them to implement.

• No significant differences were found between schools from urban, suburban, or rural communities.

• More efficacious teachers were found to rate mastery learning as more important, more likely to be present in their own teaching and easier to implement than less efficacious teacher. (p. 4)

In conclusion, Guskey (1987) found “fairly strong and statistically significant relations between perceptions of teacher self-efficacy that are generally associated with instructional effectiveness and attitudes toward implementation of instructional innovation” (p. 11).

In her study of self-efficacy and the ethic of caring, Collier (2005) referenced the work done by Ashton (1986) in identifying characteristics of highly-efficacious teachers:

• View the role of teachers as important and meaningful.

• Set high expectations for students

• Take personal responsibility for student learning.

• Engage in the practice of goal setting for themselves and their students.

• Exhibit confidence in their ability to affect student learning.

• View their students and themselves as partners in the learning process.

• Expend greater effort and persist longer in assisting student learning. (p. 352)

To explore how teachers perceive their responsibilities compared to other professions, Fischman, DiBara, and Gardner (2006) examined surveys of professionals,
conducted by the Goodwork Project (Gardner, Csikszentmihalyi, & Damon, 2001) that asked teachers to identify to whom they are most responsible. From in-depth interviews with over 1200 individuals from professions in genetics, business, law, medicine, and education, they were able to organize responses from professionals into five broad categories:

- Responsibility to self
- Responsibility to others
- Responsibility to workplace
- Responsibility to profession
- Responsibility to society. (p. 386)

In comparing responses by teachers to other professions, teachers appeared to perceive their responsibilities more broadly to include primary responsibilities not only to students, but also to parents, administrators, and the larger community in general. Contrary to teacher responses, individuals from different professions tended to readily attribute some responsibilities to others related to the profession. For example, in the genetics profession, responses showed that scientists freely separated their responsibilities from others, “… many scientists claim that the determination of how their research is implemented is important, but something only politicians and citizens should be most concerned” (p. 386). This was not the case with teachers. They rarely attributed responsibilities to others involved with or related to education and took full responsibility for their students’ achievement. Gardner et al. (2001) found that education “is not a well-aligned profession” (p. 387), the result of which leaves teachers to have to develop their own definition of their work and how to measure their effectiveness. Another study that
offered pertinent conclusions about teachers’ self-efficacy was found in the study of urban secondary teachers by Fischman et al. (2006) and included:

- Teachers feel creativity is an essential part of their responsibility to effectively teach students. As a result, the lack definition of consistent practices may be factors limiting the inclusion of teaching as a profession.

- As with Gardner et al. (2001), this study found some teachers using the conflicting definitions of a ‘good teacher’ to redefine their own responsibilities.

- Teachers view their classrooms as their personal domain to exercise their self-defined responsibilities.

- Teachers struggle with the potential of focusing too much on students’ personal needs at the expense of their professional values and ideologies.

- Evidence of student engagement is often used as benchmarks for success rather than using more objective achievement results. (pp. 383-398)

Within education, significant research has addressed self-efficacy both for students as learners and teachers as professional instructors. Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2006) studied teacher self-efficacy to gain a deeper understanding of the contextual variable that may contribute to increased efficacy. They focused on two of Bandura’s (1977) proposed sources of self-efficacy, “verbal persuasion” (p. 944) and “mastery learning” (p. 945) to explore whether outcomes of self-efficacy were different between novice and experienced teachers. Using the Teachers’ Sense of Efficacy Scale (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001), the researchers measured responses from the
two groups across three subscales of the survey: instructional strategies, classroom management, and student engagement. The results of the survey indicated that experienced teachers rated their overall self-efficacy higher than their novice counterparts. This was evident in the three subscales with the exception of student engagement, which had no significance in scores. The researchers proposed two possible explanations for the lack of difference between the two groups concerning “student engagement”. The first being that the concept of student engagement has only been recently a focus of education, hence its core principles are yet to be developed and, secondly, novice teachers may be more preoccupied with instruction and management and not aware of the role of “student engagement”.

Lastly, a general finding from the Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy (2001) survey results was the difference in how novice teachers perceive the explicit tasks of teaching and the concept of verbal persuasion. Novice teachers were found to analyze the tasks of teaching more than their experienced counterparts. Novice teachers were also found to embrace the support of verbal persuasion as more pertinent to contributing to their job growth whereas responses from experienced teachers did not view such support as pertinent.

As previously cited, Gibson and Dembo (1984) investigated the degree to which teacher self-efficacy influences learning outcomes. In their first phase of the study, they studied the dimensions of teacher self-efficacy as it relates to Bandura’s (1977) theory of self-efficacy. With the second phase of the study, they sought evidence that teacher self-efficacy is a valid construct that can be reliability assessed as separate from other similar
paradigms affecting instruction and, finally, the third phase addressed whether teachers with high perceptions of self-efficacy perform at a level of teaching that is more effective than teachers with low perceptions of self-efficacy.

In Phase I, Gibson & Dembo surveyed 208 elementary (K-6) schoolteachers using the Teacher Efficacy Scale and conducted a factor analysis of teacher responses that yielded two significant factors supporting self-efficacy as a valid concept in teaching. They found the first factor, Personal Teaching Efficacy, represents a teacher’s “sense of personal teaching efficacy, or belief that one has the skills and abilities to bring about student learning” (p. 574). This factor reflected a teacher’s sense of role and responsibility and related directly to Bandura’s work. The second factor, Teacher Efficacy, represents a broader dimension of teacher perceptions. It pertains to how a teacher believes teaching, as a practice, is efficacious to enable students to learn. With respect to the ability of self-efficacy to be assessed, Gibson and Dembo (1984) found Teacher Efficacy Scale to be a reliable measure of teaching self-efficacy.

In Phase II of this study, Gibson and Dembo (1984) conducted a multitrait-multimethod analysis of the responses of 55 teachers enrolled in graduate education courses to the Teacher Efficacy Scale and other measures of teacher-student rapport, flexibility of instruction, and verbal ability to determine how these traits converge to support the concept of teacher self-efficacy. Results in this phase indicated support for such convergence.

Finally, the Phase III of this study which asked whether teachers of high and low perceptions of self-efficacy influence a teacher’s ability to provide effective instruction,
particularly related to variables of when teachers are involved in academic time activities versus non academic time activities. Coding of these observations among the two teacher groups (high and low efficacy) showed significant differences in the persistence variable. Teachers identified with high efficacy traits showed significant higher levels of persistence in a lesson as opposed to those with low self-efficacy who tended to go on to the next activity even when students had not achieved the lesson objective.

Guskey (1994) sought to further examine the dimensions of teacher self-efficacy, particularly with regard to whether a distinction exists between personal and teacher efficacy as prior researchers such as Woolfolk and Hoy (1990) had found. Guskey surveyed 283 experienced teachers and 59 preservice teachers using Gibson and Dembo’s (1984) Teacher Efficacy Scale and measured their responses across a quadrant representing Locus (internal vs. external) and Efficacy (personal vs. teaching). Contrary to previous research, Guskey found no evidence to distinguish personal efficacy from teacher efficacy; however, “results indicate the difference to be an internal versus external distinction, similar to the locus-of-control found in measures of causal attribution” (p. 637). From an efficacy perspective, these findings relate to a teacher’s belief of whether outcomes in learning are due to internal factors (teacher skills, etc.) or external (student characteristics). Guskey suggests that teacher judgment of student ability is an important variable in constructing teacher self-efficacy.

Finally, in research by Spillane (1999), his study of how the three math teachers interacted with curricular and instructional changes to reform yielded some transformation in teacher practices. Through social interaction, reflection, and
workshops, he found teachers “...had replaced the norm of privacy that dominates most schools with a norm of collaboration and deliberation about practice” (p. 164). He concluded that their “enactment zones” supported the intention of the reform to incorporate collaboration, inquiry, and reflection in their instruction.

Teacher Responsibilities, Tensions, and Emotions

In exploring teacher self-efficacy, reviewing research as to how teachers perceive their responsibilities may provide insights into how they define their role. Fischman et al. (2006) interviewed 40 urban secondary teachers to examine the influences that shape teachers’ understanding of their responsibilities. Specifically, they sought to explore the apparent tension some teachers reported between societal expectations that narrowly focused their role on student academic needs with the broader expectations they have for themselves to meet the developmental, social, and emotional needs of students.

When considering the task of teaching and the perceptions of teachers to meet the demands of teaching, some research explores how teachers’ emotions influence how they perceive their role as they interact with their students. To study the emotional aspects among teachers experiencing educational change, Hargreaves (1998) interviewed 32 middle school teachers from four school districts outside Toronto, Ontario. The teachers had all been identified by administrators in their school systems as having a serious and sustained commitment to implementing common learning outcomes (or standards), integrated curriculum and alternative forms of assessment and reporting in their classes (p. 841).
Each teacher was interviewed for between one and two hours and transcripts were generated and analyzed to develop themes from their responses. Focus areas of the study included the study of emotional relationships with students, parents, administrators and other colleagues and the emotional responses to changes in curriculum, assessment, reporting, and other teaching activities. Quotes and summary statements from respondents were sorted and assigned to create additional sub-themes for further analysis. From the study, Hargreaves (1998) arrived at a general conclusion that:

Teaching cannot be reduced to technical competence or standards. It involves significant understanding and emotional labor as well… one important way in which teachers interpreted the educational changes that were imposed on them…was in terms of their impact these changes had on their own emotional goals and relationships. (p. 850)

Specifically the Hargreaves (1998) study concluded that:

1. Educational reform must acknowledge the central role emotions play in the outcomes of teaching and learning.

2. Educational discourse involving policy should acknowledge more ‘authentic pride’ in what schools and teachers are achieving in current reforms.

3. Along with pride, the educational community needs to also acknowledge ‘shame’ rather than intellectually rationalizing that school failures are attributed to external factors.
4. Educational reform should include the emotional dimension of teaching into learning standards and professional competencies.

5. Educational and political leaders gain a deeper understanding of the role emotions play in teaching.

6. The reform process break from the highly rationalized structure that embraces a step-by-step paradigm and consider how teachers can embrace emotionally engaged approaches to instruction.

7. Administrators and teachers themselves break from these ‘rational aspects’ that include things like checklists, targets, meetings, etc. and make time for teachers to care and connect with their students emotionally. (pp. 850-852)

Teachers’ emotions may also to be related to the degree in which they perceive their role and responsibility to care for students. In a study that explored how teachers use and manage their emotions to care for students, O’Connor (2008) conducted a series of in-depth interviews with Christina, Michael, and Laura, three secondary school humanities teachers who were selected based on their experiences in a focus group involving issues of professional accountability and autonomy. Interview questions centered on themes of participants’ life history to identify significant life experiences that may have contributed to their understanding and practice of caring for their students. Responses by the three teachers showed distinctions in how each teacher defined and interpreted their duties to the outcomes of their students. In their responses, O’Connor found the concept of caring within several contexts in teaching. In a performance context, Michael and Laura defined caring in terms of sustaining enthusiasm and positive feelings...
in the classroom. They separated the functions and responsibilities of professional teaching from their own personal emotions and characterized teaching as more like performing. By contrast, Christina expressed a deeper caring for her students and a more integrated paradigm of personal emotions and professional expectations, using the “love” (p. 122) she feels toward her students as the foundation of her teaching.

In a professional context, teachers may employ strategies to separate their personal feelings from professional expectations, suggesting that for some, teaching requires an element of acting (Hochschild, 1983) to balance this separation. In this context, Michael expressed a personal expectation to be warmer and more outgoing in his role as teacher whereas Laura felt the professional role of teaching should not be a performance but should represent “aspects of yourself” (p. 122). She felt the “conscious decision” a teacher makes to care for students emphasizes the nurturing role inherent in the profession. Two of the teachers interviewed espoused a humanistic orientation in their teaching. For example, Michael expressed a desire to “liberate his students through improving their literacy skills” (p. 123) while Christina had a desire to teach students to develop the virtue of empathy. From an organizational perspective, each described their philosophy as having some conflict with organizational expectations. Christina took exception to the shallowness of nurturing and “rah-rah encouragement” (p. 123) exhibited by some teachers, while Michael felt that schools were only concerned with measurable outcomes and not the nurturing role of the teacher. These in-depth interviews showed that teachers shaped their instructional emphasis on the basis of their identities and that caring for their students was a central theme to their understanding of their role as professionals.
Secondarily, it was apparent that their identities are closely related to their emotional selves and that their emotional selves are often in conflict with the more rationale practices espoused by the education community.

**Occupational Stress**

To explore how teacher self-efficacy relates to teacher stress in coping with major curriculum reform, McCormick, Ayres, and Beechey (2006) sent over 2300 questionnaires to teachers in New South Wales, Australia asking them to reflect and report on their ability to adapt their instruction to higher educational standards as prescribed by national policy. Data from the questionnaires were analyzed across theoretical frameworks such as previously researched “stress domains” (student, school, external, and personal) to identified self-efficacy domains (teaching and technology).

Their study reached several conclusions. First, variables affecting stress and teacher efficacy are more pertinent at the teacher level rather than the school level. Hence reform efforts should consider teacher factors rather than a “one size fits all” (p. 65) approach. Secondly, the study concluded that, when faced with stress due to change, teachers tended to use less direct strategies for reducing stress rather than strategies that address the underlying cause of the stress, such as communicating with the administration, professional development, etc. Finally, results of the study found no relationship between perceived stress and the two self-efficacy domains of teaching, which involved employing new teaching strategies, and technology, using the internet to access the syllabus.

In examining stress in the education workplace, Bandura (1997) identified areas
in the job of educators where stress may be significant and ultimately influence how a
teacher perceives self-efficacy. Increasing demands for time and outcomes with little
added support creates tedium and job overload for many public school teachers. Added to
this paradigm is the technology that monitors and accounts for teacher compliance and
student test scores that increases teacher perception of a job with uncontrollable
expectations and/or represents an administration that may use such technology “…as a
coercive means of managerial control” (p. 464).

Folkman, Lazarus, Gruen, and DeLongis (1986, as cited in Bandura, 1997) found
when individuals “rely on cognitive re-appraisals” (p. 466) of stressful situations, it
lessens the effects of stress. Bandura attributes this reframing to individuals with a
perception of high self-efficacy while those with low self-efficacy would most likely
choose more evasive and/or escapist strategies that are considerably less productive.

Teacher Aspirations

As previously referenced, Quaglia (2008) developed conditions and a set of
guiding principles under which aspirations are fostered (refer to Addendum I). In
surveying teachers, Quaglia gained some insights into how teachers perceive these
conditions and identify, compare these differences, and recognize similarities and
differences in their perceptions.

In comparing responses from teachers to students, Quaglia (2008) found
significant differences in how teachers and student perceive “School Pride, a critical
condition of ‘Belonging’” (p. 13). Only 49% of students agreed with the statement, “I am
proud of my school,” while 85% of teachers agreed with the statement. Another
statement yielding differing perceptions within the condition of “belonging” was the question of whether “Teachers cared if you are absent from school.” From the survey, 85% of teachers agreed that students care if teachers are absent, while 45% of students surveyed agreed that teachers care if they are absent. Finally, under the condition of “Fun and Excitement,” a stark difference exists in how the two groups perceive teachers as having fun in their jobs. From the survey, 96% of teachers surveyed agreed to the statement that “I am excited to be working with students,” while 56% of students surveyed agreed to the statement “Teachers enjoy working with students.” Conversely, when asking whether students are “having fun” in school, 77% of teachers agreed with the statement, while 48% of students surveyed agreed “school is boring.”

Bandura (1993) researched how teachers perceive the collective efficacy of their school by integrating aggregated responses to questions of their own efficacy with responses to how they perceive their schools’ capability as a whole. This study showed marked differences in how teachers perceived their schools’ efficacy across grades. From kindergarten to second grade, responses from teachers showed a trend of high efficacy in their schools’ ability to successfully teach students in reading and math. At grade three, efficacy scores declined significantly through grade six.

Collective Efficacy

*Schools in which the staff collectively judge themselves as relatively powerless are likely to convey a group sense of academic futility that can pervade the entire life of the school…in contrast, schools in which staff members collectively judge themselves highly capable of promoting academic success and development.*

*Bandura, 1997, p. 248*
As this review of literature continues to move from conditions of the individual teacher to the external factors that impact self-efficacy of teachers, Bandura’s (1997) concept of collective efficacy is a logical paradigm to examine those factors. According to Bandura, “Collective efficacy is not simply the sum of efficacy beliefs of individuals…rather is an emergent group level attribute that is the product of coordinate and interactive dynamics” (p. 57). Bandura speaks of the reciprocal relationship between teacher efficacy and school systems. School success or failures are based on the cumulative nature of teacher’s self-efficacy, yet a teacher’s perception of self-efficacy can be influenced by how the school system functions to meet student-learning needs.

In a study to determine whether factors of collective efficacy can be found in a “large national survey” (p. 305), Ware and Kitsantas (2007) surveyed over 26,000 teachers and 6,700 principals to explore how collective efficacy relates to teacher commitment. Using the Public Teacher Questionnaire (TQ) and the Public School Principals Questionnaire (PQ) of the School and Staffing Survey (SASS) 1999-2000, perceptions of the subjects were measured using a Likert Scale and analyzed via factor analysis yielding three factors that accounted for 54.97% of item variance: 1) Teacher Efficacy to Enlist Administrative Direction – the degree to which school administration supports the work of teachers; 2) Collective Efficacy – Teachers’ Influence on Decision Making – the extent teachers feel they have involvement in major decision-making; and 3) Teacher Efficacy for Classroom Management – teacher beliefs about the control they have to manage their classrooms. Results of the study confirmed three concepts of collective efficacy can be validated in a large national survey and that a significant
correlation exists between the perception of collective efficacy and teacher commitment to the profession. Results also showed that teacher commitment is enhanced when principals support their work and they have opportunities to influence school policy and control instruction.

An initiative known as Accelerated Schools (Levin, 1989), proposed “speeding up rather than slow down” (p. 1) the progress of underachieving and/or at-risk students via systemic change designed to counter school tendencies to support struggling students through slower pace, lowered teacher expectations, and emphasizing mechanical skills over more substantive outcomes. Three main features of this initiative required schools to empower teachers, involve parents at a high level, and use available community resources to support students. Organizationally, Accelerated Schools (Levin) is based on three principles:

- **Unity of Purpose** - Agreement among all stakeholders (parents, teachers, administrators) on common goals for school that involve achievement for all students.

- **Empowerment** - Placing instruction and curriculum decisions in the hands of professionals.

- **Building on Strengths** - Instead of attributing lack of school on disadvantage students, build instruction on student and family strengths. (p. 4)

To study the efficacy of the Accelerated Schools to make a difference in student achievement, Ignatz, Bauman, and Bird (2003) conducted a longitudinal study of four elementary schools in northwest Florida over a seven-year span. As a result of the study,
Ignatz et al. concluded “…data provided ample evidence to indicate that the project effected an increasing trend in achievement scores and in some instances, significant achievement increases” (p. 56).

In a study comparing how teachers’ sense of efficacy relates to their commitment to teaching, Coladarci (1992) asks the fundamental question of teachers: “If you had it to do over, would you choose teaching as a profession?” He surveyed 364 elementary school teachers that the Maine Department of Education randomly generated to correlate responses to that question to variables related to personal and general perceptions of teacher efficacy. He assessed teacher efficacy using Gibson and Dembo’s (1984) instrument and correlated with the variables in a survey that included teacher commitment, teacher perceptions of personal efficacy, general or collective efficacy, and principal leadership as well as general teacher characteristics. The results of the study found two independent variables, personal and general efficacy, as having the highest correlation with commitment to teaching. Within general efficacy, most prominent school level variables were small class ratios and principal involvement as an instructional leader. As significant as these conclusions are, the study did not clarify how general efficacy influences personal teacher efficacy related to the teacher commitment question.

Diamond, Randolph, and Spillane (2004) studied teacher expectations from what Lee and Smith (2001) also refer to as “collective responsibility” or the organization’s (school) indicators of teacher expectations. Lee and Smith used three indicators to measure collective responsibility: 1) teachers’ internalization of responsibility for student learning; 2) teachers’ willingness to adapt teaching practices to students’ needs; and 3)
teachers’ sense of efficacy in their teaching process. In their study, Diamond et al. confirmed Lee and Smith’s conclusion that schools with the most socio-economically advantaged students have the highest collective responsibility among teachers, thereby concluding that student composition impacts teacher attitudes and/or beliefs. They also confirmed “teachers’ sense of responsibility for student learning was higher in contexts where they saw students as possessing greater learning resources” (p. 93). Conversely, when students’ deficits were emphasized, teachers believed issues such as lack of motivation, limited skills, family background and other external factors as undermining their ability to effectively teach.

Leadership and Support: The Principals’ Role

As stated previously, the role of the principal is transforming such that principals are now expected to be more of an instructional leader who can move schools forward. Within the context of schools achieving equity and excellence for their students, Scheurich and Skrla (2003) write extensively regarding the role of school leadership. They describe three characteristics of effective leadership in schools to achieve equity of opportunity and excellent instruction. They include: “1) an ethical, moral, and democratic core; 2) a deeply held belief that we can create equitable and excellent schools; and 3) the commitment to never quit…” (p. 110).

In his critique of school leadership, Schmoker (2007) cites the lack of honest feedback principals give teachers, creating what he calls the “leadership illusion” (p. 29). Citing Elmore (1999), Schmoker supports that “…school leaders have little effect on
instruction…even teachers admit this (p. 30). Through his research, Schmoker contends that principals’ support of teachers results in the “rewarding of mediocrity” (p. 32).

In his research of educational reform, Marzano (2003) writes extensively of the many factors that are critical to the development of effective schools. In his book, he describes the implementation and coordination of a viable curriculum, well-trained teachers, and a community that supports high-expectations. Interestingly, he reserves school leadership as a separate function, “This is not because school leadership is unimportant…on the contrary, leadership could be considered the single most important aspect of effective school reform” (p. 172). He attributes this to his opinion that leadership in school permeates every facet of the educational community, thus supporting its critical role. Among several facets, he cites a school’s clear mission, climate, teacher attitudes, and the organization of curriculum as being critical to the role of the principal.

Finally, in the most extensive work on defining the role of the principal, Gray and Streshley (2008) compared Collin’s (2002) work in the private business sector and applying CEO attributes to the role of principals. They interviewed principals from several high performing schools and found commonalities in how school principals led their effective schools. Their research revealed several over-arching themes showing that principals: created and facilitated opportunities for collaboration among teachers, students, parents, etc.; allowed teachers to participate in school-wide decision-making; and held to practices related to Professional Learning Communities (DuFour, 2003) by focusing on how students learn.
With respect to principal self-efficacy, there has been little focus on exploring the motivation and behavior of principals in their roles as instructional leaders (Tschannen-Moran, & Gareis, 2007). Principals face significant challenges in their roles to lead schools on the path to reform. How do they perceive this role?

The Vermont Context

It is interesting to note that, in an attempt to define general rural characteristics of community and school, Vermont is a state that defies a strict rural categorization. In the annual report by the Rural School and Community Trust by Johnson and Strange (2007), Vermont’s profile presents a mix of characteristics. It ranks low on the overall Priority Ranking of states (#39) because of relative low poverty and “positive overall outcomes” (p. 79). It does have a significantly high percentage of students in rural schools (55.8%) versus the national average (19.1%), giving it a ranking of #1 in the country. Surprisingly, it has significantly higher Rural per Pupil Property wealth ($204,042) compared to the national average ($151,164), giving a ranking of #40. Of those students in rural schools, 25.3% qualify for free and reduced lunch giving it a ranking of #37, with #1 being the most urgent. Fourteen percent of its student population receives special education services and recent studies from the University of Vermont (Giangreco, 2008) indicate this percentage is trending upward. Compared to other states, Vermont ranks #43, with #1 being the most urgent, of states where rural adults hold high school diplomas. It also has low teacher-student ratios and high per pupil spending, two variables that may change significantly given the current economic conditions.
Equity and Educational Outcomes

As mentioned previously, achievement scores from standardized test scores in Vermont reveal a gap in achievement between those students above the poverty line and those eligible for free and reduced lunch. Disaggregated results in the tables below taken from the New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP) illustrate the degree of this gap.

Table 2. Fall 2007 Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Math Proficiency</th>
<th>Reading Proficiency</th>
<th>Writing Proficiency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grades 3-8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63% All Students</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45% Low SES</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30% All Students</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15% Low SES</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Spring 2008 Science Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Grades</th>
<th>Intermediate Grades</th>
<th>Secondary Grades</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>48% All Students</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32% Low SES</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These data illustrate two issues. First, NECAP proficiency scores represent the failure of schools to reach those students across all critical content areas. Proficiency scores consistently show the high percentage of proficiency among students with adequate financial resources versus those students considered in poverty. Secondly, these
data represent the decline in proficiency scores increasing as students rise from elementary to secondary grades, which corresponds with Bandura’s (1993) work showing teacher self-efficacy measures steady decline from 3rd to 6th grades. Although this study did not compare findings about teacher efficacy with student achievement on standardized test scores, some understanding of student data adds to the contextual background of this study.

Literature Review Summary

This review of literature provides a background, structure, and context for interpreting responses from participants and the analysis of themes that emerged. Most of the studies reviewed indicated a number of findings about teacher self-efficacy and collective efficacy that provides a theoretical background for this study. Several researchers address principles of self-efficacy, teacher commitment, the equity/achievement gap, rural education, and the role of administration in supporting teachers. It is clear from the literature review that teachers’ beliefs about their own abilities and skills to bring about substantive change in schools is important. The research also shows that the teachers’ emotional strength and persistence to work with students are indicators of a strong sense of self-efficacy. Their ability to use innovative instructional techniques, set high expectations, and effort to work collaboratively also emerge in the literature as evidence of a strong sense of self-efficacy as teachers. Below is a summary of the major themes from the literature as they relate to the primary research questions.
With respect to reform, many researchers agree that the teacher is the most critical variable in how or whether a school actually improves. How teachers assimilate their role and abilities to fulfill this role looms large and makes this study potentially viable in contributing to the education reform discourse. Self-efficacy appears as an important concept that influences student learning, student aspirations, teacher collaboration, instructional pedagogies, and other facets of educational reform. Knowing how teachers perceive their own abilities to manage high expectations of educational reform mandates with the drive to improve instructional outcomes for all students can inform the discourse and help support both causes. Within the rural context, there is some indication that rural communities pose unique considerations in designing reform initiatives. As Harris et al. (2001) found in Project Launch, rural teachers were more likely to focus time and attention to student relationships while urban counterparts focused on achievement goals. With respect to classroom environments, urban teachers developed clear rules and guidelines in their classroom while rural teachers resisted such practices, instead focusing on more open-ended goals addressing issues such as student motivation.

**Teacher Aspirations and Commitment**

To address the question of how a teacher’s self-efficacy might influence his/her aspirations and commitment as teachers in a rural community, the review of literature found that teachers with high standards of self-efficacy created “mastery experiences” (Gibson & Dembo, 1984) and held high expectations for students to accomplish “mastery learning” (Guskey, 1987). Conversely, evidence in the reviews also shows that teachers...
with a low degree of self-efficacy were less likely to persevere with a struggling learner and would tend to devote more time to non-academic activities than those teachers with high perceptions of self-efficacy. These findings also translated into how teachers perceive expectations of their students. Although no causality can be inferred, a strong relationship exists between teachers with high self-efficacy and those who generally hold high expectations for their students.

Considering how teachers perceive the responsibilities of their profession as compared to other professions, the Fischman et al. study (2006) found some fundamental differences. Whereas other professionals in business, law, medicine, etc. identified a relatively finite list of whom they are responsible to, teachers responded with an expansive list that ranged from self to society. These data pose questions as to whether teachers truly believe in their expansive role and if so, is it an attainable goal for a profession to meet the extensive list of responsibilities?

Collective Efficacy

Using the concept of collective efficacy to define the environmental parameters in which teachers work, the review found some major themes to explore further. In Ware and Kitsantas’ (2007) expansive national survey of teachers and principals, the concept of collective efficacy was validated and showed that teachers perceive higher success in their work when they have opportunities to influence decisions that impact school-wide outcomes and when principals support their teaching. Additional research by Scheurich and Skrla (2003), Schmoker (2006), and Marzano (2003) emphasize the important role school leadership plays in school reform. Longitudinal studies of the Lord Byron and
Blue Mountain Schools (Hargreaves & Fink, 2000) exposed the challenges schools face in sustaining consistent leadership while retaining competent and committed teachers. Both schools experienced a period of early success when both principals and teachers were “hand-picked” based on a clear mission for the school but, from a systemic perspective, the capacity to sustain success was limited.

In examining how schools collectively defined expectations of students, Diamond et al. (2004) found schools with students of higher socio-economic status (SES) held higher teacher expectations than those with students of low SES. The former schools also defined teachers as having greater responsibility for student outcomes, a similar outcome to the previously referenced Fischman et al. (2000) study addressing the teacher responsibilities.

Bandura (1993) researched how teachers perceived the collective efficacy of their school and compared them by grades. As reported previously, his study shows differences across grade levels with lower grade teachers reporting high efficacy while upper grade level teachers reporting progressively lower collective efficacy in their schools’ ability to successfully teach students.

In reviewing the factors that contribute to teacher commitment and performance from a self-efficacy and collective efficacy perspective, it appears that differences may exist between veteran teachers who may have been involved in a school/district that lacked support, and those teachers new to the profession who are armed and eager to use their newly acquired skills.
Rural Schools

It should be acknowledged that many of the studies reviewed either did not consider rural factors as significant or found no significant differences between rural schools and teachers from urban schools. With the exception of the work done by the Rural School and Community Trust (Johnson & Strange, 2007), most of the studies defined “rurality” on a regional basis. As the literature suggests, Vermont is a unique state in that it does not follow many of the other state’s characteristics of “rurality”. Given the paucity of focused research in specific rural school features, this study will consider many of the unique Vermont characteristics rather than more general considerations of rural attributes.
CHAPTER 3: DESIGN AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

*The opportunity to learn about what you cannot see and to explore alternative explanations of what you do see is the special strength of interviewing in qualitative inquiry.*

*(Glesne, 2006, p. 81)*

Theoretical Framework

The purpose of this study was to explore how rural teachers’ perceptions of self-efficacy in their jobs related to their abilities to meet expectations, demands, and mandates placed on public schools. In addition, the study examined how school principals perceive their efficacy to support their teachers and lead their schools to meet demands of school reform was examined. The study was guided by the following questions:

1. How do rural teachers’ perception of self-efficacy in their jobs relate to the degree in which they engage in public school reform?
2. How do rural teachers’ perception of self-efficacy relate to the degree in which they collaborate with colleagues and is their understanding of collaboration similar to their principals?
3. How do rural teachers’ perceptions of self-efficacy relate to how they maintain high aspirations and commitment to their profession and what supports do they feel enhance their aspirations and commitment?
4. What is the relationship between a teacher’s self-efficacy and his/her perception of a school systems’ collective efficacy?
5. How do principals perceive their own efficacy to successfully influence and support their teachers and schools to move forward?

By exploring teachers’ self-efficacy to meet the demands of public education, and principals’ perceptions of their schools’ efficacy to meet expectations of public education, this study seeks to gain a deeper understanding of what teachers and principals think, feel, and practice in their roles as public educators. It seeks to further define the personal relationship both educators have with their jobs as changes occur to meet those demands. As a result, the focus of this study lends itself to a qualitative analysis of the perceptions of teachers and principals. David Fetterman (1988) speaks of the “secret storm or the silent scientific revolution” (p. 22) in educational evaluation in his reviews of qualitative methods. He describes the evolution of qualitative research in education as moving away from being a “monolithic entity” (p. 22) to using multiple approaches that support an emphasis on program evaluation in education. His promotion of qualitative research approaches in education evaluation as a varied and integrated endeavor resonates with my approach to the methodology of this study. Open-ended interviews with teachers and principals served as a major research method for this study. The focus is to understanding perceptions based on experiences of participants captured through extended interviews.

Design of the Study

Essentially, this study examined how teachers perceive their skills and abilities to meet the expectations to improve educational outcomes for all students, in other words, their sense of self-efficacy. Additionally, the study explored the relationship between
teacher self-efficacy and the degree to which principals provide leadership to move schools forward in a collective efficacy context. A goal was to understand their sense of self-efficacy in this reform environment. Patton (1980) has done extensive work in qualitative research as it applies to evaluation education. Much of his work focuses on how subjects in a study create meaning from their experiences. In his description of a phenomenological study, he might describe the phenomenon reflecting the inquiry would be the relationship teachers have with their jobs. He describes qualitative research for educational evaluation as a means to determine how subjects experience phenomenon. “…phenomenology does not ask how do children learn this particular material, but it asks what is the essence of the experience of learning” (p. 106).

As a method of study, the qualitative design offered the best opportunity to gain an understanding of teachers’ self-efficacy to personally meet reform demands and principals’ perceptions of schools’ collective efficacy to meet those same demands. This type of study has some obvious strengths and weaknesses. While it provided the subjects opportunities to “share stories” that can give meaningful perspectives, interpreting those stories for analysis was challenging. Interview questions were designed to allow subjects to freely share their personal stories as educators or as Glesne (2006) suggests, “making words fly” (p. 79). This study revealed at the essence of how teachers perceive their capabilities to meet expectations for educational reform. By exploring teacher perceptions through inquiry, I was able to obtain this essence through teacher stories. My intention was for the participants to reveal their personal perceptions honestly in a safe, relaxed, and confident manner, enabling me to to analyze, and synthesize their
responses. Careful attention was given to interview questions and follow-up conversations that provided reliable and valid data from which themes for analysis were developed.

An interview lasting approximately one to one-half hours was conducted with eight teachers representing grades K-12 and two school principals representing the grades kindergarten through 12th grade. The original design was to interview nine teachers and three principals, however, it proved difficult to recruit both a third teacher and find access to the principal from the Johnson City School, which was experiencing a significant amount of stress due to administrative uncertainty. The interviews include teachers representing grades K-5, 6-8, and 9-12 respectively. Each subject from the grade groupings represents a sample of teachers representing a wide range of experience, from their first year to year over 20 years of experience. School data concerning student demographics, achievement test scores, and other school characteristics were also used to triangulate data obtained through the interviews and considered as additional background information for responses.

I relied on two types of data collection in my study. First, I conducted interviews, using questions generated from my review of literature, experiences as an educator and discussions with colleagues in public schools. Second, I conducted a series of document reviews that included data on school demographics, and scores from state-mandated assessments.
Role of the Researcher

As the researcher, I was responsible for implementation of all facets of this study. As a district administrator, I considered how my current job and professional relationships with subjects might have influenced teacher responses to interview questions. I explained to each subject that interviews would be semi-structured, focused on the research questions, and would be strictly confidential.

Since this researcher is a current district administrator, consideration was taken to ensure that I suspend any preconceived notions or biases that would influence how I deliver questions and analyze data obtained from responses. For example, during the interviews, I was constantly aware of the need to pose questions in the most neutral manner possible and to carefully monitor my response to their responses. During the analysis of the transcripts, I needed to curb my immediate tendency to reach a quick conclusion based on my job experience and remain as objective as possible in my interpretations. I also required interview settings to be held at neutral sites, usually a bank conference room or community-based office, to help ensure subjects’ comfort, interviewer neutrality, and professional decorum. In addition to these requirements, my research design followed the guidelines, requirements, and approval of the Institutional Review Board at the university.

Selection and Description of the Sites and Participants

Through networking with state superintendent and principal associations, principals from a dozen regional schools were contacted and provided a letter inviting them to participate in the study. They needed to agree to be interviewed and to nominate
three teachers meeting the criteria representing variables of grades and teaching experience. Principals demonstrating an obvious verbal commitment to participate and a clear understanding of the study were selected. It was made clear that teachers needed to be willing participants and that cooperation as well as the above-stated criteria were the only requirements to consider in their nominating teachers.

Responses from superintendents were relatively swift although principals were more delayed in responding and required more contacts and communication. As stated previously, the study was unsuccessful in recruiting a principal and teacher from the Johnson City School. It seems likely that the reluctance to participate that I observed in this school was related to the effects of increased accountability and a major administrative transition that occurred during the study. The principal made several attempts to find a teacher, but it was obvious that my study was not a priority in their job as the school year was winding down. The principal, facing job uncertainty, did not return my repeated contacts at that time.

It should be noted that the manner in which I selected teachers and principals may yield participants considered more effective in their roles as teachers and principals. And may represent a deeper awareness educational skills than those in a larger, random sample. Those superintendents who responded to my request might be influenced to choose principals who they feel already striving to meet the intentions of this research. Similarly, teachers selected by principals might naturally be the more high-performing teachers in the school that principals feel would be good representatives of the school.
Participants

Teacher participants recruited for this study clearly represent a degree of diversity regarding years of experience and grade levels. The least experience teacher, Doug, had just finished his first year of teaching high school, while the most experienced, Vera, was in her 23rd year. All grade groups were represented ranging from Kindergarten to 12th grade.

Although only two principal participants were recruited, they represent the necessary diversity, both from tenured perspective and representing the K-12 continuum. Tables 4. and 5. provide more specific information regarding the teacher and principal participants.

Teachers

Table 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of Teaching</th>
<th>Grades</th>
<th>School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Helen”</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Kindergarten, Johnson City School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Karen”</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4th Grade, Wake Rural School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Jack”</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1st Grade, Johnson City School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Freda”</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6th Grade, Wake Rural School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Vera”</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>5th Grade, Wake Rural School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Doug”</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9th – 11th Grades, Grand Regional High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Gerri”</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9th – 12th Grades, Grand Regional High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Sarah”</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9th – 12th Grades, Grand Regional High School</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Principals

Table 5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years as Principal</th>
<th>School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Bob”</td>
<td>13 years Grand Regional High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Paul”</td>
<td>1 year Wake Rural School</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Data Collection Strategies

**The Interview**

Although Glesne’s (2006) stated “the opportunity to learn about what you cannot see and to explore alternative explanations of what you do see is the special strength of interviewing in qualitative inquiry” over-simplifies this study’s purpose, it illustrates a possible outcome. We cannot see a teacher’s perception of self-efficacy but a study such as this offered the opportunity to explain what these perceptions appear to relate to and how they were developed. Patton (1980) suggests that interview questions be designed to include questions that elicit several different perspectives. He recommends questions that address a subject’s experiences, opinions, feelings, knowledge and senses, and background, which fit well with the questions posed through this study.

As described earlier, teacher and principal subjects participated in an interview lasting approximately an hour and a half in length, sometimes longer as needed. Interview questions were organized into four basic categories with corresponding subcategories. Three of the basic categories related to the research questions while an initial category addressed the participants’ profiles.
Interview questions for both teachers and principals (see sample questions in Appendices A and B) were open-ended, giving subjects opportunities to “tell their story” and provide their perceptions of teaching. Holloway and Jefferson (2000) suggest four principles when interviewing that may help to facilitate quality responses to questions. They suggest allowing subjects to share their perspective through open-ended questions that ask “why”, and to use the subject’s ordering and phrasing when asking follow-up questions. In these interviews, follow-up questions were used both in an open-ended and clarifying manner that yielded deeper understanding of their responses.

State Reports and Assessments

In addition to interviews, school data taken from state assessments and reports were analyzed and considered within the emerging themes. However, the purpose for looking at state assessments and reports was to provide a context for the kinds of schools and levels of student achievement in which the participants in this dissertation study worked. Also, it is clear that most of the major reform efforts at both the state and national levels are intended to improve student achievement data as indicated by standardized test results. Thus, implications for how teachers and principals perceive their own sense of self-efficacy to meet these demands need to be viewed in terms of that results the schools are hoping to attain for students.

Methods of Achieving Validity

The participants in this research needed to trust that the study would accurately capture their perceptions, and would use methods that would accurately analyze those responses. Several means were employed to assure validity of these processes. With
respect to the interviews, I used follow-up questions when participants provided vague or
general responses. During the interviews with participants, adjustments and clarifications
were made to strengthen the trust between researcher and participant. To further establish
the validity of subject responses, individual transcriptions of the interview data were
shared with each subject for review and re-clarification if needed.

*Personal “I”*

It is important that I address my personal motivation for embarking on this
journey for answers. As an educational administrator responsible for improving
achievement outcomes for all students in a rural Vermont supervisory union, I am acutely
aware of the important responsibility given to teachers in educating our youth.

On a personal note, I bring a set of biases that reflect family values, personal
school experiences, and general life experiences. I know through personal reflection and
observation of my family that I tend to seek a quick and rational explanation for events.
For this research, I needed to suspend and/or delay belief until the final analysis of data
was complete. I needed to be vigilant of that tendency as I analyzed subject data.

In my experience as an educator for over two decades, I have acquired
knowledge, experiences, and opinions as to what constitutes good teaching and have
relatively strong values relating to issues of equity in public education. I also have
extensive experiences collaborating and managing teachers in public schools that could
shape my subjectivity. As a result, I recognize that I might be prone to engaging in subtle
stereotyping of veteran teachers being resistant to change and, conversely, perceiving
new teachers being more change oriented. In short, I needed to limit my reform agenda
while seriously attempting to answer questions pertaining to good teachers. My experience and intimate knowledge of the subject gave me insights to carefully interpret and analyze data generated in this study.

Glesne (2006) describes the importance of subjectivity as needing to “be imaginable by others, and it must be verifiable by others” (p. 123). For the purpose of this study, I maintained a field journal and held conversations with colleagues to gauge my own subjectivity during the process of transcript analysis and interpretation.
CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS, FINDINGS, AND EMERGENT THEMES

Responses from the interview participants were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. Data from the interviews and school assessment reports were coded according to themes identified in the literature review and those that emerged following the completion of the interviews. Leedy and Ormrod (2005) provide an outline for analyzing data from the extended interviews (p. 139) that describes content analysis or identifying patterns in a body of data taken from the interviews. Drawing from their ideas, the following steps were taken to adequately analyze data from the interviews through the recording and the written transcripts:

- Statements from teachers relating to themes of self-efficacy to meet reform demands were identified.
- Statements from principals relating to themes of collective efficacy to meet reform demands were identified.
- From these statements, categories or “meaning units” (p. 140) or “themes” were constructed and labeled and categorized.
- Ways in which different subjects experience similar responses to interview questions were identified.
- A summary description of how teachers’ self-efficacy relates to their ability to successfully perform their duties was created as was a similar summary for principals.

Subject statements from the interview transcripts were reviewed to gain a sense of how the subjects responded to the interview questions. Once that sense was established,
pertinent statements by the subjects that addressed the over-arching research questions were identified, interpreted, and summarized according to themes. Further interpretation of subject responses within the themes began the process of offering a deeper understanding on how teachers perceive their self-efficacy to successfully meet the high demands of public education. The final product has become what Denzin (1997) refers to as an “illuminative epiphany” (Savin-Baden & Van Niekerk, 2007, p. 8), that reveals insights or raises other issues that further define the problem. Before moving to the analysis of interview data, I provide profiles of the participants to provide context and deeper understanding of the respondents in this study. The participant profiles were created from participant responses to interview questions relating to background and provide the context for content analysis.

Participants’ Profiles

“Helen”

Helen is in her second year as a Kindergarten teacher at Johnson City School. She was raised in suburban Massachusetts and reports that she “always wanted to be a teacher” and was most influenced to be a teacher by her stepfather, who was a teacher. She noticed how students responded to him. She also reports being influenced by an English college professor who she described as “passionate, motivating, and helped her learn.” With her current employment, she reports being “thrown quickly into her job” due to a radical increase in enrollment but felt comfortable with that transition from her former job as a paraeducator.
“Karen”

Karen, raised in a central Vermont city, has been a teacher for four years and teaches 4th grade at Wake Rural School. Her former career was in advertising in an urban area. She elected to move back to Vermont and opened a daycare center. She decided to become a teacher when her oldest child entered school. She reports being influenced by her 8th grade teacher who taught in “exciting and creative ways.” She reports he used music and encouraged discussion about personal interests. When asked what she might have done differently in the way she entered the teaching career, she stated, “I didn’t give myself enough credit for pursuing a teaching career.”

“Jack”

Jack, raised in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont, has taught 1st grade at Johnson City Schools for years. He reports being influenced to teach by his mother who was a teacher. He knew he wanted to be a teacher in high school and reports that no single teacher influenced him, but he has instead looked at his teachers “collectively” as influences on his own teaching. In his teacher training, he credits ample field experience for giving him the most skills to teach in public schools.

“Freda”

Raised outside Vermont in a suburban setting, Freda, a teacher of 15 years, teaches 6th grade at Wake Rural School. Prior to teaching, she started a collaborative nursery in the village where she currently teaches. She reports she always wanted to be a teacher in her earlier life but “became disenchanted with the educational training…being a teacher felt like being an educational technician.” She stayed home with her children
until they became school age, and then entered the profession. Freda reports no favorite teacher, although she described a principal who taught one of her graduate courses as “empowering for me” as he helped her discover a writing skill which she brings into her own teaching. If she had an opportunity to enter the career differently, she would have found a more inspiring education program. She reports that she relies on her parenting skills in teaching along with extensive research in the content and pedagogical areas.

“Vera”

Vera, born in southern Vermont, teaches at Wake Rural School. She has taught for 23 years and currently teaches 5th grade. She did not enter college until later in her adult life, having married and raised a family. She stayed home until her children were school aged and took a job as a paraeducator. Eventually she was encouraged to pursue teaching by a principal of a school in a nearby town where she worked. She credits her 1st grade teacher as having the most influence on her teaching. “She always challenged me and made me feel like a good student.” She added that this 1st grade teacher gave her a “thirst for learning”.

“Doug”

Doug is a first year teacher of social studies at Grand Regional High School. He was raised in suburban western New Hampshire and reports that he attended a gifted and talented program in high school. He credits teachers like Mr. F. in that program as “making us do more thinking than regurgitation…we were fortunate to go on weekly field trips which provided a lot of enrichment.” Doug reports that he was originally pursuing a Forensic Psychology degree. After seeing people in the rough setting of
prison, he decided to work with kids at the “pre-conviction end”. He entered teaching as a substitute teacher while caring for his ailing mother and younger sister, as it offered the most flexibility to balance a job with family needs. Teacher training was at a local collaborative that licensed teachers coming from other professions.

“Gerri”

Gerri, raised in a large Vermont city, has taught for 10 years at Grand Regional High School as a 9th through 12th grade math teacher. After high school, she majored in engineering and planned to teach at the college level. She describes her high school as “everyone was really…always paying attention to the teacher and there were no behavior problems.” She and her husband moved to the Northeast Kingdom and tried sheep farming but soon realized they needed more income, resulting in her decision to become a teacher.

“Sarah”

Sarah was raised in the small northern Vermont city where she currently teaches English at Grand Regional High School. She has taught for 15 years, 10 of which have been at Grand Regional High. She originally planned to major in criminal justice in college but went to law school after realizing the market for teachers was flooded. She became a city manager in a small New Hampshire city, and then worked for a corporation. She “kinda fell into teaching because the bottom fell out of the market in the economy.” She cites her most influential teacher as an English teacher she had at Grand Regional High School, who “recognized my ability to write and nurtured me to pursue
writing. She reports herself as a very quiet student but this teacher helped her express herself.

**Comparative Analysis of Teacher and Principal Backgrounds**

It was apparent that some similarities existed among the teacher participants, which, for the purposes of this study, should be noted. They include the following:

- All but one teacher reported being raised in Vermont
- All teachers possess a Masters Degree.
- Four out of the eight teachers entered the profession from another career.
- Five of the eight teachers identified a past teacher as having a significant influence on them personally and professionally.
- Five of the eight teachers reported that they had planned on teaching as a career when they were in high school.

As stated previously, only two principals were secured as participants for this study, leaving no representation from Johnson City School. Below is a short summary of each principal’s background (see Appendix D for more detailed information regarding their background and responses to interview questions).

**“Bob”**

Bob was raised in the small northern Vermont city where he works as principal of Grand Regional High School. He has been an educator for 25 years, 13 of those as an administrator. As a Marketing Teacher at Grand Regional, he was recruited to be assistant principal and mentored into his current position of nine years.
Paul also grew up locally in the Northeast Kingdom where he is in his first full year as a principal. After high school, he joined the Navy and returned to enroll in the local college to major in education. After receiving his teaching degree in Science, he worked in a regional special education alternative school where he considered being an administrator. He served as assistant principal at Wake Rural School for three years before being appointed principal.

School Data

As stated previously in the review of literature, much of the current reform initiatives target the achievement gap between students with adequate family and financial resources and those students in poverty. For the purpose of this study, student Math and Reading scores on the New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP) were compared to those on free and reduced lunch (FRL) and those not on free and reduced lunch (not FRL). In addition to those data, per pupil expenditures for each school were obtained from the Vermont Department of Education (2010) web site for the 2007-08 school year. Both data sets help illuminate school efficacy as it relates to the level of poverty in the communities and the difference in achievement scores between those student from poorer backgrounds as compared to those students not considered poor. Table 6 depicts school achievement scores for the years 2007 – 2008 and compares those scores of Not-Free and Reduced Lunch (NFRL) to those students meeting eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL).
Table 6. School Data

**Johnson City School**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enrollment 2007-08</th>
<th>% Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) Assessed</th>
<th>2007-08 NECAP Reading</th>
<th>2007-08 NECAP Math</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>FRL</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>687</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>FRL</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Wake Rural School**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enrollment 2007-08</th>
<th>% Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) Assessed</th>
<th>2007-08 NECAP Reading</th>
<th>2007-08 NECAP Math</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>FRL</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>235</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>FRL</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Grand Regional School**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enrollment 2007-08</th>
<th>% Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) Assessed</th>
<th>2007-08 NECAP Reading</th>
<th>2007-08 NECAP Math</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>FRL</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.053</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>NFRL</td>
<td>17%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings and Emergent Theme

Responses from teachers provided a perspective as to how teachers feel about their skills, their opinions of educational reform, the means by which they perceive success in the classroom, their school efficacy to support them, and their career aspirations. The analysis was conducted through the filters of years of experience and grades taught. Based on a summary analysis of the interviews, teacher respondents offered some unique perspectives and attitudes about their sense of self-efficacy as related to the research questions.

From the interview transcripts, teacher and principal responses were reviewed and coded according to the degree that their responses appeared relevant to the study and the main inquiry questions. The findings are reported and organized according to several sub-themes, 1) Background Influences, 2) Instructional Skills/Philosophy/Self Efficacy, 3) Collaboration, 4) Instructional Challenges, 5) Learner Outcomes, 6) School/Collective Efficacy, and 7) Rural Considerations (see Appendix C).

Perceived Instructional Skills

Within this sub-theme, six of the teachers listed the ability to either manage student behavior or engage with students as critical skills, while two of the high school teachers identified content and instructional skills. Clearly, the teachers in the lower grades emphasized more child-centered and affective skills. Helen described her skills in “addressing the whole child” while Karen cited her classroom management skills. Freda, the veteran 6th grade teacher at Wake Rural School, blended the two themes by defining her skills as, “…creating a classroom that supports learning.” Doug, the first year high
school teacher, described his skills as, “understanding student stressors. It should be noted that none of the teachers answered the skills question easily and there were obvious delays in their responses. An extreme example was a quote from Vera, a 5th grade teacher of 23 years, who responded, “…skills? That’s a tough question…” The veteran high school teachers identified “capabilities in the content area (Gerri)” and “making learning applicable to my students’ lives (Sarah)” as their instructional skills.

Feelings/Observations After A Successful Lesson

The majority of responses related to this sub-theme were based in observing the affect of the student. Karen, the kindergarten teacher, gauges success when her students appear happy. Vera, 5th grade, reported student smiling as an indicator of a successful lesson. Interestingly, Vera took the opportunity to share a story of a former student, now an adult, who visited her at school to thank her for “saving his life” through her written messages she regularly conveyed to students. In this case, it was a message of hope and positive feelings, which her former student credited her with saving his life. She obviously felt that was a successful lesson. Jack, 1st grade, gave the most pragmatic description of a successful lesson involving the degree to which his students achieve independence. His description of a successful lesson is “…when the class appears to run itself.” The only teacher having a null response with respect to feelings after a successful lesson was Doug, high school, who stated, “…it doesn’t really feel that spectacular.”

Successful Teaching Strategies

Based on the interviews, subjects talked about what they believe to be the instructional strategies that provide the most successful learning for their students.
Responses ranged from obvious reform initiatives such as “Responsive Classroom” techniques to more general activities such as making “students feel safe.” Helen cited Responsive Classroom as making a difference in her class. Karen emphasized “making students safe” as her most successful strategy while Vera emphasized the positive, “focus on students’ strengths”. Doug had the broadest perspective by identifying “…continual, ongoing assessment” as his strategy for successful learning. Gerri and Sarah both identified “guided note-taking” and “lots of writing” respectively as their most successful strategies.

Skills Matching Job Description

As stated previously, the participants demonstrated some mild consternation about skills they feel they possess that match their job expectations. Teachers were asked whether they felt their skills in teaching matched the expectations of their jobs as public school teachers. Three of the eight teachers obviously struggled with defining their skills. Helen stated, “…I try not to brag…I’m sensitive about taking compliments, however, I do feel comfortable with challenging behaviors”, while Vera gave a similar response, “…I’m not used to tooting my own horn.” Karen gave a more hopeful response, “…I hope I can teach all students”, while Sarah gave a non-committal, “…mmm…that’s a hard one…I think students do learn.”

These responses were significant in that no subject actually identified a skill and even veteran teachers appeared to minimize the concept of teaching skills in their discussions. This would appear to be either an inability of teachers to identify the skills or a reluctance to speak of those critical skills necessary for students to achieve.
Philosophy of Education

Questions related to this sub-theme were designed to explore teachers’ ideas about the purpose and central beliefs of education. There were follow-up questions that directed the conversations to students and ultimately to the question of where is the learning centered. Many of the responses by teachers regarding philosophy of education contained references to the belief that their teaching is “student-centered.” With the exception of Jack, the lower grade teachers described student-centered in terms of “safety and engagement”. The upper-grade teachers emphasized “independence” and “choice”.

With her kindergarten students, Helen stated, “…learning needs to be engaging”. Karen offered that her students’ “…should feel safe…to explore learning”. Jack’s philosophy of student-learning emphasized independence, “…giving the learner ownership for learning.” Freda’s gave a more qualified response with a commentary supporting the need for teacher-centered instruction, “…a pretty significant gap [exists] between our philosophy [as educators] and practice… we need to strike a balance between teacher and student-centered learning.” From the high school perspective, both Jack and Doug emphasized student independence. As noted, “…for students to be self-aware, self-directed, and self-reliant- we need to lead students, then get out of the way”. Gerri hadn’t really considered her philosophy, “…that’s tough- to be firm and fair”, while Sarah expressed her philosophy as, “letting students choose”.

Instructional Challenges

Questions related to instruction asked the teachers to reflect and comment on what they felt were the more significant challenges they face meeting the expectations of their
jobs in the classroom. Responses were varied although there was some commonality across the grades and years of experience. that contributed to this theme.

Although Helen had previously indicated that managing student behavior was a skill she possessed, in response to this question she stated, “...behavior of students and mobility of families” as her most pressing challenge in kindergarten. With her fourth grade students, Karen identified the “diversity of student skills in her classroom” and having to “adjust teaching methods”. Similarly, Jack identified, “...student behaviors and those students who come to school with baggage.” Freda expressed her challenge in curriculum terms by stating, “...covering the curriculum”. In high school, Doug expressed his challenges as “stresses of the job....when parents don’t show up...”. As with the lower grade teachers, Gerri cited the “rigidity of time” in the high school schedule and “student behavior” as the most challenging aspects of her job. Sarah noted “...students who act like they don’t care” as her most pressing challenge in the classroom.

**Learner Outcomes**

These questions addressed how teachers determined learning outcomes and expectations for their students’ learning. Although responses by participants were varied, they represent a theme of this study.

Helen was quick to point to her ongoing-assessment of her kindergarten students in determining her students’ learning outcomes. “I do on-going assessments, checklists, and lots of notes” on my students. From a different perspective, Karen expressed her reliance on standardized tests scores to validate her students’ learning. She stated that
scores in these tests are “accurate and very well-aligned with her classroom assessments”. Jack stressed his practice of having “high expectations when assessing…” He stated, “Standardized tests have their place but are a one-shot deal…formative assessments inform me instantly if a student is not achieving”. He added, “We need to be able teach students and show what they know…” Once again, Freda took the opportunity to express a broader personal opinion in response to these questions. “I’m in conflict with many of the school reforms stemming from No Child Left Behind (2001)… too many mandates that emphasize teachers as technicians”. She also expressed the opinion of students suffering a “learned helplessness…kids learn to underachieve” as related to the problem of teachers having to respond to as technicians to governmental mandates. Vera stated, “NECAP scores are well aligned with [classroom] learning outcomes”. From the high school perspective, Doug expressed more philosophical statements, “learning needs to be rigorous and relevant”. Sarah stressed the importance of teachers needing to be aware of “…where your kids are learning with the grade expectations” in order to establish good learner outcomes.

_School (Collective) Efficacy_

This theme revealed how teachers perceived the effectiveness of their school to support their teaching as well as the learning of the student population. Responses ranged from assessing the school ability to function (i.e., collaboration, mission, etc.) to how it supports the individual needs of teachers. The table below captures some of the responses of the teacher participants to questions of collective efficacy:
### Table 7. Collective Efficacy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Helen, 2 Years</th>
<th>Karen, 4 Years</th>
<th>Jack, 8 Years</th>
<th>Freda, 15 Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>4th</td>
<td>1st</td>
<td>6th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“School has a challenge with community involvement…it does provide “hands-on” support in the classroom…PD.”</td>
<td>“Some but not all teachers collaborate.”</td>
<td>School Mission- “…provide consistent and equal education for all students and have high expectations…”</td>
<td>“Little time to be reflective…we tend to get entrenched in the ways of structuring that doesn’t give us time to teach effectively.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“It carries out it’s mission (effectively).”</td>
<td>Admin Support- “…should be with supporting curriculum development, etc. and might need to support students outside the classroom.”</td>
<td>“We have a lot of the necessary parts in place but need to get them stitched together.”</td>
<td>“Would like to see schools make learning more joyful.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Principal should be a teacher’s greatest support.”</td>
<td>“Principal has the role of instructional leader.”</td>
<td>Biggest Support: “My colleagues.”</td>
<td>“I think change can be very powerful and positive…doesn’t have to be threatening.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 7. (con’t)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vera, 23 Years</th>
<th>Doug, 1 Year</th>
<th>Gerri, 10 Years</th>
<th>Sarah, 15 Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5th</td>
<td>11th</td>
<td>11th</td>
<td>11th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Lack of communication.”</td>
<td>Pride: “The fact that people are trying new things despite resistance from the community…we’re doing what we feel is right.”</td>
<td>Stress: “A lot of meetings that keep me from my young kids…also keep me from helping my students.”</td>
<td>Structural Challenge: Time, lack of technology in the classroom</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
At Johnson City School, Helen described the school having difficulty relating to the communities it served. Results of this challenge have seen serious delays in funding and much political discourse in the community preventing the school to successfully move forward. Fueling this political discourse, Johnson City School was recently identified as failing adequate yearly progress standards and representing the bottom 5% of the schools in the state, resulting in a forced removal of the principal. From Helen’s perspective, teachers’ receive, “…a lot of support from administration” and was very satisfied with the type and availability of support she receives as a first year teacher.

Regarding the general theme of teacher collaboration, Helen felt that the “…teachers with the most experience are less available to collaborate”. Karen felt that administrative support, “…should be with supporting curriculum development and might need to
support students outside the classroom”. She stated, “… principals should be a teacher’s greatest support”. With respect to collaboration, Karen, Wake Rural School, simply stated that, “…some but not all teachers collaborate”. Jack, also from Johnson City School, stated that, “…we have a lot of the necessary parts in place but need to get them stitched together”. Regarding the role of principal, Jack stated, …the principal has the role of instructional leader.” As with past responses, Freda, Wake Rural School, took the opportunity to speak more critically and broadly about her school. She felt teachers have, “…little time to be reflective… we tend to get entrenched in the ways of structuring that don’t give us time to teach effectively… would like to see schools more joyful”.

Regarding the need for change, “I think change can be very powerful… it doesn’t have to be threatening”. Freda also felt that school leadership, “…should encourage collaboration. Vera, also from Wake Rural School, took a similar tact in her responses to the questions of school (collective) efficacy. She expressed a concern with, “lack of communication” as well as, “…sometimes feeling devalued” because administration seems to see what has been done over the years as simply “old”. Doug, Grand Regional High School, expressed pride in his school mission despite challenges from the community, “…people [teachers] are trying new things despite resistance from the community… we’re doing what we feel is right”. He expressed concerns with the perception of a lacking of administrative support with regard to parental demands, “…the [administrative] stance should be student-teacher-parent…parents have to understand that there is a certain amount of pain with what goes on in schools”.

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Regarding the principal’s role, Doug felt the principal should be more of an instructional leader, “...less discipline more support of teachers”. From Gerri’s perspective, also from Grand Regional High School, she felt the stress of outside demands from administration as impacting her personally and professionally, “...a lot of meetings that keep me from my young kids...also my students. Regarding collaboration with other teachers, “...a common planning time would be nice”. She too felt the principal’s role should be “... more focused on the goal...spends too much time with discipline.” Finally, also from Grand Regional High School, Sarah cited the structural challenges of high school, “...[lack of] time, lack of technology in the classroom as problems. She feels supported by the administration but feels the high school curriculum fails to help kids, “...prepare for college life”.

Rural Considerations

Questions pertaining to the consideration of rural Vermont communities in their students’ education basically asked subjects to describe the benefits and challenges of teaching in rural, small town Vermont. There was very little variation in subject responses. Lower grade teachers expressed a general concern with lack of parental support while the upper grade teachers focused on the more provincial aspect of students and families not looking beyond there own communities and experiences when looking to the future.

Not surprisingly, given Johnson City School’s challenges, Helen expressed the concern with lack of community involvement and reduced budgets as challenges related to the rural nature of her communities. Although, contrastingly, she reported, “...more
“group interactions” as a benefit in being rural. From Wake Rural School, Karen’s stated benefit of the rural nature of communities were, “… people are very down to earth… in tune with nature”. Challenges for Karen relate to the significant achievement gap between economic groups and the lack of supports for learning in the community, “…supports from home aren’t as strong as I like”. Doug, also from Johnson City School, shares his appreciation for the closeness of communities, “…easy to get to know families of my students”. As a challenge, he described Johnson City School students as actually coming from “all different environments and backgrounds…rural is not what it looks like”, a unique perspective that was not shared previously. Vera, Wake Rural School, was quick to point several benefits, “…small class size, knowledge of student families and interests” as important to her work.

In response to challenges, Vera shared a unique story of provincialism in her community from several years ago. As part of a fellowship, she visited Japan with a group of teachers and brought cultural information back to her classes to share with students. She described responses from elderly community members who challenged her patriotism in view of Pearl Harbor and World War II. This definitely challenged her professional integrity yet she saw it as an opportunity to explain learning outcomes for future generations.

In a similar context, Doug, Grand Regional High School, expressed his concern with his students being in a community that has, “… a lack of global thinking” that clearly impacts how he designs his instruction. He also shared some insights into his belief in the difference of rural versus urban poverty. He characterizes rural poor has
having deeper challenges to access resources, “… rural poor is different than urban poor… less community resources (libraries, internet, business opportunities), for kids. As a benefit, he describes his students’ community as being highly accessible, “There is a big sense of community so if you can tap it the right way, you can find a lot of ways to relate learning to kids”. Gerri, also from Grand Regional High School, identified the wide variety of kids, “…superstars going to MIT all the way down to kids who get into a lot of trouble…” As a challenge, she too cites the lack of industry in the rural communities, “…kids have a hard time understanding what an education is going to get them”.

Finally, Sarah, from the same school as Doug and Gerri, also expressed the benefit of knowing her kids and families well as important to her instruction. As with her colleagues and other subjects, she sees the challenge as getting students and families to “…think beyond the Northeast Kingdom”.

Principal Responses

Principal interviews focused on perceptions of their role as instructional leaders and their definition of how this role supports teachers to meet the expectations of their jots. As stated previously, the original design of the study included three principals representing the three schools affiliated with teacher subjects. Due to circumstances beyond the control of this researcher, the principal from Johnson City School was not available. Hence, the analysis of Paul, from Wake Rural School and Bob, from Grand Regional High School will follow.

As with teacher subjects, findings were organized according to themes that were generated after preliminary analysis of their interview transcripts. These ten sub-themes
include: 1) Perceived Autonomy to Lead, 2) Leadership Role and Style, 3) Teachers’ Perception of their Role, 4) Factors that Contribute to School Success, 5) Perceptions of Principal Efficacy, 5) Curriculum and Instruction, 6) Measures of School Efficacy, 7) Standards-based Instruction, 8) School Accountability, 9) Teacher Leadership and 10) Promoting High Expectations. Responses by the two principals showed a significant difference in how the two principals view their job. The following Table illustrates those differences:

Table 8.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Paul Wake Rural School; 3 years Administration</th>
<th>Bob Grand Regional High- 13 years in Administration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Perceived autonomy to lead</td>
<td>“…I think autonomy is only there based on work that I’ve done…like lay the groundwork to not have the school board micromanage.”</td>
<td>“At this point in my career, I have a fair amount of autonomy….working with the board in very positive relationship….I’ve developed trust through developing positive teams in school.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Leadership Role/Style</td>
<td>“...I’m really developing that...what I’m trying to do is to try to do a collaborative leadership...has not been the case in the past...hesitation from teachers to invest...there was disinterest in the past for teachers to share in any excitement about learning...I'm trying to form teams...management, math, and literacy...teachers’ not yet comfortable to invest.”</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Leader Role: “I think I need work...I see myself an instructional leader but I don’t feel like I'm staged yet...I’m trying to move past the managerial stuff and I think I’m doing that...but it takes time. I don’t feel like I’ve been able to focus there yet...not enough time to right the ship.”</td>
<td>“I believe we have to create positive teams....we have an administrative team that meets weekly...what I do is provide each of the administrators the support and guidance they need....I look at two things...relational capacity (positive working relationships) and the second is system constraints (areas that prevent an organization from moving up).”</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Instructional Leader Role: (delay to the question) ‘I’d like to think so, yes, but I know the demands of a high school principal are very challenging because of some many factors in a given day....I see myself supporting new professional development...I think in the beginning of the year we all have good intentions, like one of my goals is to visit classrooms every day and every week, but there are some days/weeks, for the nature of the beast, I can’t get into as many of the classrooms as I like.”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Teachers’ Perception of their Role</td>
<td>“He’s trying to be a collaborative leader...I'm honest with teachers but still working on it...”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“...I’m not an authoritative leader, I’m more supportive....teachers will look to me to bring new ideas in but empower them to pursue some of their interests....I think I’ve grown to be a stronger principal, clear with my decisions and expectations of teachers.”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4) Factors that contribute to School Success</td>
<td>“...I would say that we haven’t experienced much success in the way of student achievement...one bright spot (although dimming) is with literacy...due to K-2 teaming. we really target kids with interventions...starting to stretch that out to other grades.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Positive working relationships with teams and the ability of the administration to work closely with teachers.” (collaboration).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perception of Principal Efficacy</td>
<td>Measures of School Efficacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5)</td>
<td>“I think that question can really go anywhere…it depends on the school, the superintendent, it depends on the school board…I’ve been reflecting (on this) and with the 3-year turnover rate of administrators…turn the school around, people get upset, and go off someplace else…but you’ve done the good work.”</td>
<td>“NECAPs are valid indicators and reliable measures…teachers are pulling the shade a bit…don’t want to look at that (scores)...the k-2 team looks at that data...they learn from it and design interventions…I don’t think we have the mechanisms to do good analyses”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6)</td>
<td>“...they can be very significant if they focus on....relational capacity and systems constraint.”</td>
<td>“Let’s see...grad rates, NECAP scores, discipline data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>8)</td>
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</table>
From the analysis of these responses, it was apparent that the principals’ perception of their role as instructional leader for their school did not support a significantly high degree of self-efficacy. They both recognized the importance of teachers having skills and motivation to effectively teach all students but were both resigned to the reality that it was not meeting their hopes and expectations. Interestingly, Bob, the veteran principal, focused his work on establishing good working relationships among his teachers through his “relational capacity and systems constraint” analysis. He appeared confident that working through those two paradigms would eventually lead to effective instruction. Paul expressed the need to motivate his teachers to embrace the change needed to effectively teach all students and cited specific instructional programs (in literacy) as examples of minor successes in his school.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore how rural teachers’ and principals’ perceptions of self-efficacy in their jobs related to their abilities to meet the expectations and demands of school reform. Analysis of the research data provided some findings that have implications to school reform. In answering the research questions outlined in Chapter 1, the analysis of the data provided some insights into how and when teachers consider their efficacy to teach all students. Many responses by teachers emphasized a “student-centered” approach to teaching with a particular focus on arranging the environment to support student learning. Overall, teachers appeared to have very personal and unique means by which they perceive their self-efficacy.

Research Questions

The five major research questions for this study focused on the perceptions of self-efficacy among teachers and principals and provided the background for analysis. Since this study addressed participants’ perceptions of self-efficacy, it was important to design the interview questions in a manner that enabled the researcher to reach some reasonable conclusions from participant responses to the interview questions. To facilitate this outcome, open-ended questions were designed to give participants multiple opportunities to respond. Some examples included questions that addressed issues such as, how they felt their skills matched the expectations of the job, how they described a successful day as a teacher, how they felt teacher training prepared them for their job, and what constituted some of the greatest challenges in their job. Taking their responses in total under the structure of these research questions provided the means for developing
themes pertaining to whether the participants perceived high or low self-efficacy. What follows is a discussion of what was learned through this study of teacher and principal perceptions of self-efficacy as related to the major research questions for this study.

1. How do rural teachers perception of self-efficacy in their jobs relate to the degree in which the engage in public school reform?

As stated in Chapter 1, this question examines the teachers’ confidence and belief that they can make a difference in their students’ learning, particularly those who are under-achieving due to poverty. Do they believe in their ability to adapt their teaching to higher professional standards that result in high student achievement? Achievement scores for the three schools show significant differences when comparing students with Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) with students Not Free and Reduced Lunch (NFRL). Johnson City School’s scores showed the most dramatic difference in the two populations with proficiency percentages for FRL in reading 40 points lower than NFRL. Ironically, Wake Rural School had the opposite results with students on FRL scoring six percentage points higher than NFRL.

It should be noted: none of the teachers appeared comfortable or confident when asked to describe their skills. It was the question asking teachers to comment as to whether their teaching skills matched the expectations of their job that created apparent conflict with most teachers. As mentioned previously, Helen and Vera expressed a desire “not to brag” about their skills for fear they would be perceived as arrogant. When asked whether they possessed important teacher skills, most responded affirmatively, yet the basis for their answers was not apparent. In my attempts to get teachers to talk about their
instructional abilities as they relate to student outcomes, teachers often identified the activities of managing classroom behavior and student engagement in learning as their indication of efficacy. Educators in the lower grades described their teaching strengths as being related to “making students feel safe” and “addressing the whole child”. These responses differed from those teachers in high school. They identified skills in assessing student achievement (Doug), effective writing prompts (Sarah), and the use of guided notes (Gerri) as teaching skills important to student learning.

Regarding when and how teachers know they have had a successful lesson, responses were similar from most teachers, yet had little relationship to evidence of learning or standards. For the most part, the lower grade teachers used student reactions or affect as indicators of learning such as students appearing happy and attentive. Teachers in the upper grades reported a successful lesson when they a student appeared engaged, or the student expressed benefit from the instruction. The only exception was Jack, who described a successful lesson, “…when the class appears to run itself”.

In defining their successful teaching strategies, responses ranged from obvious reform initiatives (Responsive Classroom) and formative assessments to focusing on student strengths and guided note taking.

2. How do rural teachers perception of self-efficacy relate to the degree in which they collaborate with colleagues and, is there understanding of collaboration similar to their principals?

This question was meant to explore how teacher define and practice collaboration and to what degree it is it perceived as necessary for students to learn. In teacher
interviews, all subjects spoke of the benefit of collaboration. In defining collaboration, examples of their collaboration were varied. Jack (1st) described the “houses” at Johnson City and a formal means of supporting collaboration. Doug (11th) described very little collaboration occurring outside the departments at Grand View High School. On the other hand, Sarah (9th-12th) at the same school described a learning project in she has implemented in her classes that rely heavily on collaboration with local communities. In the lower grades, Helen (kindergarten) expressed a strong desire to collaborate, yet expressed a reality that the most experienced teachers are the least available to collaborate at Johnson City School. Karen (4th) attested to the benefits of her own collaboration at Wake Rural School, particularly with regard to curriculum development. Vera (5th) at Wake Rural said she did very little collaboration with other teachers and even questioned whether veteran teachers or “my generation, can really “embrace collaboration”. Just about all teachers expressed the challenge of time as hindering collaboration in their schools. Several teachers did express that it was the principal’s role to direct and support collaboration in their schools.

3. How do rural teachers’ perceptions of self-efficacy relate to how they maintain high aspirations and commitment to their profession and what supports do they feel enhance their aspirations and commitment?

This question was central to how teachers perceived their professional abilities. In reviewing their backgrounds, all teachers possessed a Master’s degree and were viewed as competent by their principals as evidenced by their participation in this study. Most of the teacher subjects gave clear examples of past teachers in their lives that influenced
their teaching, giving some sense of what they considered to be the attributes of a quality teacher. That being said, these teachers were not able to identify those instructional skills that yield positive learner outcomes. It was also evident in their responses that they attributed success in their teaching to their own personal skills, beliefs and experiences more than any teacher training or certification process. The responses to the question of their role as it relates to their students’ successful achievement revealed themes ranging from assessment practices, “… on-going assessment” (Helen) to philosophy statements, “…rigor and relevance” (Doug).

With regard to the question of how teachers’ self-efficacy relates to student performance on standardized assessments, there was little commonality or consensus that teachers “owned” the results of their students’ achievement scores. Many of the responses to questions of learner outcomes were based in strategies to engage reluctant learners. In the lower grades, Helen, (K) described the importance of meeting the social and emotional needs of her students. Karen, (4th grade), emphasized the importance of her students feeling safe, and Jack, (1st grade), spoke of the need to establish high expectations. In the upper grades, Doug, (9th grade-12th grade), expressed the importance of on-going assessment and clear objectives, while Gerri, (9th-12th grade) emphasized her math skills and her strategies for designing learning groups as significant for her students’ success. Absent in their responses was the inclusion of standardized measurement to test their strategies. Many responses indicated that success for them was more in how their students appeared to be learning with emphasis on student engagement, well being, and happiness. From questions regarding background experiences and the
acquisition of teaching skills, there were indications that teachers in this study relied on their own personal experiences in assessing their perception of self-efficacy as teachers.

4. What is the relationship between a teacher’s self-efficacy and his/her perceptions of their school systems’ collective efficacy?

This question addresses the degree to which teachers rely on, value, and embrace their school’s collective efficacy. This question has a direct relationship with question #5, which focuses on principals’ perceptions of their school’s collective efficacy. What follows is a discussion based on the particular sites used in this study.

Johnson City School

Teachers at Johnson City School expressed confidence with the support and structure of the school despite the challenges the school faces with meeting federal and community expectations. Inherent in this question is whether and how the school collectively, under the leadership of the principal, supports teachers to meet their self-efficacy needs. Responses by teachers indicated challenges facing the school to relate to the communities it serves. Jack described the challenge the school faces to establish productive relationships with families from both rural remote areas and those who live within the city. Both groups of families seem to have very different expectations from teachers and the school in general. Jack also described the Johnson City School, in evolutionary terms, as “having a lot of the necessary parts in place but need to get them stitched together”. He cites the size of the school as adding to this challenge. Jack also cited his colleagues as providing the greatest support to his teaching.
Helen reported feeling like most of her support to teach comes from colleagues and she believes the school successfully carries out its mission.

*Wake Rural School*

Teachers expressed mixed views of the collective efficacy of their school. The lower grade teacher with four years of teaching experience offered a more positive view of the school’s ability to teach all kids. The other veteran teachers expressed concern with expectations of administration and the time available to successfully collaborate.

Karen believes the principal should be the instructional leader and responsible for ensuring curriculum development and supporting provide good instruction. Her responses indicated that she thought the principal “knows what’s going on in her class.” The more veteran teachers had a significantly different perspective of their school’s collective efficacy. Clearly, the more veteran teachers’ responses reflected skepticism of school administration and the initiatives designed to improve educational outcomes. Freda expressed her “conflict” with many of the school reforms, characterizing them as “mandates that emphasize teachers as technicians”. Although Vera stated that she feels she can teach students well with the support of principals, she lamented current administrative practices that appear to solely focus on new strategies and ignore past practices.

*Grand Regional School*

Teachers at this high school have more unique perspectives and opinions of their school’s ability to meet their mission. The subject areas they taught appeared to play a more prominent role with respect to teacher and collective efficacy. Sarah, the English
teacher, had a fair amount of confidence in her abilities to teach which appeared to coincide with the school’s achievement scores in Reading. According to standardized test scores (Appendix E), Grand Regional’s students did achieve higher outcomes in Language than in Math. Responses from both teachers and the principal acknowledge this difference. Of interest were how different the two content teachers in these areas, Gerri (Math) and Sarah (English) perceived themselves. Gerri characterized her instructional skills and strategies in terms of her supporting students to be prepared (helping them with organizational skills, guided notes, etc.) while Sarah’s responses were focused on matching the content with their interests (“…I try to make it real”). Her Foxfire Project illustrated this focus.

5. How do principals perceive their own efficacy to successfully influence and support their teachers and schools to move forward?

There was significant commonality among responses of the two principals regarding their perceived self-efficacy. They both expressed a fair amount of autonomy in their roles, predicated on their work in developing positive relationships with their school boards. Although they both described their leadership style as being collaborative and team focused, Paul described his style as still evolving while Bob described a fairly comprehensive paradigm using terms such as “building relational capacity” through positive working relationships (collaboration) and minimizing “system constraints” or those ideas and activities that prevent a school from moving forward. When asked to talk about their roles as instructional leaders, both articulated a belief that, while instructional leadership a part of their jobs, it was not the central focus. Paul described his role of
instruct

Relating to the question of successes in their school, there were some strikingly similar responses. Both Wake Rural Elementary and Grand Regional High School experienced successes in their Reading and Literacy achievement while scores in Math were below expectations. Finally, the two principals gave similar responses to the question of whether their schools teach to standards-based outcomes. They both stated their schools were not doing that. Paul stated, “I’m pretty confident that it’s not happening in the school” although he qualified it a bit after reflecting on Literacy scores. Bob admitted, “It’s an area that we need to work on.”

The differences posed by these two principals were also significant. With respect to the question of success in their school, Bob cited the Literacy achievement scores as “one bright spot, although dimming…” among an otherwise lack of student achievement school-wide. He clearly was not satisfied with the rate of improvement in his school. Bob, on the other hand, described his school’s success in terms of the amount of “positive working relationships with teams and the ability of the administration to work closely with teachers.” The two principals varied with respect to perceptions of their own self-efficacy and ability to make a difference in their school, both principals gave different perspectives. Paul thought the question really related to the school and superintendent, citing his reflections on the three-year turnover of administrators at this school and the challenge to make a difference in such a small window. Bob saw himself as very
efficacious in promoting the success of the school citing his paradigm of “relational capacity and systems constraints” as key to understanding how to move schools forward.

Regarding the question of whether they promote high expectations among their faculties, their responses were different. Paul stated flatly that, “I don’t think I’m doing that right now” and adds that his teachers have not been held accountable. Bob states the affirmative to this question, “We expect our teachers to have strong lesson plans in place and students to be in class on time.”

Finally, with respect to the concept of collaboration in their schools, Paul was more critical of his teachers not embracing collaboration, citing their “ambivalence or disinterest” in sharing information about their teaching and student progress. He perceived his role as creating the teams necessary to facilitate good collaboration. Bob reported that his teachers engaged in “a lot of informal collaboration” and cites structures such as special and Educational Support Teams as examples of more formal and focused collaboration. His role was to structure the time necessary for both types of collaboration to occur.

Teacher Efficacy

In summary, the responses by teachers regarding their perceived efficacy to meet the demands and expectations of their jobs were mixed. Although teacher responses to the interview appeared to support high efficacy, none of the participants were able to identify skills and practices that consistently yielded high achievement for all students. From kindergarten through high school, most teachers identified the ways and means they supported their students to learn with little or no discussion of standards, curriculum,
or instructional pedagogies. Minor exceptions were with two of the high school teachers who did identify some content-related strategies. Most of the responses by teachers appeared to assume that if students are engaged in a positive relationship with themselves and schools, than achievement will occur. This was evident with the series of questions related to their perceived instructional skills. Teachers reported their skills as, “…addressing the whole child”, “classroom management”, “flexible and good with behaviors”, and “understanding student stressors” in their responses to this question. Although these skills are important to students’ well being and are critical for learning to occur, they do not represent actual instructional skills known to significantly improve learner outcomes. However, given the work of researchers such as Marzano (2006) who require a student-centered approach to teaching, it is possible that these responses from teachers represent an attempt to “do the right thing” (p.76) by focusing on the supporting the learner. If true, the teacher responses still lack the instructional adaptation that is used once the learner is supported.

In terms of whether or not teachers felt their skills matched the job expectations, a significant aspect of self-efficacy, all responses conveyed a surprising amount of ambivalence, ranging from statements like, “I don’t like to brag or toot my own horn” from elementary school teachers, to “…that’s a tough one” or “I hadn’t thought about that” from the high school teacher participants. These responses raises more questions as to how and whether teachers and administrators define those skills critical to meeting the achievement expectations of all students. Van Veen & Sleegers (2006) might suggest there lacks a congruency between their orientation of their profession and how teachers
interpret current reform initiatives or changes in their profession. This study appears to illustrate that teachers, particularly veteran teachers, have not fully committed to the more rigorous standards-based instruction based on their past understanding of their roles.

In addition to the ambivalence teacher expressed to recognizing their skills, it was also evident that teachers believed that their efficacy to meet the demands of teaching were personally cultivated and derived from their own life experiences. Teacher participants were able to identify a former teacher who directly influenced their current practices. They readily reported how these mentors shaped their learning through personal contact and individualized attention. From these exchanges, it was evident that teachers rarely identify other influences such as professional development, training, or other career related experiences.

In research conducted by Gibson and Dembo (1984), they discovered that those teachers found to have high efficacy traits were more likely to be persistent with their instruction. These traits were difficult to measure in this dissertation study for several reasons. As stated previously, the skills by which the teacher participants identified their efficacy appeared personal and related to student support and well being, making it difficult to conclude otherwise, or in terms of how they persisted with students in terms of learning. It was apparent, however, that all teacher participants conveyed a confidence in their jobs to meet the demands and expectations of teaching all students. Thus, results were mixed and inconclusive.

Secondly, from their responses to questions of their perception of what constituted a successful lesson, responses again were mixed, especially according to grade levels. For
those teacher participants in the elementary school grades, they identified successful strategies relating to student support, student safety, and practices that create a positive environment for learning while high school teachers focused more on content related practices such as writing, on-going assessment, and note-taking. No indications from teacher responses supported Bandura’s (1993) conclusion that teachers in elementary grades perceived higher self-efficacy than those teacher in secondary schools.

Again, responses from teacher participants supported the conclusion that each teacher assesses his/her self-efficacy differently. As much as all teacher participants supported their commitment to meet the demands to teach all students, the means by which they defined successes in this endeavor were varied. As a researcher, it was curious to me how little ownership teachers had with their students’ achievement. Whether it was pride in their students’ doing well or concern when they were not, teacher responses indicated a separation of their skills and abilities and the eventual learning outcomes of their students. It appeared teachers felt that, if they met the minimal requirements of making students feel connected to learning, than students would automatically reach their learning goals. This appeared to minimize the expectation of students achieving on standards that represent the rigor of current school reforms.

Collective Efficacy

Responses from teacher and principal participants revealed some of the challenges facing public schools in meeting their missions. With regard to teacher collaborations, all teacher participants agreed with the premise that effective teacher collaboration results in higher achievement among students. This was evident in their responses regarding
concepts such as a coordinated curriculum, understanding school mission, and sharing instructional strategies. Unfortunately, no teacher was able to provide evidence that collaboration occurs with the required consistency and intensity needed to increase student achievement. Barriers to collaboration were evident in responses ranging from teachers not having enough time to collaborate to the idea that collaboration is really an activity for younger teachers as evidence by Vera’s comment, “…not sure if my generation is ready for collaboration”. All responses cited real and practical reasons why teacher collaboration was not occurring in their school and attributed this responsibility to the principals for creating time and structure for collaboration.

With regard to the degree teachers feel they share and contribute to school-wide decision-making, responses were mixed according to years of experience in the elementary grades. Those teachers newer to the profession in elementary schools indicated a satisfactory response to this question. They felt more connected to administration, hence, part of the leadership of the school. More veteran teachers were less positive about their role and described school leadership in more critical terms.

**Principals’ Perspective**

There were significant differences between the two principal participants with respect to their perceptions of self-efficacy. Bob, the elementary school principal of two years, responded with statements reflecting lower self-efficacy for leading his school to reform while the responses by Bob, high principal of 10 years, reflected a high degree of self-efficacy to influence the schools’ collective efficacy. Paul’s responses reflected more of a “work in progress”. He was more willing to state bluntly that instruction in his
school is not teaching to instructional standards and that he had a lot of work ahead that involved motivating teachers to change. Bob’s responses were generally accepting of the challenges and reflected a high degree of self-efficacy and collective efficacy. His use of the concepts of “relational capacity” and “systems constraint” revealed the training and professional development around his work building positive relationships with teachers through “teaming”. He clearly spoke confidently about how these concepts help him communicate to his staff. Both principals defined their leadership style as “not authoritative” and being more supportive of teachers.

Regarding teachers supporting them as instructional leaders, teachers in high school had a more favorable perspective of the collective efficacy of their school than teacher responses in elementary. Teacher participants at Wake Rural responded with less certainty about leadership in the school than at Grand Regional High School. Although teachers in the high school lamented the lack of time the principal had to address curriculum and instruction, they appeared to understand the challenges facing someone in this position. It could be concluded, as with Bandura’s (1993) theory of reciprocity, these responses support the concept that principals, who are supported by their teachers, gain a higher perception of self-efficacy.

Finally, it should be noted that both principals indicated, without hesitation, that other demands of their job take them from totally attending to their role of instructional leader. They were resigned to the fact that daily challenges distract them from attending to the role of instructional leader. This speaks to the significant challenge schools face in building the capacity for instructional leadership through the role of the principal.
Rural Considerations

Regarding the rural nature of their communities, the study participants gave some insights into the benefits and challenges of teaching and learning in the northeast, rural region of Vermont. There was consensus among all teachers that their rural communities gave them an advantage in gaining more intimate knowledge of their students and their families. This attributed to their ability to design instruction that might be more relevant to their learning. They also appreciated being able to see their students in the community outside of the school context. Regarding the challenges of rural communities, common themes emerged regarding the perception of lack of family support for education. The elementary school teachers commented on a lack of family contact and conferences for students struggling. For the high school teachers, they shared some frustration in getting students and their families to “think outside the Kingdom”, indicating that a more provincial attitude exists in their communities. This provincial attitude was amplified in the story Vera (Wake Rural School) shared when she received a grant to visit Japan several years ago as part of her attempt to enhance her Social Studies lessons. After returning from Japan and sharing details of her visit and the Japanese culture, she was met with resentment and resistance from elder members of her community who thought her lessons disrespected those who died in World War II.

Regarding the practice of collaboration in rural schools, as stated previously, evidence from teacher participants indicated a lack of intentional collaboration occurring in all three schools. Although far from conclusive, these results support the research by
Harris et al. (2001) that rural teachers find collaboration among peers as challenging. Might this be part of the provincial aspect of the communities?

With respect to the aforementioned results of teacher responses reflecting skills developed through more personal experience rather than through training and professional development, it should be noted that these findings support the work of Howley and Howley (2004). With respect to instructional practices, they found rural teachers relying more heavily on personal experiences cultivated by their upbringing rather than more external experiences such as training and professional development.

Regarding the evidence that responses from all teacher participants reflected an emphasis on student, these responses support the work by Harris, Holdman, Clark, and Harris (2001) who found that, compared to urban teachers, rural teachers tended to concentrate more on good relationships while urban teachers concentrated on content goals.

Summary

As described in the previous section about the limitations of this study, the small number of participants and the qualitative nature of this study preclude any definitive outcomes or generalizations in answering the research questions. This study was meant to explore how a group of selected rural teachers and principals from schools located in the northeastern part of the country perceive their sense of self-efficacy to meet the demands of current public school. One goal was to add to the discourse regarding issues of teacher preparation and training, the changing role of principals, and rural considerations. From this intent, there are several outcomes that have future implications.
In attempting to assess teacher self-efficacy, this study explored how teachers and principals perceived their ability and their schools’ ability to teach all students effectively, thus meeting the goals of school reform. Inherent in this question is whether and/or how teachers perceive the skills necessary to meet these expectations of moving their schools forward. Surprisingly, this study found the concept of having necessary and perhaps best practice skills in teaching was minimized and, in some cases, teacher participants expressed reluctance to consider skills in their job for fear of bragging or being perceived as self-centered. This was surprising to this researcher, given the amount of research and resources spent for professional development in public schools the past 20 years.

Related to this finding and given the responses to the background questions, it is apparent that teachers rely on their own personal experiences for basing their instructional strategies, thus their self-efficacy. Implications of these findings suggest researchers continue to identify critical teaching skills and continue to assess the degree to which teachers will integrate and accept those skills through a body of professional knowledge that supports effective instructional strategies. In addition, it is curious as to why the teacher participants were reluctant to identify and accept their professional skills. Is there some peer pressure in the profession that emphasizes modesty over skills development or does the very nature of the school environment compromise teacher professionalism due to its community nature?

This area of study should be expanded for rural teachers and compared to urban teacher to determine whether the lack of skills recognition is a rural characteristic or is it
more ingrained in all teachers in public schools. That said, without the personal acknowledgement or recognition of teaching skills and how they influence student learning, the perception of self-efficacy remains dubious at best.

Another implication that has over-arching importance is related to the teacher participants’ focus on student relationships. In reviewing those responses from questions regarding successful learning, instructional skills, outcomes, etc., the theme of supporting students to learn and establishing positive relationships appeared to replace, in part, the emphasis on effective teaching of the content. Thus, an implication for further research includes exploring whether this is a wide-ranging phenomenon rather than simply indicative of teachers in a particular region of Vermont. In other words, how teachers balance the importance of developing positive teacher student relationships with the need to attain high student achievement emerged in this study and needs further analysis.

Implications

A recent article in the New York Times (Dillon, 2010) summarizes several contemporary issues that were mirrored in this study. In the article, the Gates Foundation reports that 90% of the nation’s teachers evaluated by principals receive a “favorable rating”. Hence, the foundation is planning to invest $335 million to “over-haul” school district personnel departments to improve their capacity to evaluate teachers. The obvious implication of the article is for the Gates Foundation to enable school districts to improve their ability to identify good teachers while removing ineffective teachers. Although it is possible that improving a school district’s personnel function may address the identification of those skills that principals must evaluate, the work involved in that
process extends beyond the school’s personnel office. In exploring public school teachers’ and their principals’ efficacy to meet these demands, there are several implications that this study revealed.

From this study, the skills teachers report that contribute most to the success of their students were found to be more a result of their background and beliefs rather than training or career professional development activities. Although teachers described a student-centered approach to their teaching, their responses to questions of student success were generally focused on their abilities to support the student as a learner. While no one can argue the importance of student-centered approaches, there was an absence in their responses as to how they engaged students to actually achieve and demonstrate standards-based skills. In an attempt to identify those teaching skills necessary for student achievement, it was apparent that teachers would rather not discuss their personal skills even if they were positive. In other words, they were reluctant to own those professional skills they perceived as important to meet the critical learning needs of their students. This has implications for how teachers will readily accept and assume the objectivity necessary to evaluate their job performance. In the context of teacher perception of self-efficacy, it was difficult to find a consistent means by which teachers self-evaluate or reflect on their own success as it relates to the demands of current reform. This study found a disconnect between teachers’ perception of high self-efficacy and the school expectations of teachers to work collaboratively to teach all student standards-based instruction. The questions for further study in this area are twofold. Is this a phenomenon indicative of rural teachers in a rural setting as compared to urban teachers and, how do
teacher-training programs define contemporary teaching skills? And, how will these new mandates about the evaluation of teacher effectiveness address the important issues related to a teacher or principal’s sense of self-efficacy in promoting high student achievement.

As the New Times article implies, the burden for principals to conduct valid performance evaluations is formidable. Evaluating the performance of teachers clearly falls within the role of principals being instructional leaders. From interviews with principals, this study found little evidence that they feel efficacious in this role. Other demands of the job prohibit principals from fully engaging in developing the means by which teachers receive constant support to embrace the changes necessary to meet current expectations. The issue of whether principals have the time, ability, or desire to be instructional leaders has critical implications for how teachers provide the instruction necessary to enable all students to achieve skills necessary to meet the demands of standards-based instruction. Further study should address how are principals currently receive training whether the role of instructional leader is considered in their preparation to assume the role of principal.

From the rural perspective, this study found all teachers indicated poverty as the root of their most significant challenges. For the elementary teachers, this took the form of families not attending to meetings, parent/teacher conferences, and other school events. For the high school teachers, the challenges were described as students and families lacking the desires and aspirations to look beyond the region for post-secondary opportunities. Interestingly, all teachers cited the close-knit communities as a benefit to
their teaching in that they obtained a familiarity with their students’ families. These results speak to some of the skills teachers need to address poverty in their schools. The disconnect between school and community that hampers student achievement is rooted in poverty. Achievement scores for these schools reflect the performance difference between students in poverty as compared to those who are not. This appears to be a case of schools having ample evidence of the problem but little knowledge of how to equip teachers to mitigate the lack of engagement poorer students and families have with public education. It would appear, through this study, that teachers need the skills and direction to engage more with families of poverty if they are to feel efficacious in meeting the demands of current school reform. Thus, more inquiry related to teachers’ or principals’ sense of self-efficacy within rural and urban poor districts is needed.

As far as future research, it is apparent that qualitative nature of this study defined self-efficacy from a constructivist approach, using an extensive literature review and data presented during the interviews. Future studies should consider a mixed methods approach to quantify the characteristics of self-efficacy in more reliable manner to measure its impact on teacher attitudes toward the changes occurring within their profession. Additional studies about the relationship of teachers’ perceived sense of self-efficacy in terms of raising student achievement scores also needs to be focus of future study.

In summation, this study explored a small sample of educators in hopes of gaining a perspective that defines teachers’ and principals’ efficaciousness to do what is required in our public schools. Most revealing to this researcher is the lack of identified teaching
skills related to moving schools (and students) forward, by teacher participants and principals. Most professions readily identify skills that make workers successful. If you are an architect, you will need math and spatial skills. Attorneys require knowledge of law. Medical professionals require knowledge of the body and patient characteristics. It is apparent that we in education have not identified even the most critical skill necessary to effectively teach all students. Without those identified skills, it is difficult to imagine how we can define successful teaching in our public schools.
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## APPENDIX A

### Sample Teacher Interview Questions

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<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Interview Questions</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Background</strong></td>
<td>Tell me a little about your life… How long have you been teaching? In a rural school community? Do you have memory of a favorite teacher? If so, please describe. Did you have hobbies, sports or activities that you felt accomplished? When and how did you decide to choose teaching as a career? If you had it to do over, what would you do differently in choosing and preparing for a career in teaching? Describe a time when your teaching gave a struggling student a “a-ha” moment. What is it about children in that grade that attracts you?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1. How do rural teachers’ perception of self-efficacy relate to the degree in which they engage in public school reform?</strong></td>
<td>How would you describe your teaching philosophy? Tell me about how you feel you are making a difference in your students’ achievement? How do you think your teaching skills match your job expectations? What are the parts of teaching you find most challenging? How did your teacher training prepare you? What areas of teaching weren’t you prepared for in your training? How would you characterize the benefits of teaching in a small rural community? The challenges? How do you know when you are being a successful teacher? When you think about your teaching, whom do you feel most responsible to in your job? How do you feel about standardized testing (NECAP)? Do your student test scores reflect the work you do in the classroom? Why or Why not? What do you think are some of the major changes occurring in your job as a public school teacher?</td>
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<td><strong>2. How do rural teachers’ perception of self-efficacy relate to the degree in which they collaborate with colleagues?</strong></td>
<td>Would you characterize yourself as a “team player”? If so (or not) tell me more… As a teacher, what activities occur that require you to collaborate with on colleagues? How do they impact your teaching?</td>
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3. How do rural teachers’ perceptions of self-efficacy relate to how they maintain high aspirations and commitment to their profession?

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<td>What percentage of students in your class fail to meet the standard? What do you attribute to their lack of success? How do your skills as a teacher relate to their lack of success? What is your understanding of NCLB? Do you agree with the premise that all students can learn? How do you know when a student is not responding your instruction? (example)? When do you decide the student needs additional support to learn? How do you feel emotionally after a successful lesson? A not-so-successful lesson? (give examples). What are the factors in a rural community that contribute to students having a not-so-successful lesson? What do think are the most notable conditions that contribute to a student not learning? Describe what gives you the most stress in your job as a teacher? What are the things that give you the most pride as a teacher?</td>
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</table>

4. What is the relationship between a teacher’s self-efficacy and his/her perception of a school systems’ collective efficacy?

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<tr>
<th>Question</th>
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<tr>
<td>How would you characterize the teachers’ ability and desire to collaborate with each other? Why is this important (or not)? What is it about your school that gives you the most pride? What types of supports do you think a school district should afford teachers? Can you describe your school’s mission statement? Do you think most teachers could? How would you characterize your school’s ability to carry out this mission? How is a principal’s role in supporting teachers and the school in general? How long as your principal been in this position?</td>
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APPENDIX B

Sample Principal Questions*

1. Tell me a little about your background and why you entered the field of education? Had you planned to be a principal?

2. How would you describe the top priorities in your job as principal?

3. Why do you believe you were selected as principal of your school?

4. How would you describe your leadership style?

5. What kind of leadership style would your teachers say you have?

6. Take a minute (hand interviewee a piece of paper) and write down the top 5 factors that you believe have contributed to your school’s success in improving student achievement.

7. Talk a little about the top 2-3 factors.

8. What indications or measurements do you use to measure student achievement? Do you consider them valid indicators? How do teachers relate to these indicators?

9. What supports do you have in place for students not meeting academic standards?

10. How do you teachers integrate standards into their instruction?

11. Has your school undertaken initiatives to increase to improve outcomes for students not meeting standards?

12. How does your school manage the pressures of local, state, and federal accountability while making long-term changes for the future?
<table>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Background Influences</strong></th>
<th><strong>Instructional Skills/Philosophy of Teaching/Efficacy</strong></th>
<th><strong>Collaboration</strong></th>
<th><strong>Instructional Challenge</strong></th>
<th><strong>Learner Outcomes</strong></th>
<th><strong>School Efficacy</strong></th>
<th><strong>Rural</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Helen, 2 years, K</strong></td>
<td>Raised in suburbia “Always wanted to be a teacher”</td>
<td>Slow to answer…</td>
<td>“Teachers with the most experience are less available to meet and collaborate…I don’t feel that way…I like to collaborate”</td>
<td>“I do on-going assessments…checklists and lots of “notes”.” Successful lesson- “kids are having fun…and their growing.” Use GE’s extensively</td>
<td>School has a challenge with community involvement. Supports- “extra hands in the classroom.” Behavioral Intervention Team. Professional Development Teams-voluntary. School does carry out it’s mission-principal really cares about kids.</td>
<td>Community involvement a challenge; reduced budgets. More group interaction a plus</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Started in Human Services Stepfather was an educator; saw how kids responded to him. Influenced by an English professor who was passionate, motivating and helped her learn.</td>
<td>“Use a lot of varied techniques” “Knows what activities to present for learning” Was thrown into teaching quickly (10 days). “My job expects me to address the whole child…I think I have the skills to meet the emotional, social, and academic skills of my students. Try to “mix it up”. Uses “Responsive Classroom” Believes learning needs to be “very engaging”. “Fair doesn’t always mean equal”. Believes her philosophy came from both within and externally. Feels very comfortable with challenging behaviors. Is the “go-to” teacher for behavior problems. Sensitive about taking compliments. “I try not to brag.” Philosophy- “I think learners need to be engaged…I really feel strongly about that.”</td>
<td>“Responsive Classroom” Mobility of students Behaviors</td>
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Karen, 4 years, 4th Grade

Karen is a Native Vermonter from central VT city. Teaching for 3 years. In a prior business career, advertising. Moved back to Vermont and opened a daycare. Became a teacher when her oldest entered 1st grade. Teaching for 3 years. In a prior business career, advertising. Moved back to Vermont and opened a daycare. Became a teacher when her oldest entered 1st grade. Teacher Influence: 8th grade teacher taught in an exciting and creative way; he used music; encouraged us to talk about our personal interests...came to my house to tutor me when I had surgery (caring). I try to remember the effects he had on me when I teach. Do differently? I didn’t give myself enough credit when I was younger to pursue a career.

Skills: “Classroom management is a good skill of mine...I feel like my students know what my expectations are...I feel really confident in what I’m teaching and how I’m teaching it.”

Philosophy: “When students walk into my classroom, they should feel safe so they can explore and take risks in learning...every child should be given the opportunity to do their best.”

Making a difference: Story of a student who stated he couldn’t read.

Efficacy: “I hope I’m effective in teaching all students. “...don’t feel that NCLB is there for kids.”

Having to make changes to my teaching methods...Diversity of learners

“I feel the results from standardized testing for my students are accurate.” Very well-aligned.

I feel that all students are mine...

Successful: when...”students are really engaged in what their learning...and they’re able to talk about what they’ve learned.”

Caring: “...means that you understand their needs, where they’re from, and they’re safe.”

On average some but not all teachers in the school collaborate.

Admin Support- should be with supporting curriculum development, responsive classroom...may need to support students outside the classroom.”

Principal should be teacher’s greatest support. I think my principal know what’s going on in my classroom.

Benefits- People are very down to earth, in tune with nature.

Challenges: Student Support for learning-(collective efficacy). Support from home isn’t as strong as I’d like. Huge economic achievement gap.

Jack, 8 years, 1st Grade

Grew up rurally in Northeastern VT. Mother is a teacher. Wanted to be a teacher after high school and enrolled at local college. Master’s Degree No one particular teacher has influenced

A fair and structured environment where expectations are clear. “I’m a big believer in the constructivist model of learning. Try to use the constructivist approach, but it takes time.

Teaching Skills:- “A

“ I’m not my own-kinda-guy, I do not work well by myself.” In my school, we function in houses...we collaborate, plan, figure things out as a team.

Student Behavior and those students coming to schools with a certain amount of “baggage”. They’re often the students I connect with and look back with good memories.

High Expectations, student responsibility. Standardized Tests: “The have their place but are a one-shot deal.” We do need to be able to teach students to “show what they know.”

“I feel I’m fairly well-

On average some but not all teachers in the school collaborate.

Admin Support- should be with supporting curriculum development, responsive classroom...may need to support students outside the classroom.”

Principal should be teacher’s greatest support. I think my principal know what’s going on in my classroom.

Benefits- People are very down to earth, in tune with nature.

Challenges: “have people coming from all different environments and backgrounds...some don’t look rural but drive 3 minutes and suddenly you’re in the middle of nowhere. Difficult connecting
him but has looked at teachers collectively and “drawn from them.” Teachers that had fair and structured environments for us to learn….expectations are clear…that was how I learned best.”

“First couple years of teaching, I was out of my comfort zone…had 2 great colleagues as mentors.”

Big sports fan…can hold my own in golf.”

Training: “A lot of field experience” helped me the most. I had extensive experience in classrooms beginning in my sophomore year in college.

work in progress. I’ve only been teaching 10 years so I know I have a lot to learn.” “I’m a big believer in furthering my education…although I’ve taken a whole year without taking classes, kind of odd…I feel like I’m successful. “I guess if I’m ever at the point where I know everything I need to know then it might be time to move on to something different.”

Most Success with Students: “I go back to formative assessment stuff…it has allowed my students to be more successful. I believe this assessment helps put the ownership for learning back on the students. I have responsibility to teach all students, including special ed…”nobody is walking into first grade as a reader…they’re all at different spaces.”

Philosophy: “Student Centered, giving them ownership for their learning is important. I think these values came from within me. The same with my teaching skills.”

I’m Successful equipped to teach all students…I feel like I know where to start and know when I need more help.

Student Relationship- “Trust is critical.”

Formative Assessment- informs me instantly of when a student is not achieving.

have a lot of the necessary parts in place but need to get them “stitched together.

Principal- has the role of instructional leader; in classrooms all the time; very active in supervision and evaluation.

School Structure: Fairly big school and spread-out. A lot of discussion around re-configuration.

Biggest Support- “My colleagues.”

with parents. “On the other hand, these are small communities and you really get to know the families.
When... “The class is running itself...it’s not the only measure but if I can step away from my classroom and kids are learning...that is successful.”
Change: “Is really difficult for me...it is necessary if it is for a purpose.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Freda, 15 years, 5-6th grade</th>
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<td>Teaching 15 years, had started a collaborative nursery school 10 years prior. “...stayed home with my kids...I knew I always wanted to be a teacher but became disenchanted with the educational training.” “In the late 60’s, I felt like my personal education was coming to a halt...when I was in school. Being a teacher felt like being an educational technician.” Majored in Art History. “I didn’t think about teaching again the early eighties.” (when kids were going to school) Stayed home with my kids, opened the nursery school. No Favorite teacher but, I did take a class</td>
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<td>Teaching Skills- Establish an “easy rapport” with children. “I’m skilled with creating a classroom environment where students will be receptive to learning...learning comes natural to children. I create a community in the classroom that is responsive to the needs of students. I also think I have skills in helping students with behavioral issues, helping them feel comfortable and establishing a sense of trust.</td>
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<td>“I collaborate on a lot of initiatives within the school literacy initiatives...I love collaborating with art, music, performing arts and integrating them seamlessly into content areas. (very rewarding) Other teachers: “I think (collaboration) is pretty challenging for many teachers...they are overwhelmed with mandates, etc.” “Personality conflicts also add challenges to collaboration.”</td>
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<td>“Covering the curriculum that out there expected to be covered...most challenging might be managing student behaviors to some extent, although I don’t find it real challenging...I find it exhausting. “I’m sort of in transformative period...I think a lot of my practices in the past have been more traditional and I equated rigor with...”</td>
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<td>“I am in conflict with many of the current school reforms stemming from NCLB...too many mandates that emphasize teachers as technicians.” Comment on “learned helplessness with students who learned to underachieve. When students don’t respond: “bored, not engaged with learning.” Successful lesson: Just the opposite.</td>
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<td>Time: “Little time to be reflected; we tend to get entrenched in the ways of structuring that doesn’t give us time to teach effectively. Would like to see schools make learning more joyful. Change: “I think change can be very powerful and very positive...doesn’t need to be threatening. Leadership Role- “To encourage collaboration.” ”No time for planning”</td>
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on the writing process
(in grad program) from
a principal in
NH…very
empowering for me…I
discovered I could
write.

Love of children and
the act of learning.

If I had it to do over, I
would have found a
more inspiring ed
program and majored
in education.

through,”

Student Assessment:
There are numerous
ways to assess student
learning…I should be
able to sit down with
you and give a pretty
good narrative on each
student in my class as
to where they are at
with their learning. “I
thing conversation
(with students) is
highly underrated in
schools…it provides
insights about how
they’re thinking”

“I think I brought a lot
of my teaching skills
with me…as a parent
I’ve ‘always been
interested in children
and I do my own
research…that writing
class also influenced
me..” “I read about
education all the
time…kind of an
education addict.”

Philosophy: “ I feel
there is a pretty
significant disconnect
between what we
believe as our
philosophy of
education and are
practices.”

Teacher or Student-
Centered- “Student-
centered but there’s
value in a balance
between student and teacher-centered... very difficult being student-centered when schools are driven by curriculum in order to prepare students for standardized tests.

Skills match to job:
“I’m not sure... that’s a very big conversation. I feel that teachers today are perceived as ed technicians or information delivery systems. “My skills appear higher than expectations.”

Vera, 23rd year 5th grade
Native Vermonter who has lived in the town she teaches for most of her life. Started a family early in her adult life and became a paraeducator. She credits the principal in the school she works for pushing her to go to school and pursue her teacher’s license. She also credits her 1st grade teacher as having the greatest influence on her teaching, “she always challenged me and made me feel like a good student.”

Difficulty answering the question of skills, “That’s a tough one”, when asked to describe her skills. “I’m flexible; good with behaviors... I’m not used to tooting my own horn.”

Philosophy comment: “When I first taught, I thought I was the best thing to come down the pike... the older I got, the more reflective, the more I thought no so great.”

Strategies: “I look at student strengths, have honest conversations to be able to empathize

Sees very little collaboration in school. “I’m non-union... not in this for pay... not sure if this [my] generation embraces collaboration.”

No challenges identified.

Feels NECAP scores are well-aligned with her instruction. “I feel I can teach students well with the support of my principal.”

“Not all students learn at the same rate.”

Sees a difference in administrative support from past to present. Past years, she felt more supported. Present perceptions are that principals don’t appreciate past practices and veteran experience.

Sees small class size and knowledge of student and families in small community as a strength. Shared a story that illustrates provincial thinking: She took advantage of a fellowship trip to Japan to enhance her social studies curriculum. Brought back artifacts, stories, etc. The older population in the community was critical of her teaching Japanese culture, questioning her patriotism.
Doug, 1st year, 11th Grade

Grew up in western NH
Attended a gifted and talented program as a youth—“Mr. F. made us do more thinking than regurgitation….we were fortunate to go on weekly field trips…a lot of enrichment” These experiences shaped his teaching philosophy. Accomplished in sports and music.

Originally was pursing a Forensic-Psych degree. “Looking for an antagonistic setting… I was going into prisons and seeing people who were in rough shape….rather than deal with it at that end, I wanted to get to kids at the pre-conviction end.”

Entered teaching as a substitute while caring for his ill mother and younger sister.

Teaching Skills: “I think my interactions with students and my understanding of their stressors; their cognitive processes is pretty strong….I think my preparation can always be better….also improve my wordings with less proficient readers could be more concise.”

Strategies that work: I think ongoing assessment in the classroom…flip cards, checking in vista five, that sort of thing.”

“Very few things escape being assessed and if you define an objective and get them to do something with it, makes it an authentic assessment after the fact….we are not just learning vocab, we are going to apply….this will be a writing piece that the community is going to Participate in curriculum decision-making “very limited….very loose curriculum in social studies.”

Very limited collaboration: “Regarding the world curriculum, I had two very different peers. one was Greece, Rome, Renaissance, and the Enlightenment… the other was into prehistory.” Very autonomous in their teaching…makes for difficult 1st year. Lack of sharing resources by veteran teachers.

Collaboration: “…very little outside department meetings….a lot of privacy and autonomy.”

“I think the more you collaborate, the more you get student success…Critical Friends- provides a stress on the job: “Parent upkeep….there are parents who are in it for their students and then there are parents who are in it on behalf of their students….there are parents that are directing it to you and triangulating…parents that you have a meeting for and don’t show.

“Some of it is the rural setting where parent didn’t have a lot of success in school and they transfer that…”

Making a difference? “I want the (learning) outcome to be something that is relevant to them but the process to be rigorous.”

“Success varies between students….there is a certain amount of learned helplessness.

“I don’t think I ever walk way satisfied (with my teaching) and that is a terrible thing to say.

“I’m a successful teacher when….students come to me enthused about other places they have seen…. when there is relevance.”


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School Pride? “The fact that people are trying new things and the fact that there is resistance in the community…we’re doing what we feel is right.”

Administrative Supports? “Backing from the administration… I think that has been lacking…” I think an administrator’s stance has to be student-teacher-parent.”

“Parents have to understand that there is going to be a certain degree of pain with what goes on in a school.”

Describe Mission Statement? “No, it’s ever-changing….NEASC re-wrote it….we used the previous one and it is a sad expectation… How can we be held

“There is a big sense of community, so if you can tap into it the right way, you can find a lot of ways to relate learning to kids…”

“We took a walking field trip to one of the cemeteries to look up civil war veterans that were buried in the cemetery… to see kids looking up known relatives in their community attaches meaning to their learning.”

Rural poor is different than urban poor….less community resources for kids.”

Challenge: “A lack of global thinking.”
Felt confident as a teacher through his substituting, "could get through to troubled learners."

Teacher prep: "I think my program did not do a good job preparing me for rural education...."

Do differently? "I would have gone through the masters of education rather than a masters in administration."

Felt the administrative/leadership program "really informed me on what I supposed to do as a teacher and how I should be evaluated."

Why high school? "I think there's a degree of higher-order thinking (with high-school students)."

Teaching skills? "I would say I have pretty good skills. I think I'm one of the better teachers in the high school....I feel I'm see" framework for collaboration."

How do want students to view you? "I want them to know that I'm the biggest proponent of their learning...."

Philosophy: "I want students to be self-aware, self-directed, self-reliant and more and more, I'm trying to lead them to some place and then get out of the way.

Job Expectations: "Teaching expectations in a high school are part classroom control....discipline." "I think we need to constantly re-evaluate what we are doing and act upon it."

Challenges: "I find the rigidity of time really challenging because sometimes we need more time...and you're not going to get it."

Successful Lesson: "It doesn't really feel like anything spectacular."

Being Successful: "When a kid suddenly had an a-ha moment...like a kid says I have to do my homework...not accountable when our students are not?"

Survey of teachers: "You can't pay me enough to deal with some of the issues...collaboration, making your day really understanding that it is not just about you, being part of the global team...."

Principal's role: "Not an instructional leader...they said that before you go into the classroom as an administrator, you have to be confident because view you as an instructional leader."

Ideal Role of Prin? More than bi-annual assessment...stop in the classroom...tell me how I'm doing....

Student perception of school? "I don't think they like it...they may appreciate that it gives them opportunities but I don't think they like it...."

Gerri, 10 years, 11th Grade

Grew up in small city Vermont, majored in engineering...had planned to teach at college level...

Colleague Collaboration: "I would say females in the department tend to want to collaborate...want to

Benefits: "Our school has a wide variety of kids...we have superstars going to MIT all the way down to kids who get into
In high school: “It was hard to use my experience in high school because, in my classes, everyone was really, always paying attention to the teacher and there were no behavior problems…I was always in honors classes.”

Tried sheep farming but realized we needed more income… teaching in high school was available…it happened very quickly.”

Why high school? “Their liveliness, they’re excited about all kinds of things because they haven’t really settled on a career path.”

How did training prep u? “I really felt unprepared…someone just handed me a book and asked what would I like to teach....”

Skills Match? “I think my skills match the expectations of the job…a lot of expectations for teachers...sometimes I think we’re expected to capable in the Math content area…I think I can explain math in a lot of different ways...can also relate Math to real life.”

Successful Teacher Strategies: “I’d say I used guided notes...I require them to keep their notes in a binder which keeps them organized...then I like to do group activities where I give them problems and have them solve them as a group.”

Philosophy: “That’s tough…I try to be firm and try to be fair...fair doesn’t mean every kid gets the same thing...when a situation happens, if we break it down, then the kid will say, well, I’m not real happy but I feel the outcome was right.”

“I also allow kids to make mistakes and I’ll forgive them.”

Collaboration: “I rate collaboration fairly high…I feel my colleagues give me insights into strategies I can try...kids benefit from that.”

“…and then there’s ‘the behavior piece...it seems that sometimes kids have no desire to learn and just want to have fun...sometimes I get really upset, go home feeling like, I wish those guys would take the opportunity.”

because he has to but because it’s preparing him for learning…”

Feel most responsible to students but also the curriculum director.

Standardized Tests: “I guess I like it...I feel it’s a good snapshot to see what the school is doing...”

“I don’t understand why they don’t do it every year in high school.”

“The test is difficult, so few kids do well on it...it almost like it’s a test designed to see how many people can fail...”

Alignment? “I’ve seen some alignment in my pre-cal class...”

Changes in the past 10 years: “…has improved organization of curriculum.”

A successful lesson: “I get excited and the adrenalin starts flowing.”

Unsuccessful? “I feel very sad, defeated…”

Lunch together and talk about our classes…seems like males want to do their own thing.”

Feeling? “Probably the feeling, we have a lot of meetings that keep me from my young kids….Also they keep me from being available to help my students.”

Supports? “Common planning time would be nice...have inservice where you get to collaborate...the only thing is you have some unstructured time and those teachers might take off...so that’s a little frustrating.”

Mission Statement: “I have it sitting on my desk...it might be to prepare kids for lifelong learning [that might be the old one...]”

Principal’s role: “I guess someone to keep us focused on the goal...probably I think his role isn’t really to discipline students...to be more supportive of teachers...a positive role.”

Challenges: “…not a lot of industry so kids have a hard time understanding what an education is going to get them...”

lot trouble, so that’s kind of neat…I like walking around town and seeing my students…I like living in a rural community.”

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Sarah, 15 years, 11th grade
Grew up in the community she teachers; went to college for criminal justice; always thought about being a teacher but the market was flooded so decided she wanted to be a lawyer. “…became asst city manager in a New Hampshire town…worked for a corporation and kinda fell into teaching because the bottom fell out of the NH economy.”
Influential Teacher? “It was a high school Your Teaching Skills? “Well, it has to real…I try to everything they’re learning applicable to their lives…I listen to students…get to know them, I want to know things that they’re interested in.” “I have student write a lot so my writing prompts are well-chosen.”
Teaching All Students: “I find the highest level of student the most difficult to teach…those students are bright and have
Collaboration: “This year, I have a teacher who’s teaching a sophomore class and wants to join me (Foxfire).” “I love change…I get bored easily…I can’t do the same thing all the time…thank God for me because kids change all the time so you have to change.” Collaboration and achievement: “That’s a hard one because it should. I just haven’t seen it in all the year’s I’ve taught…we would
Challenge: “It’s when students act like they don’t care…so their unmotivated, and it’s the same with their parents….that’s a huge challenge.”
Standardized Tests: “I’m one of those teachers who actually likes NECAP and other standardized tests…I don’t like what they do with the information…I think you have to know where you’re kids’ learning is aligned with GEs…you need some sort of measure of where your kids are and I think you have to look back and analyze that information and make adjustments.”
NCLB: “That’s a tough
Curriculum: “…nothing in the curriculum to helps kids prepare for life in college.”
Curriculum: “We don’t really have one in the English department…I serve on several committees…”
“…”I love the high school…I really think teachers care about kids..they care about what works with kids.”
“…”I think it’s the superintendent who decides what our PD
Challenges: “I think there are many…funding is an issue but our kids are so far removed from anything that’s it’s hard to get kids and families to think beyond the Northeast Kingdom.”
Benefits: “A small community is where you know your kids pretty well…you know their background, which I think is important.”
Currently: “I think he spends a lot of time talking to students…after talking to the vice principal, students aren’t happy so they go to the principal…don’t think that’s appropriate…a waste of time.”
English teacher…I was very quiet and reserved and this teacher (in my current school) who recognized my ability to write…he nurtured me and noted how I was different…he had a passion for his subject and made Shakespeare easier to understand…also very theatrical”

Accomplished artist (painter)

If you had it do over? “I think it’s easier this way than being 22 and walking into the classroom.”

Why high school? “Because you can talk to them like young adults…you can reason with them and make connections.”

Prep for teaching? “Probably my…how to do lesson plans…how to schedule time, how to get x amount of things done in a certain amount of time…contact with parents, that’s another one.”

I went to a traditional high school and it try to collaborate when I taught the middle grades (thematic units) and you know, the kids just would see the connection.”

one…I feel that everyone moves forward but will not get there at the same time.”

Example: “…years ago we discovered that the NSRE was supposed to be assessing reading but was actually assessing writing…we discovered our students were also having trouble writing a summary, so we broke down the skills that go with writing a summary and adjusted our teaching.”

Alignment of measurement “We’re working on it…NECAPs are harder because it’s not broken-down as easily as NSRE.”

Student/Teacher: “Well there has to be respect, both way…they’re has to be an understanding of what the expectations are.”

Successful Lesson: “I feel happy and I want to share their success…it happens daily.”

Unsuccessful lesson: “I can’t stop thinking should be… cyclic not targeted to individual teachers.

Structural challenge- “Time”

Mission Statement: “Oh, we have a new one…I don’t think I can tell you… The school has things in place but it’s going to be a challenge…”

“I feel supported by administration.”

“I love the (block) schedule as it is.”

Lack of technology in classrooms.

college, being away from families, etc.”
Daughter is a teacher. novels...we do literacy circles where I choose a theme and I let students choose books within those themes.”

Foxfire Project: “Elliot Liggington teaching in Georgia where kids couldn’t read or write, parents had dropped out...used community knowledge to teach reading and writing...I created a Foxfire project in N.H. with 8th grade students...have just started a project this year.”

Why not start project sooner? “It’s harder to do in a larger school and a lot of people at the high school level don’t understand a project like this.”
### Principal Responses

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<tr>
<th>Paul- Wake Rural Elementary</th>
<th>Bob- Grand Regional High</th>
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<tbody>
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<td><strong>Background:</strong> Grew up in the NEK, had a difficult time with school (slipped through the cracks), joined the Navy...was mentored by a high school teacher; came home, went to local college, realized he enjoyed working with kids and graduated with a teaching degree in Science...had thought about being a principal while teaching at special ed school...served as assistant principal and “groomed” for is present position... board and school administration desired consistency...</td>
<td><strong>Background:</strong> Grew up in the town he works in. 25th years in education, 13th as administrator; began in Tech Ed as a Coop/marketing teacher; was recruited to be Asst. Principal at his current school; mentored by the principal for his current job.</td>
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<td><strong>Job Priorities:</strong> “…student safety is always a top priority...moving staff to a point where they’re excited about education and teaching.... I’m actually excited and confident in this role.”</td>
<td><strong>Autonomy:</strong> “At this point in my career, I have a fair amount of autonomy.....working with the board in very positive relationship....I’ve developed trust through developing positive teams in school.”</td>
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<td><strong>Autonomy:</strong> “Yes...I think autonomy is only there based on work that I’ve done...like lay the groundwork to not have the school board micromanage.”</td>
<td><strong>Leadership Style:</strong> “I believe we have to create positive teams....we have an administrative team that meets weekly...what I do is provide each of the administrators the support and guidance they need....I look at two things...relational capacity (positive working relationships) and the second is system constraints (areas that prevent an organization from moving up).”</td>
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<td><strong>Leadership Style:</strong> “…I’m really developing that...what I’m trying to do is to try to do a collaborative leadership...has not been the case in the past...hesitation from teachers to invest...there was disinterest in the past for teachers to share in any excitement about learning...I’m trying to form teams...management, math, and literacy...teachers’ not yet comfortable to invest.”</td>
<td><strong>Instructional Leader Role:</strong> (delay to the question) “I’d like to think so, yes, but I know the demands of a high school principal are very challenging because of some many factors in a given day....I see myself supporting new professional development...I think in the beginning of the year we all have good intentions, like one of my goals is to visit classrooms every day and every week, but there are some days/weeks, for the nature of the beast, I can’t get into as many of the classrooms as I like.”</td>
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<td><strong>Instructional Leader Role:</strong> “I think I need work...I see myself an instructional leader but I don’t feel like I’m staged yet...I’m trying to move past the managerial stuff and I think I’m doing that....but it takes times...I don’t feel like I’ve been able to focus there yet...not enough time to right the ship.”</td>
<td><strong>Teacher Perception:</strong> “…I’m not an authoritative leader, I’m more supportive....teachers will look to me to bring new ideas in but empower them to pursue some of their interests...I think I’ve grown to be a stronger principal, clear with my decisions and expectations of teachers.**</td>
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<td><strong>Factors for Success:</strong> “…I would say that we haven’t experienced much success in the way of student achievement...one bright spot (although dimming) is with literacy...due to K-2 teaming...we really target kids with interventions...starting to stretch that out to other grades.”</td>
<td><strong>Factors that contribute to success:</strong> “Positive working relationships with teams and the ability of the administration to work closely with teachers.”</td>
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Efficacy of Principals: “I think that question can really go anywhere…it depends on the school, the superintendent, it depends on the school board… I’ve been reflecting (on this) and with the 3-year turnover rate of administrators… turn the school around, people get upset, and go off someplace else…but you’re done the good work.”

Measure of School Success: “NECAPs are valid indicators and reliable measures…teachers are pulling the shade a bit…don’t want to look at that (scores)...the k-2 team looks at that data...they learn from it and design interventions…I don’t think we have the mechanisms to do good analyses”.

Supports in Place for Students: “Oh, not much...we have an EST which doesn’t result in anything substantial.

Standards-based Instruction: “I’m pretty confident that it’s not happening in the school...have recently adjusted my thinking...the end of last year, good teachers had been aligning their instruction with standards...it may be not as dire as I had perceived... school very much teacher centered...”

School Accountability: “...school board appears comfortable with ignoring any kind of pressure and so that’s the way they feel comfortable...our school is not exceptionally interested in high stakes tests...ethically and morally, I hold myself accountable.

Promoting High Expectations: “That’s a good one...no I don’t feel like I’m doing that right now...my work with the Snelling Institute.... I don’t think teachers have been held to high expectations...no accountability...”

Moral Purpose: “I think my moral purpose is to provide kids with the opportunity to be successful in something, at something...it’s tough to align that with high stakes testing sometimes...very much, kids can be successful without scoring a 4 on their math...”

Teacher Leadership: story of board member interviewing a teacher...minimized the need for teacher leader...that’s the principal’s job...a teacher leader is current on educational (strategies)...attends professional development and not necessarily taking their summer off (to travel)...their skill, dedication, and commitment is so obvious that it draws people to them...commitment can be developed...”

Collaboration: A reluctance for teachers to “buy in to the system”, a disinterest or ambivalence for teacher to share information; his role has been to “try” and form teams of teachers to work together.

Efficacy of Principals: “...they can be very significant if they focus on...relational capacity and systems constraint.”

Measure of School Success: “Let’s see...grad rates, NECAP scores, discipline data.

Alignment: “Yea, there’s a lot of consistency with that...students that are earning higher grades and doing well on standardized tests are the same students that are participating in extracurricular activity...there’s consistency across the board.”

Supports in Place for Students: “We have after school tutoring, block 3 study program that gives students opportunities in the middle of the day to get support, a learning center, titles support, a strong alternative program and a good relationship with community learning service programs...teachers are very familiar with what they do.”

Standards-based Instruction: “That’s an area that we need to continue to work on...our Language Arts department is very strong with it...Math and Science are continuing to work on it, but they’re not there yet...it’s a lot of people getting together to look at common assessments...and ask the questions, are students learning”.

School Accountability: “...we cannot have school accountability be our only focus...because there are so many things that can affect the success of a student...student will stay in class if they’ve made a connection with a mentor, an athletic team, a dance program, a chorus, or career class.”

Promoting High Expectations (Teachers) “I would say I do...we remind the student to do well and work hard...we expect our teachers to have strong lesson plans in place; expect students to be in class on time, communication program that enables parents to communicate with teachers 24/7.

Moral Purpose: (pause). “We must all have a moral purpose...I think it’s to really focus on you can maybe effect.”

Teacher Leader: “…teachers willing to chair committees, sharing their knowledge with others, leading PD training.

Collaboration: “...there’s a lot of informal collaboration but also structured collaboration, like in IEP teams, EST, department meetings, etc...my role is to structure the time (for teachers).”

Curriculum: “It’s constantly changing...an evolving process...we want make sure we focus on the whole preK-12 curriculum.”
Assessment Report

Organization: Grand Regional High School
Teaching Year: 2007-2008
Test/Subject: NECAP Reading Grade 11
Breakdown: Differences in achievement by family income?
Comparison: Compared to its District and Vermont?

The NECAP Math, Reading, and Writing tests are administered in October and measure student achievement of Grade Expectations for previous school years. NECAP science tests are administered in May and measure student achievement of Grade Expectations in current and previous school years. District assessment data are for the accountability LEA which is either the town or union school district.
**Assessment Report**

**Organization:** Grand Regional High School

**Teaching Year:** 2008-2009

**Test/Subject:** NECAP Math Grade 11

**Breakdown:** Differences in achievement by family income?

**Comparison:** Compared to its District and Vermont?

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The NECAP Math, Reading, and Writing tests are administered in October and measure student achievement of Grade Expectations for previous school years. NECAP Science tests are administered in May and measure student achievement of Grade Expectations in current and previous school years. District assessment data are for the accountability LEA which is either the town or union school district.
**Assessment Report**

**Organization:** Johnson City School  
**Teaching Year:** 2007-2008  
**Test/Subject:** NECAP Reading Grades 3-8  
**Breakdown:** Differences in achievement by family income?  
**Comparison:** Compared to its District and Vermont?

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### Achievement Levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proficiency Level</th>
<th>LIA</th>
<th>State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not FRL</td>
<td>FRL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Students Tested</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proficient With Distinction</td>
<td>27 %</td>
<td>11 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proficient</td>
<td>53 %</td>
<td>39 %</td>
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<tr>
<td>Partially Proficient</td>
<td>15 %</td>
<td>28 %</td>
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<tr>
<td>Substantially Below Proficient</td>
<td>6 %</td>
<td>32 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Proficient and Above</td>
<td>79 %</td>
<td>50 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Below Proficient</td>
<td>21 %</td>
<td>50 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Assessment Report

Organization: WaKe Rural Elementary
Teaching Year: 2007-2008
Test/Subject: NECAP Reading Grades 3-8
Breakdown: Differences in achievement by family income?
Comparison: Compared to its District and Vermont?

The NECAP Math, Reading, and Writing tests are administered in October and measure student achievement of Grade Expectations for previous school years. RECAP Science tests are administered in May and measure student achievement of Grade Expectations in current and previous school years.

District assessment data are for the accountability LEA which is either the town or union school district.