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BEST PRACTICES USED BY ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENTS OF CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION: IMPROVING TEACHER INSTRUCTION IN A HIGH ACCOUNTABILITY ENVIRONMENT

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by

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative multi-case study investigated not only the role of assistant superintendents of curriculum and instruction, but the strategies and best practices used by four assistant superintendents of curriculum and instruction and a deputy superintendent of teaching and learning from East Texas in order to improve classroom instruction and support teachers in the high-stakes testing environment. The study sheds light on the role of central office leaders, their views related to the high-stakes testing environment and the impact they have on instruction for teachers and students. The responses given in this qualitative case study were carefully analyzed in order to identify emerging themes. Responses were transcribed through an online transcription service and then uploaded into NVivo 11 for disaggregation and appropriate grouping. The results indicated that a high-stakes testing environment, implementation of new programs or initiatives, and principals were all significant in using best practices for student achievement in a high-stakes testing environment.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to my family.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction to the Study

Background of the Problem

In 1983, The Imperative for Education Reform (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) prompted educational initiative reform throughout the United States when they issued a scathing report, *A Nation At Risk*, which reported on the nation's educational state. According to the report, poor quality teachers were contributing to a failing education system. It also reported that the entire education system was deteriorating at a rapid pace.

Subsequently, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and the International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMMS) provided an outsider's view through both of their reports that compared United States student performance to the performance from students in nine other countries. United States eighth grade students scored higher than the international norm, but below the other nine countries. The result of the two additional reports created extensive concern related to what United States students knew and how they were assessed against their peers (Abelmann, Elmore, Even, Kenyon, & Marshall, 1999).

In 2001, Congress passed legislation on the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act (No Child Left Behind Act, 2002). Not long after, standardized testing infiltrated America's schools holding campuses and districts accountable based upon assessment results (Deming, Cohodes, Jennings, & Jencks, 2016). Legislators believed standardized testing would improve student performance and future academic success projections for school children in the United States (Deming. et al., 2016). NCLB's requirements included a documented account of achievement and progress, which was then broadcasted for school campuses and districts statewide (Fullan, 2005). According to a review of reform measures in California and Texas by Causey-Bush (2005), increased changes in demographics, students from a multitude of cultures and students who were linguistically behind or English Language Learners (ELLs), presented a daunting educational challenge.

As a result of NCLB, educators were feeling the pressure of high-stakes testing to advance academic student outcomes (Schlechty, 2002). Standardized testing was able to identify areas of academic concern. However, many felt that the high-stakes assessment did not account for a true academic profile of a student (Darling-Hammond, 2008; Guskey & Bailey, 2001; Wormeli, 2006). Causey-Bush (2005) asserted, " . . . while standardized tests may be useful in the sense that they can provide insight to diagnose weaknesses in student academic performance as a formative assessment, they are not useful in determining a student's overall academic capacity . . ." (p. 332).

President Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), a later version of NCLB, into law on December 10, 2015 (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). ESSA

once again approved the Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA) from 50 years ago. ESSA combined 50 programs into one substantial grant (Klein, 2016). Emphasizing independence and more state power, ESSA also terminated the federal waivers of NCLB (Ferguson, 2016).

Standardized testing continued to be debated, and there was considerable research notating a correlation between high-stakes testing and the effectiveness of teacher instruction, teacher stress, and student success (Berryhill, Linney, & Fromewick, 2009; Betoret, 2009; Collie, Shapka, & Perry, 2012; Haberman, 2005; Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008; Stipek, 2012; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008; Woolfolk Hoy, Hoy, & Davis, 2009; Wright & Ballestero, 2012). Teachers experienced pressure when the focus was on performance (Grissom, Nicholson-Crotty, & Harrington, 2014). The symbiotic relationship between standardized testing and classroom instruction was affected by the high-stakes accountability environment (Cimbricz & McConn, 2015) and the desire to impact student success through instructional change had positive and negative consequences for teachers (Schlechty, 2002).

Teachers tried several tactics to get students to achieve higher scores but were many times unsuccessful (Schlechty, 2002). There were often many discussions about the struggles of change among educators and others in the field (Sannino, 2010). Torff (2008) suggested qualified educators, who presented teacher focused professional development, were very vocal about the responses they received from new initiative training. In fact, they were able to easily identify teachers that would be receptive and those that would be more resistant. Torff (2008) asserted that teacher attitudes fell into

three categories depending on their years of experience. Even though the first few years in the classroom were quite demanding, teachers in stage one with at least three years of experience had a favorable view of professional development. Stage two was defined as teachers with three to 10 years of experience. Teachers who fell into the stage two category showed a decrease in positive feelings toward professional development. The final stage considered experienced teachers with 10 or more years of experience. In stage three, teachers who taught for decades had comparable attitudes to stage one teachers, which included positive feedback and favorable attitudes toward professional development opportunities.

Teachers' experiences with training on new ways of delivering instruction tended to foreshadow how receptive they were in future professional learning scenarios (Knight, 2009). However, if their experiences encompassed independence, were commanding and yet provided easy application, included coaching support, and contained on the job training, then it was likely that teachers embraced professional learning in an optimistic fashion. An absence of those components presented a barricade to the process (Knight, 2009).

In addition, researchers asserted that professional characteristics, social place, principles, and an individual's moral compass were all connected to resistance of change (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2006; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2008; Piderit, 2000). Glickman, Gordon, and Ross-Gordon (2007) shared that teachers, who were not included in making decisions, sometimes showed signs of resistance. According to Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2011), "Adults have a deep psychological need to be seen by others and treated

by others as capable of self-direction. They resent and resist situations in which they feel others are imposing their wills on them" (p. 63).

The accountability movement impacted the relationship between school campuses and district office personnel, which affected the connection among district level personnel such as curriculum directors and campus level staff. Larson (2007) submitted that NCLB legislation brought substantial change to the organizational setting in today's schools. Additionally, the cultural and administrative atmosphere of a school had powerful implications for teachers (Agee, 2004; Rex & Nelson, 2004). Teaching practices and teachers' judgment were greatly influenced by the high-stakes testing and state accountability environment.

Not only did that type of setting alter educators' outlook and opinions regarding their professional work, but also challenged them to question their trained knowledge in the field (Agee, 2004; Rex & Nelson, 2004). Teachers were troubled with the glaring expected preparation for standardized tests. Many more educators voiced uncertainties concerning the validity and worth of the assessments (Klager, 2013; Kohn, 2002; Luna & Turner, 2001; Smith & Fey, 2000).

Assistant superintendents of curriculum and instruction (ASCI) were critical participants in preparing and supervising principals and curriculum based personnel (Leach, 2009). In New York State, Leach (2009) took an in-depth look at assistant superintendents. His findings suggested the role of assistant superintendents were quite diverse. However, in most cases, their roles encompassed a crucial curriculum and instructional responsibility in addition to serving as a vital liaison between the

superintendent, curriculum directors and coaches. Wimpelberg (1987) (as cited in Pajak, 1989) noted, “The central office instructional supervisor’s position may be, in fact, the least well understood and the most frequently overlooked of the professional roles that exist in the schools” (p. 2).

In order to understand the impact an ASCI had on instructional changes and development within their district, there needed to be an understanding of their role, their perceptions of their role, and how they interpreted their work. Once all the components of their role were understood, support and recommendations for maintaining improved teacher instruction and student achievement would be evident.

This research strived to grasp the role of the ASCI and best practices they used by examining five participants in their roles as ASCI. Due to ESSA being implemented in the 2017- 2018 school year, the researcher examined NCLB, the high-stakes testing environment, school reform, and the responsibilities of ASCIs. Furthermore, this research examined how ASCIs worked with staff (Fullan, 2008; Gallucci & Swanson, 2006; Kotter & Rathgeber, 2005).

Not only were ASCIs essential in growing and managing directors of curriculum, but they were also important in the development of principals and teachers (Leach, 2009). The fundamental roles of district leaders were key in the running of a public school organization (Marzano & Waters, 2009). District leadership roles included support for district initiatives, time, resources, implementation, and monitoring of instructional goals, and student achievement (Marzano & Waters, 2009). ASCIs were also an integral part of making decisions regarding curriculum, resources, and personnel. The role of the

superintendent as an instructional leader and district manager had been examined and documented (Fullan, 1991; Kowalski, 2006; Marzano & Waters, 2009; Murphy & Hallinger, 1986; Petersen & Barnett, 2005; Wimpelberg, 1987), although there was not much information available regarding the ASCI (Anderson, 2003; Pajak, 1989).

Searches conducted through the ERIC journal articles database with 'assistant superintendent' in the search field yielded one result for 2016, six results in 2015, and 28 results for the past five years. However, only one of those results included information about the role of the ASCI. A search through the ERIC database and dissertations with 'assistant superintendent' produced 45 results in the past five years. Only one (DiMuzio, 2013) contained information in the title related to the role of the ASCI.

A search through Stephen F. Austin State University's library online research site using "assistant superintendent" in the search generated 3,328 results in journal articles and a search of 'central office' in a refined search of school administration in education over the past 10 years yielded 73 results in journal articles. A further search in dissertations produced 249 results. An additional search with 'role of the assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction' generated 68 results. However, only four dissertations (Butler, 2013; DiMuzio, 2013; Kaltenecker, 2011; Leach, 2009) contained information on the role of ASCI.

Stating the Problem

Change has been the key word used when discussing school improvement for the past 40 years (Harris & Chrispeels, 2006) and superintendents used different philosophies when they addressed school reform measures. Agullard, Huebner, Goughnour, and

Calisi-Corbett (2005) studied the impact various superintendents' ideas had on school progress methods and whether or not their ideas were communicated with other district leaders or central office personnel. The findings in their study revealed that when district or central office staff shared the same vision of reform, the improvement was more successful (Agullard, et al., 2005).

Knight (2009) wondered about the communication between administration, curriculum directors, and staff, what all the staff were being asked to do, and if professional learning and training was preparing teachers to accomplish the task at hand. Student achievement was effected by district accountability on five different levels. The levels included setting objectives, firm intentions for student success, achievement objectives that were supported by resources, progress monitoring, and a strong alliance with the school board (Waters & Marzano, 2006). District office administrative roles, such as curriculum directors and superintendents, changed to more of an instructional leadership capacity in contrast to a focused management position (Bredeson & Kose, 2007; Houston, 2006). Superintendents were feeling a substantial obligation to bring about instructional change in order to improve student achievement (Petersen & Young, 2004).

According to Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004), providing direction included "creating high performance expectation, monitoring organizational performance, and promoting effective communication throughout the organization" (p. 9). In addition, there were three paradigms of ideas and best practices essential to successful leadership approaches. These strategies included applicable examples,

customized support, and intellectual motivation. Furthermore, a reconstruction of a school district's philosophy and configuration for cultivating the work put forth by the organization's representatives, needed flexibility and accordance with a district's improvement plan (Leithwood et al., 2004).

Schiro (2013) noted the impact instructional improvements of ASCIs by making decisions about curriculum materials, teacher efficiency, and school accountability. Several studies recognized the significance of district office staff in improved student success (Corbett & Wilson, 1992; Leithwood, 2010; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; MacIver & Farley, 2003; Murphy & Hallinger, 1986; Waters & Marzano, 2006). The problem addressed in this study was how ASCIs used best practices to implement program changes in a high-stakes testing environment.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this multi-case study was to examine the best practices of five assistant superintendents of curriculum and instruction (ASCIs) in Texas and determine how they use best practices to bring about change with new instructional initiatives in a high-stakes testing environment. The research question that guided this study was:

1. How do ASCIs bring about change and successfully implement new academic initiatives in the environment of high-stakes testing?

Definitions of Related Terms

The conceptual definitions presented in this section are explicitly related to the role of ASCIs leadership practices and their perceptions at the time of this study.

Conceptual definitions are given to support understanding and the make-up of the study.

Assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction (ASCI).

Many times the person in the position of ASCI reports to the superintendent of schools and is part of the leadership team. The exact title and job description may be different depending on the district. If the superintendent is unable to attend a meeting or function, the ASCI steps in during their absence. The ASCI is concerned with the district's implementation of instructional quality, resources, support, and many programs and objectives (Konnert & Augenstein, 1995).

In a study more than 20 years ago, Pajak (1989) notated the unclear role the assistant superintendent plays. Because supervisory roles are very different from other district or central office positions within the district, they are not as well defined as the roles of the superintendent, principal, or teacher. Taking this information into consideration indicates that the position is inclined to be portrayed through the district's and individual's choices and representation of the role.

Achievement gap.

The notion that minority students and economically disadvantaged students are inclined to underperform compared to other populations of students on standardized testing assessments. Furthermore, there is a connection between wide achievement gaps and high school dropout rates, lower college registration, and college completion degrees (Lee, 2006).

Accountability.

NCLB defines accountability as the assemblage of student achievement data. Legislation on how the data is used holds many stakeholders responsible including, students, teachers, schools, districts, and states (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Adequate yearly progress (AYP).

A student's performance measured on standardized assessments across school districts and states is called AYP. The annual AYP of public school campuses and districts was first initiated by federal law through the NCLB Act, and the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) (Texas Education Agency, 2017).

Academic coaching.

A school employee that has the job of offering encouragement, support, and assistance given to inexperienced teachers in order to advance their instructional abilities is participating in academic coaching (Melendez, 2007).

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

In 2015, Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) into law. ESSA focused on progress accomplished over the past several years. The progress included elevated academic standards for all students to be college and career ready. It also guaranteed that critical information was available through state assessments, maintaining accountability, targeted equity for disadvantaged students with high-needs, providing local intervention for students driven by educators and local community leaders, making

sure action for positive change was taken in low performing schools, and supported excellence in preschools (U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

Organizational change.

Change at the organizational level designed to effect modifications to the structure of an organization. Organizational change is a method of implementing a change initiative, guided by a well-developed plan, which must consider both the process and its effect on stakeholders prior to proceeding with plan of change (Angel-Sveda, 2012).

Improvement required (IR).

A rating given to a campus or district for low performance on standardized assessments in one or more indexes according to the index framework by the Texas Education Agency. This rating means that improvement is required (Texas Education Agency, 2016b).

Indexes.

Student performance on The State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) must meet targets in 4 indexes. The indexes consist of student achievement (Index 1), student progress (Index 2), closing performance gaps (Index 3), and postsecondary readiness (Index 4). School districts and campuses are required to meet the target in each index to show satisfactory performance for each index (Texas Education Agency, 2016a).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB).

In 2001, Congress passed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). This law, which was signed by President George W. Bush in 2002. It updated the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, including Title I, in order to improve student outcomes for all students especially disadvantaged and minority students. The NCLB law supports measurable goals and high expectations through educational based standards that allow student success (Maleyko, 2011).

Professional development.

Professional development is a meeting organized by key personnel in a district or school and informed by an organized plan to help improve teaching pedagogy, practices, the opinions and attitudes of teachers, and improved student learning (Guskey, 2002).

School board.

A School board governs school districts at the local level. School board members are trusted by the public to make decisions that are in the best interest of students and the community (Texas Association of School Boards, 2017a).

School board policy.

Local public school district policies are decisions made at public meeting, which is legally called and put into action by a majority vote (Texas Association of School Boards, 2017b).

School reform.

Reducing the gap among low and high achievers requires all involved within the school system perfecting their skills. "Whole system reform produces higher levels of

education performance on important cognitive and social learning goals, and it does so while reducing the gap toward a more equal public education system" (Fullan, 2010, p. 18). School reform involves all schools in the system making progress, including reducing the gap between high and low performers. Whole system reform produces higher levels of education performance on identified cognitive and social learning goals, and it does so while reducing the achievement gap toward a more equal public education system.

Standardized testing.

External sources create standardized tests and deliver them to large amounts of students at the same time. The assessments had set guidelines during the administration of the test and set protocols for the scoring of the tests. Tests were scored by an external source (Morris, 2011).

Teacher resistance.

An individual teacher's inclination to elude making modifications, deviations, or variations in a number of different improvement efforts or frameworks is considered teacher resistance (Oreg, 2003).

Texas Education Agency (TEA).

Located in Austin, Texas, the Texas Education Agency offers direction, governance, and means to assist educators and school organizations take care of students' educational needs. In addition,

> . . . the agency handles the processes of textbook adoption, curriculum development, statewide testing, student data, finances, staffing protocols, school

> report cards in accordance with the state's accountability structure, oversees federal guidelines compliance, financial manager for federal and state funds dissemination all under the watchful eye of the Commissioner of Education. (Webb, 2005, p. 160)

Significance of the Research

It was important to realize that unless students were engaged during classroom instruction, not much learning was taking place (Schlechty, 2002). If learning strategies had been assessed in an on-going fashion, it would have prevented learning deficiencies. (Fredericks, Blumenfeld, Friedel, & Paris, 2003; Guthrie, 2001; Schlechty, 2002). Effective classroom management practices spoke to the concrete design of a classroom and aided in the prevention of unwanted student behavior, which effected teacher instruction (Colvin, 2002; Weinstein, Romano, & Mignano, 2010). The level and rigor of instruction also played an important role (Strong, Silver, & Perini, 2001). Additionally, reluctant and resistant teachers, who were impervious to change, affected the quality of instruction and student success (Ajzen, 1988; Bandura, 1986; Fullan, 1992a).

Each year, during staff development days, teachers were given a new scope and sequence for their grade level and were guided through the curriculum by personnel from the district office directly connected with curriculum and instruction. Teachers were provided new guidelines and initiatives that were in the process of implementation in order to boost student achievement. If there were new initiatives, the initiatives were usually discussed and a timeline of implementation was given (Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, & Shapley, 2007). New teachers were given staff development on classroom

management and other teachers were given time to work in their rooms and plan for the first week or two weeks of instruction.

However, seeing, discussing, and getting a timeline of an impending new initiative felt much different to teachers in the initial phase than it did once the "trying it out" phase began. Once the "trying it out" phase began, it was possible for some teachers to have a bit of fear. They wondered if they were doing "it" right or were uncomfortable because the new initiative was different from what they had known. That was a crucial phase for dialogue because during that time, if teachers were overwhelmed, they were inclined to reject the new initiative (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Thoonen, Sleegers, Oort, Peetsma, & Geijsel, 2011).

The time period from the introduction phase through the trying it out phase of any new initiative created a big challenge for school administrators including ASCIs (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Thoonen et al., 2011). After the "trying it out phase", there had to be a plan in place to make sure the change initiatives were implemented with fidelity. Fidelity was the degree to which detailed elements of an instructional model were applied in the way they were expected to be implemented (March, Castillo, Batsche, & Kincaid, 2016).

Usually, school districts had campus coaches and/or district literacy specialists that were available to check on teachers and lend support where needed. In some cases, the coaches and specialists helped guide a teacher to achieve a new initiative with fidelity. If teachers, implementing change, were not able to execute change with fidelity, then sometimes the initiative was thrown out before it had a chance to bring success. The

value of instructional delivery, loyalty to the initiative, and student engagement were several areas where fidelity was evaluated A successful carrying out of a new initiative addressed the instructional delivery, loyalty to the initiative, and student engagement (Gresham, 2009; Power et al., 2005).

In addition, many times there were costs involved in implementing change. For example, there were fees or money allotted for the training of teachers, district leaders, specialists, campus coaches, and administrators (City, 2008). The need and cost for all materials had to be considered and decisions made based on resources that either met or did not meet district, federal, or state guidelines (City, 2008). It was important for the ASCI to research the information behind any new initiative or implementation or when implementing change. Research provided principles and elements that were the bases for systematic change, which ultimately influenced student achievement (Elmore, 2000).

The percentage of teachers committed to a new initiative and the level of teacher capacity that needed to be developed was a problem for some district leaders. Furthermore, the success of any new initiative to support a school district had to be ensured in some way (Elmore, 2000). "For change agents, this burden [to communicate] can be relentless: explaining, clarifying, training, seeking feedback, troubleshooting, modifying, reexamining, reclarifying" (Evans, 1996, p. 77).

Organization of the Study

Chapter I covered a synopsis of the study, which included background material that aided in setting a base for the research, purpose of the study, and the research. In addition, definitions of terms related to the research were given. Chapter II covers the

onset of the high stakes testing environment with the passing of the NCLB, research on roles of the ASCIs, accountability, the organization of central office, teacher resistance, curriculum coaches, and change leadership. Chapter III provides the methodology used for the study as well as explains the data collected and the procedure for analyzing the data. Chapter IV begins with an introduction to the interviews and the interview of Dr. Smith. Chapters V through VIII continue with the interviews of Dr. Collins, Dr. Reed, Mr. Jones, and Mrs. Adams. Chapter IX presents the case analysis, cross-case analysis, and findings. Finally, Chapter X concludes with the summary, conclusions, implications, and recommendations for future study.

CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

Introduction

There has been very little research conducted on assistant superintendents of curriculum and instruction (ASCI) that has analyzed their specific role. The value of examining these district leaders was vital. Universities, policy makers, district leaders, and all stakeholders would gain great insight from further research on ASCIs. Several searches were conducted using the terms ASCI, assistant superintendent, and central office. However, searches using central office were more successful. Also, only a narrow body of empirical research on ASCIs exists (Firth & Pajak, 1998; Leach, 2009; Louis, 2008). Pajak (1989) noted the vague definitions of ASCI roles:

> The central office supervisor's position differs in many ways from other professional positions in the school district. An especially important difference . . . is that supervisory tasks are less clearly defined than those of teachers, principals, and superintendents. Given this ambiguity, an individual's interpretation of the situation becomes a major factor influencing the enactment of his or her role. (p. 19)

Since there is little research on the role of ASCIs, there are many questions on how these leaders are expected to carry out their roles. Furthermore, it is important to consider the practices they used to improve student achievement and teacher instruction. The central office literature that is available did support the idea that central office leadership has an impact on the priorities of a district and their attempts to improve instruction through reform efforts (Gallucci & Swanson, 2006; Honig & Copland, 2008; Marzano & Waters, 2009; Togneri & Anderson, 2003). Reform endeavors began to invade American schools with the induction of NCLB (No Child Left Behind Act, 2002).

ASCIs, directed by superintendents, impacted school reform and the process of change (Glass, Franceschini, & American Association of School Administrators, 2007). School reform endeavors were not an easy progression. Dominant teacher groups within a school carried opinions that directed them to a collective resistance. One investigation looked at closing the achievement gap for students coming from low socioeconomic homes, including African American and Hispanic students (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2008). School reform and the process of change were examined over the course of one school year by McKenzie and Scheurich (2008).

The teachers involved in the action research project were primarily female and white. In order to achieve school reform, the teachers collaborated while making decisions, participated in rigorous professional learning trainings, and joined in the process of making shared evaluations. At the end of the year, Hispanic students showed slight advances, but African American students did not. A provoking outcome emerged from this study because although the teachers were initially in favor of and contributing

to change in their practice, a significant number of teachers voiced a resistance to the change process for the remainder of the school year. McKenzie and Scheurich (2008) stated, "Moreover, in our work with other schools and in the work of one of us as an urban principal we have often seen other examples of the same kinds of resistance" (p. 123).

Leithwood (2010) noted, "District efforts to create a shared sense of purpose about student achievement are fundamental strategies for generating the will to improve" (p. 252). Yet, in McKenzie and Scheurich's (2008) study, the resistance highlighted allied views, which were connected to the social positions of many teachers (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2006; Lieberman & Miller, 1999; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2008). Teachers attributed the sub-par performance of the African American students to their home life and family circumstances (Barton, 2004). Consistent resistance concerning culturally diverse viewpoints was predictable (Shields & Sayani, 2005). In addition, teachers did not support the idea that they were to assume some type of leadership role in the effort to close achievement gaps (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2008). The teachers, who offered suggestions, were accused of unjustified critiquing and negative disapproval (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2008).

Finally, the assessment measures that were implemented were seen as damaging to a teacher's instructional craft and teachers thought the assessments brought about unnecessary analysis (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2008). Several scholars have not been supportive of accountability assessments, especially at the federal and state level (McGhee & Nelson, 2005; McNeil, 2000; Valencia, Valenzuela, Sloan, & Foley, 2004).

In addition, McKenzie and Scheurich (2008) found that the absence of commitment by the teachers to work together to raise the achievement levels at their school was a clear example of resistance. Therefore, the social implications and opinions of many of the teachers led the researchers, McKenzie and Scheurich (2008), to the conclusion that school reform and instructional initiatives would possibly be resisted based upon the beliefs of the teachers.

No Child Left Behind

With a copious amount of disparaging news regarding American students' disappointing performance on standardized tests, the education system in America was criticized for the lack of students earning top scores in key content area subjects (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Public concern over the quality of American schools began to grow and became a primary focus of political elections (Schoen & Fusarelli, 2008). In 1999, there was a consensus that schools were failing many children and an outcry was made for more educational awareness and alternative educational options for parents. This demand for school choice and more accountability concluded with the passing of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act (Schoen & Fusarelli, 2008).

In 2001 (No Child Left Behind Act, 2002), NCLB extended the federal government's task in launching a governing framework for all public school students in the nation (Franklin, 2011). Usually, the criteria for school attendance, enrollment, and graduation rules and procedures were regulated by each state. However, with the expansion of the government's role, states were given a choice of compliance with

NCLB. Yet, states that did not conform to the federal government's guidelines faced the possibility of sanctions (Franklin, 2011). Sanctions that would be imposed included possible removal or reductions of federal funds. Some states decided to not take part in NCLB by declining the federally offered funds (McCurley, 2005).

No Child Left Behind worked to guarantee that public school leaders and teachers understood they were accountable for student success regardless of ethnicity, race, socioeconomics, special education, or second language. A plan focused on accountability, strived to establish educational justice through academic achievements by creating an alignment between state standards and instruction. The demands of policy based on accountability was difficult for urban schools based upon several inequalities they faced, which included skilled professionals, quality instruction, economic abilities, and academic accomplishments (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010).

Every Student Succeeds Act

On December 10, 2015, The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), a later version of NCLB, was signed by President Obama. ESSA reapproved the Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA) from 50 years ago (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). According to the U.S. Department of Education, rigid NCLB requirements grew to become impractical for schools. ESSA essentially consolidated a total of 50 programs into one massive grant (Klein, 2016). The highlights of ESSA included more authority and independence for states, and the halt of NCLB federal waivers. Considering

Congressional standstill and the Obama administration's determination to land on the educational map, ESSA was somewhat predictable (Ferguson, 2016).

Many school district administrators and state officials criticized NCLB for many years because they felt the federal government's role was too inflexible. It was still somewhat uncertain how much control would be doled out by the U.S. Department of Education (Klein, 2016). However, school districts and states would nevertheless be required to make great improvements to low-performing schools. Although school districts and states would be able to use the strategies they wanted, they would have to make sure they were evidence based (Klein, 2016).

In addition, student groups, who were not performing at the same levels as their peers, would be flagged. The groups included racial minority students and English Language Learners (ELLs). Schools had to offer at least one feature that equated to a student's optimal opportunity to learn. Such as, cultivating the school's climate or providing highly developed course work (Klein, 2016). Some support groups urged educational leaders in the state to reconfigure their educational design and focus more on the "whole child", with social learning, emotional learning, self-regulation, and student support (Blad, 2017).

Significant changes in school accountability may not have been a good choice because of their incompatibility with current high-stakes testing and reporting. Even though ESSA promised flexibility, possibility does not equal certainty (Blad, 2017). According to Klein (2016),

> States devise their own plans, to be approved by the U.S. Department of Education, effective in 2017-2018. States set goals that must address testing and English language proficiency and graduation rates, and that aim to close achievement and graduation gaps. (p. 6)

The High Stakes Testing Environment

Preparing students for the future has been a critical necessity, but it produced anxiety when coupled with NCLB directives. Countless school leaders worked hard to meet the demand for 21st century skills through creativity, higher level thinking skills, originality, and flexibility (Brown, 2007). However, at the same time, leaders and teachers strived to move their students to adequate yearly progress (AYP) or the standardized testing pass rate (Brown, 2007). There was a fear of not succeeding to meet AYP among school stakeholders. Failure to meet AYP lead to humiliation and generated compliance with leaders and teachers (Brown, 2007).

When public schools began to answer to accountability, educators were affected in many ways. Schools and districts that did not reach passing standards faced penalties, which added tension to the work environment (Schoen & Fusarelli, 2008). Furthermore, Schoen & Fusarelli (2008) pointed out, " . . . high-stakes environments create a single-minded focus on avoiding sanctions, accompanied by a fear to attempt anything new or untried . . ." (p. 192). Educators responded to policies outlining accountability by taking advantage of loopholes and insisting on plan changes (Mintrop & Sunderman, 2009). However, there remained a dispute on how accountability policies influenced outcomes and teacher instruction (Au, 2007; Mintrop & Sunderman, 2009).

According to Diamond (2012), Chicago kindergarten through eighth grade teachers indicated that standardized testing caused a concentrated effort on basic skills, which was essentially a tightening of the curriculum in hopes of being more successful with high-stakes testing. The outcome focused more along the lines of direct teaching and less on student investigation. The absence of communication between the teacher and students contributed to the lack of instructional change (Diamond, 2012). Additionally, the accountability report card influenced accountability reactions. Schools, identified as an *improvement required*, usually responded by supplying extra resources and developing a magnified focus on instruction for students who were close to meeting the state passing standard. In some cases, the practice caused added inequality instead of lessoning it (Diamond, 2012).

An inconsistent existence of leadership could be an additional obstacle in turning around a school under the pressure of a poor accountability rating (Finnigan, 2012). A school striving to change instruction in order to produce better results needed a successful leader present (Finnigan, 2012). After looking at three primary through elementary grade public schools with an *improvement required* status, Finnigan's (2012) study identified the most important factor in moving a probationary performance standing to acceptable status depended on the quality of the leadership.

According to Wei (2003), the school probation policy in Chicago stipulated "that schools at the elementary (grades K-8) and high school (grades 9-12) levels would be placed on academic probation if less than fifteen percent of their students scored at or above national norms on the ITBS in reading or math" (p. 18). Teachers, from schools

that went to acceptable status from probationary status, revealed several key characteristics that attributed to their success (Wei, 2003). Trusting relationships, high student and teacher expectations, a well-defined instructional plan, and having a respectful leader contributed to improved academic achievement (Wei, 2003).

Desimone (2013) stated, "At the heart of standards-based reform is the goal of improving instruction. Thus, a useful way to study reactions to standards-based reform is to examine what teachers are doing differently" (p. 61). Teachers' reactions to school based reform ranged from not changing instruction to only changing the order of what was taught. Desimone (2013) reported three additional concerns,

> . . . 1) emphasizing areas previously not covered, such as measurement and statistics, 2) focusing more on student understanding rather than getting the right answers, and 3) presenting lessons in ways designed to increase student comprehension and retention. Still, a few teachers mentioned the tension between procedural and conceptual learning. (p. 61)

Some school leaders believed that the issue with standardized testing was not the testing. Instead, they were more concerned with best teaching practices replaced with more drills and qualified and proficient teaching replaced with procedural acquiescence (Desimone, 2013). Stauffer and Mason (2013) stated that in their study, teachers sensed district expectations affected their work capacity, time demands, and raised their stress levels. The participants believed those pressures affected the way they felt about academic achievement and academic accountability. "Teachers often noted that

curricular changes were difficult to manage and that they felt like they had to 'teach to the test' rather than to their students" (Stauffer & Mason, 2013, p. 825).

Desimone (2013) suggested that teacher opinions changed based upon adjustments they had to make in their instruction due to school improvement reform. Desimone noted, "In my study, testing and accountability appeared to move schools in the desired direction — toward personal and group responsibility for student learning. On the other hand, the stress and pressure associated with such a system was also quite palpable" (p. 60).

Student academic achievement has been the spotlight emphasized through the NCLB legislation instead of leadership. Seashore Louis and Robinson (2012) reported, "Although in most states, NCLB has led to specification of the achievement targets to be met by each school, the federal legislation is silent about the role of leadership in achieving them" (p. 630). However, school leadership under NCLB legislation had its repercussions. Seashore Louis and Robinson (2012) spoke about needed teacher change and the NCLB agenda, "NCLB not only sets highly ambitious student achievement targets, but by implication, also sets a very particular leadership agenda . . ." (p. 631).

Teachers usually determined the academic progress of their students. Yet, accountability and mandated school reform efforts influenced teacher practices in the high-stakes testing environment (O'Day, 2002). The fundamental reason school leaders interceded on instructional practices was to advance student achievement and meet accountability target objectives. Instructional leaders have been working with teachers to

provide better-quality instruction resulting in improved academic performance (Hallinger, 2005).

Central Office

As Kirst (2008) stated, the government grants school board members to " . . . act as an agent of the state for school policy and operations . . ." (p. 38). Superintendents, selected by school boards, went on to hire principals and other staff personnel. All staff members were expected to provide a culture of quality instruction, which resulted in higher student achievement. Originally, school boards were in sole control because it was thought that they would have a great impact on policy and represent the local citizens. In the past, the central offices of schools were in the loop of what the schools needed (Kirst, 2008). However, some researchers had different views. For example, Crow (2010) contended that central office administration was an inflated establishment, which told schools what to do, but never took the time to listen to what the schools needed.

Central office administrators were known to concentrate on the main concerns put forth by board members, which was usually looking at the management of the school district (Larson, 2007). Monthly board meetings encompassed listening to reports and carrying out board proceedings. With the superintendent as the leader, other central office staff help enlighten the board who many times dealt with political questions, concerns, and disputes (Larson, 2007). Therefore, it was not a surprise that many times central office administrators were absorbed with district logistics and had not been as involved with instructional issues (Larson, 2007). Conversely, for campus leaders the

charge was to greet students every morning, make sure all students were safe, ensured quality instruction was taking place, confirmed teachers were teaching with best practices and offering differentiated instruction, and supervised the daily upkeep and maintenance of the school building (Larson, 2007). Those duties did not leave much time to collaborate with central office leadership (Larson, 2007).

For many years, principals had the responsibility of being the instructional leader. The effective school movement began in the 1980s and was responsible for the immergence of the 'instructional leader' (Marks & Printy, 2003). High student and teacher expectations, monitoring classroom instruction, and regulating effective teaching practices were now the principal's job (Marks & Printy, 2003). Since then, the charge of closing learning gaps and increasing student achievement has rested with the campus principal (Harris & Chrispeels, 2006) and central office leadership's ability to influence student success through authentic relationships and motivated independence (Marzano & Waters, 2009)

Accountability in U.S. public schools created mounting concern and the outcome was a wave of more changes. The first wave was increased performance outcomes for all students. The second wave was the principal moving from building manager to instructional leader (Marks & Nance, 2007). The third wave included district accountability regarding testing results. The answerability for school districts encompassed being ranked amongst other districts in the state and possible sanctions if results indicated poor performance (Marks &Nance, 2007). With NCLB and increased accountability, there was a push for a more organized effort, increased communication,

and evenhanded dispersal of resources, which shined a spotlight on the central offices of school districts (Johnson & Chrispeels, 2010).

The established practice of focusing on schools for academic change recently began to shift with policy makers realizing that members of the central office would be crucial to the betterment of schools through their guidance and communication (Johnson & Chrispeels, 2010). In the last decade, central office reform has taken place in a handful of city-based school districts. Central office's responsibility for school reform included working with principals in an effort to strengthen the principal's instructional leadership role (Honig, 2012).

Effective leadership required the important responsibility of transforming school governance (Yukl, 2002). According to Fullan (2007), "Leadership is the turnkey to system transformation . . ." (p. 88). Galluci and Swanson (2006) summarized provisional findings from a qualitative research study that focused on the school reform instructional initiative of the Norwalk-La Mirada Unified School District (NLMUSD). The NLMUSD entered into a relationship with The Center for Educational Leadership to head up a purposeful instructional phase-in model (Galluci & Swanson, 2006).

Due to poor test scores, central office administrators began looking to see what other districts were using to improve instruction. In order to better support the district instructional improvement initiative, central office leaders were realigned to target important leadership roles. In addition, three superintendents were included in the streamlining of the organization (Galluci & Swanson, 2006). The superintendents divided job responsibilities such as professional development, monitoring of schools, and

curriculum. Each leader supervised 10-11 schools, along with the evaluations of principals (Galluci & Swanson, 2006). It took all levels within a school's organization to achieve successful school reform (Bryk, 2010; City, Elmore, Fiarman & Teitel, 2009; Elmore, 2006; Kruse, 2003).

In 2008, central office leadership went through a restructuring process in several public school systems in the United States. The public schools included Oakland Unified School District, Atlanta schools, and New York City schools (Honig & Copland, 2008). They reinvented their central office as a strategy to better support their schools with instructional improvement. Honig and Copland (2008) synopsized that an inadequate representation of central office leadership lead to school improvement efforts with unsatisfactory outcomes. Honig and Copland (2008) asserted that central office leadership was crucial to school reform, and the redesign of central office leadership needed to be more involved with improved student learning.

Marzano and Waters (2009) looked into particular actions taken by school leaders that had a positive effect on student learning outcomes. They found that school principals that were tightly connected with district administration tended to have the most accomplishments in student achievement. In addition, Marzano and Waters (2009) pointed out that certain characteristics were present in tightly woven organizations and those organizations have abilities to self-correct, distribute information, compromise, and anticipate issues before they arose. Campus sites that were not in sync with central office leadership were relying on campus-based management only and that structure was too loosely defined or inconsistent (Marzano & Waters, 2009).

Togneri and Anderson (2003) recapitulated that the central office leadership was responsible for strategically guiding school reform efforts. It was important that central office personnel took the lead in building a district wide force where there was a district curriculum, a strong team of principals, and support in place for all teachers (Togneri & Anderson, 2003).

History of Central Office Leadership

From the early 1900's until the year 2000, the role that the central office played was all encompassing when it came to the management of schools. Up until the 1950's, the central office usually directed the management of school campuses based upon principles set forth in Taylor's Scientific Management Theory. This theory suggested that there was only one way to do the best job or the most effective job (Callahan, 1962).

A 'top technique' was acknowledged and it was determined that one method could be used across the board in every school because " . . . schools are, in a sense, factories . . ." and based instruction on what they thought the students' needed (Budde, 1996; Callahan, 1962; Cubberley, 1916, p. 512). The distribution of resources, creating school policy, and executing school policy were characteristic of the central office in the early part of the twentieth century (Cubberley, 1944). At the campus level, the leader supervised the resources used by the school and ensured policies were followed (Cubberley, 1944).

Central Office Leadership Today

Contemporary research discovered, "A principal and school staff could help a school improve student achievement through heroic effort, but they could not sustain the

improvement without the support of the district and a commitment at that level to promote effective schooling practices" (DuFour & Marzano, 2011, p. 28). In addition, some of the latest research concerning student success and district-level practices reported that there was a positive connection between district methods and student achievement (Johnson & Chrispeels, 2010; Marzano & Waters, 2009). Yet, recent research primarily looked at the practices of the superintendent's work rather than the assistant superintendent's working relationship with district campuses (Louis, 2008).

DiMuzio (2013) surmised, "The central office professional personnel found in many school districts include the superintendent, associate/deputy superintendent, assistant superintendent(s), director(s) and coordinator(s) . . ." (p. 19). Even though those positions were similar in some respects, they each required various expertise. For example, superintendents may have definite titles such as superintendents of administrative services, ASCI, and assistant superintendent of human resources (Glass et al., 2007).

A superintendent of financial services most likely held an accounting degree (Kowalski, 2003). Thus far, those assigned to curriculum were usually under the title of ASCI. The ASCI position was, in the past, used to execute district policy, state law, and regulations from the federal government. For instance, the ASCI might have been in charge of getting the latest standards from the state to curriculum directors, curriculum coaches, principals, and teachers. In addition, the ASCI monitored the implementation of new standards through the best instructional practices (DiMuzio, 2013).

The significance of the superintendent in the role of instructional guide could not be underestimated (Fullan, 1991; Kowalski, 2006; Wimpelberg, 1987). Yet, there was little information regarding the position of assistant superintendent and their role as an instructional director or assessment advisor (Anderson, 2003; Pajak, 1989). Improved student performance depended on actions that worked to deliver desired outcomes. Fullan (2010) identified four great aims for improved student performance. The four aims were " . . . resolute leadership, allegiance, professional power, and sustainability. Resolute leadership combines a culture of high expectations where no excuses are acceptable with a school focus action . . ." (p. 37).

Maintaining professionalism during change or school reform required conviction, competition, and resolve to accomplish great feats (Boyle, 2009). After accomplishing those three allegiances, professional power was attained. Combine determined leadership, commitment, and professional power and there would be sustainability (Boyle, 2009). Professional open dialogue between central office personnel and other district staff was important in moving a district to reform success. Central office relationships with principals and teachers, when positive and collaborative, also worked toward building relationships of trust and district linkages (Johnson & Chrispeels, 2010).

> As successful strategies and extraordinary efforts become routine, improved performance gathers momentum. Success breeds success among collaborating schools with a shared allegiance. At some point it reaches a critical level where so many schools are moving this way, and supporting each other, that [it becomes] almost self-sustaining. (Fullan, 2010, quoting Boyle, 2009, p. 26)

Good leaders guided teachers to make purposeful and specific choices over how and what academic learning takes place in the classroom. Without guidance, some teachers actually fail to execute instruction in a rigorous fashion (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2012). Superintendents have the challenging task of moving schools from feeble performances to more successful outcomes. According to Bambrick-Santoyo (2012), turning around schools was a crucial role for district superintendents and doing so in a high stress environment was common.

Steps that superintendents take to improve schools included the following offered by Bambrick-Santoyo (2012),

> . . . data-driven instruction and student culture. At the district level, as at the school level, these foundations will turn chaotic, failed schools into steadily improving ones; and if time and resources are limited, it is these levers of change that will generate the most improvement. (p. 280)

As change gradually began to permeate throughout the schools, the superintendent and other school leadership were able to see improvement through observations. Guiding principals through quality training with a vision of targets and supervising their work toward the objective helped to ensure success of reforms (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2012).

Leaders, who established a distinct vision, nurtured group objectives, had high expectations, and provided an exemplary example for others were considered a transformational leader. Those types of leaders brought all staff on board, but only if the staff had faith in the leader (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman, & Fetter, 1990;

Tschannen-Moran, 2003). The distrust that many schools experienced was brought on by political governmental powers, social influences, and economic strains (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). In an effort to lead reform changes, leaders considered the trust of the community. As Tschannen-Moran (2014) pointed out, "Trustworthy leadership is at the heart of productive schools . . ." (p. 14).

Barber and Mourshed (2007) examined school organizations in many countries. Their research showed one central theme, which was that teachers, students, and parents had to be respected and appreciated. "The quality of the education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers . . ." (Fullan, 2008, quoting Barber & Mourshed, 2007, p. 23). Good leadership traits not only encompass trust, but also grow empathy and obligation. Leaders were successful by having a vision and purposeful plan, not spending time on unnecessary difficulties, worked on creating an optimistic atmosphere, acquired new skills, maintained a stay-with-it attitude, and took the time to view things from different lenses (Morrell & Capparell, 2001).

Academic Coaching

In order to improve student achievement, some district leaders used academic coaches to support and coach teachers in their instructional delivery. Other leaders appointed teacher leaders to assist their colleagues with academic delivery. Mounting research continued to highlight that instructional excellence in the classroom was directly tied to district leadership (Hightower, Knapp, Marsh, & McLaughlin, 2002).

Leadership, at the district level, sent a clear message as to the types of instructional initiatives that were desired and how they planned to support those

initiatives. District leaders had the ability to influence academic coaching through social skills, the size and management of the school district, prior year's performance, stakeholder support, and the district culture (Marsh, 2002). Mangin (2009) stated, "Studying variations in role implementation in relation to variations in district context can provide insights into those factors that most influence districts' implementation of literacy coach roles . . ." (p. 765).

District School Board Governance

Texas school board members had specific roles and responsibilities outlined in policies by the Texas Association of School Boards. For example, they authorized the purchasing and selling of school district property, bond referendums, governed the district by determining local policy, established the district tax rate, and presided over the employment and dismissal of the superintendent (Texas Association of School Boards, 2017b). Johnson (2011) conducted a study that highlighted the practices and governance of school boards and how their leadership influenced the culture of learning and student engagement. According to Johnson (2011), school board responsibilities accomplished a learning environment included,

> Creating a vision, using data, setting goals, monitoring progress and taking corrective actions, creating awareness and urgency, engaging the community, connecting with district leadership, creating climate, providing staff development, developing policy with a focus on student learning, demonstrating commitment, and practicing unified governance. (Johnson, 2011, p. 90)

Summary

To conclude, research on the position of ASCIs has been very limited. An examination of their role stood to proffer a deeper awareness for universities, policy makers, district leaders, and all stakeholders who would benefit explicitly and implicitly from a more in-depth understanding of their specialized role. Moreover, it was important to investigate the practices used by ASCIs in order to address school reform measures and new initiatives to improve student performance. According to Chenoweth (2015), student achievement, attributed to the role of district leaders, takes a district working together to create a successful culture of learning. The culture or environment was key when looking at student performance (Gruenert, 2005).

Teacher resistance to reform efforts was evident in some cases due to teacher attitudes and social associations (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2008). Attempts to improve student success were sabotaged at times when controlling teachers would create a common resistance. The unwillingness of teachers to collaborate and work together in order to increase student achievement was a distinct sign of resistance (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2008).

Improved student performance was the goal with NCLB legislation. Guidelines for school reform, outlined by NCLB, held school and districts accountable for student success. ESSA was a later version of NCLB and was set to begin implementation in the 2017-2018 school year. ESSA was created to give states more authority in school reform and student success efforts because the NCLB requirements had grown to be impractical for schools.

The high-stakes testing environment and standardized testing stemmed from NCLB. Standardized testing held teachers, campuses, and districts accountable for student achievement on standardized assessments. Even though NCLB brought about equity awareness, the potential penalties and high-stakes testing environment increased stress levels in schools (Daly, 2009). The literature suggested accountability and the focus on standardized testing altered the leadership role of today's public school administrators (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Elmore, 2002; Fullan, 2005; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2007). To ameliorate teacher instruction, educational leaders assumed additional responsibilities and increased obligations (Elmore, 2002; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2007).

Central office leadership grew a from top-down establishment to a committed link for school improvement with individual campuses. According to educational reform literature, school campuses were recognized as a real agent of change. Supporting agendas of reform while adjusting to new demands was difficult and required a central office leadership to be highly trained (Argyris & Schön, 1976; Collinson & Cook, 2007; Elmore, 2006; Honig & Copeland, 2008; O'Day, 2002; Shilling, 2013). Johnson and Chrispeels (2010) asserted that connections of related ideologies were fundamental in improving a cohesive instructional focus, professional commitment, and for advancing school reform to successfully impact student achievement. Central office communication and the allocation of resources were crucial to implement wanted changes (Johnson & Chrispeels, 2010).

Schools began using academic coaching as a way of supporting the quality of teacher instructional practices. Resources and communication supported campus-based academic coaching models thus providing significant assistance in helping teachers improve their instruction (Johnson & Chrispeels, 2010).

Wong and Wong (2008) stated,

> . . . effective schools have coaches. Coaches met with the principal on a regular basis to assess the progress of every teacher and student. In an effective school, everyone functioned as a team and there was a laser focus on student achievement. (p. 59).

Finally, district school boards played a role in adopting policies that supported a culture of learning and student engagement. Local school boards monitored school progress along with many other responsibilities. The school board had the authority to preside over the dismissal of a superintendent who they believed was not steering the district in the right direction or hire a superintendent they believed would work to improve student achievement, community relations, and establish a culture of learning (Texas Association of School Boards, 2017b). The role of the superintendent was to recommend other personnel such as an ASCI and campus principal for hiring.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this multi-case study was to examine the best practices of five assistant superintendents of curriculum and instruction (ASCIs) in Texas and determine how each used best practices to bring about change with new instructional initiatives in a high-stakes testing environment.

The research question that guided this study was:

1. How do ASCIs bring about change and successfully implement new academic initiatives in the environment of high-stakes testing?

The research design used in this study, including methods and techniques for data collection, analysis of the data, and a discussion of ensuring ethical maintenance of the data and related materials. A description of the setting followed by a succinct account of the criteria used to select each ASCI as a participant is included. The role of the researcher consisted of provisions for trustworthiness, honesty, and integrity. The chapter closes with a summary of the methodology components used in this qualitative study.

Overview of the Design

The research design used was a qualitative multi-case study, which gave the researcher a clear cross-case comparison of five ASCIs. The intent of the study was to identify the best practices and strategies used by five different ASCIs. The researcher analyzed the findings to determine emerging themes across the cases. Blaikie (2000) and Yin (2003) noted case studies were an accumulation of research approaches that would be a quantitative or qualitative method of design.

The purpose of a case study was to outline the study within a set of considerations such as the location and time. Present, everyday case studies were what researchers usually center their investigation on because the information was current and not invalid by loss of time (Creswell, 2007). As proposed by Yin (2009), a repetitive protocol used for each case study in a qualitative multi-case design was essentially using the same process for each case. Many researchers steered clear of oversimplifying procedures from case to case because situations and perspectives were quite different.

Stake (2010) summarized that qualitative research looked at problems through the avenue of critical study. The problems occurring in professional practice were where most research focused. Critical qualitative studies looked at problems such as standardized testing, prejudice, and poverty. In this study, the researcher looked at the ASCI, NCLB, the high-stakes testing environment, central office administration, and academic coaching. A worthy qualitative case usually encompassed an exhaustive awareness of the study (Creswell, 2007).

The information collected in qualitative case studies included district websites and job descriptions. Some of the qualitative sources included open-ended interviews, observations, artifacts, and other documents (Creswell, 2007). Yin (2009) suggested six kinds of evidence to gather, which included direct and contributor observations, archival accounts, interviews, forms, and tangible artifacts. Holistic analysis covered the whole case plus embedded analysis and identified particular parts of a case.

As the researcher collected information and began to study the data, certain themes or key issues emerged. Yin (2009) pointed out that recognizing issues in individual cases and then searching for themes that go beyond all cases was one strategy for analyzing data. A usual arrangement used by the researcher when collecting data, was to provide a detailed account of the individual case or a within-case analysis and complete a cross-case analysis to look for emerging themes. Additionally, the researcher would want to make note of any understandings or significances gleaned from the information (Creswell, 2007). After the collection of data, the researcher looked for emerging themes in each individual case studies and examined any big ideas surfacing from the cross-case analysis.

Setting of the Research

The setting of the study took place in four ASCI's offices and one small café. The offices were quiet and had a professional appearance. The café was quaint and full of individual conversations. However, the local chatter did not detract from the setting of the study. The research encompassed five different public school districts. The five school districts were nestled in Deep East Texas where school rivalries abounded, were

categorized as a UIL rated 4A school districts or greater, and were large enough to support an ASCI. The geographic region of East Texas extended from a Red River line starting at the southeastern Galveston Bay area to central eastern Limestone County all the way north to central Lamar County. The Red River line separated East Texas from the rest of the state (Johnson, 2016).

School rivalries in Texas reflected a belief in equitable competitions and made sure that schools were equally matched in all types of contests whether it was academic or sports related. Therefore, the University Interscholastic League (UIL) developed guidance for school classifications, which was used for equality of sizes. The UIL was started by The University of Texas to address the concerns of fair competition (University Interscholastic League, 2017). The membership of conferences from smallest to largest were denoted, 1A, 2A, 3A, 4A, 5A, and 6A.

Three participants in the study were from 4A size districts, one participant represented a 5A size district, and one participant was from a size 6A district. Districts reported enrollment data from ninth through 12th grade to the UIL. The UIL then assigned conferences based on the reported enrollment numbers from each district (University Interscholastic League, 2017). Policies regarding conference assignments state that at least 220 schools and no more than 250 schools make up the 6A conference. The other conferences ranging from 2A up to 5A must have at least 200 schools with a ninth – 12th grade ratio of 2.0 between the smallest school and the largest school within a conference (University Interscholastic League, 2017).

UIL categorizations were included to support the reader's understanding of school district sizes involved in the study and within the context of Deep East Texas where UIL ratings were an integral way of identifying a relative size of a school district. ASCIs were responsible for the oversight of UIL as well as curriculum and instruction in Texas and were therefore logical participants for the study.

Participants

Convenience sampling is often a chosen method for interviewing participants because the participants offer data, which is "convenient" for the researcher to collect (Parsons & Lavrakas, 2008). Convenience sampling is a nonprobability type of sampling. Convenient sampling was used to help with the number of interviews needed for this study (Neuman, 2011). The researcher located participants through networking by discussing possible participants with fellow doctoral cohort members.

The criteria the participants had to meet were holding the position of an ASCI or an appointment with a description that aligned with that of an ASCI, but perhaps had a different title. One of the potential participants was employed by the same district as the researcher and the researcher asked that potential participant if they would agree to be a part of the study and they agreed. Online searches were conducted for ASCIs within driving distance from the researcher's city of residence by entering in school district names through an online search engine. The researcher then emailed potential participants to see if they would be interested in taking part in the study.

Several potential participants had questions, which consisted of possible dates they would be able to meet with me, times that they would be available, and how long the

interview would take. The researcher assured all potential participants that the researcher would work around their schedule. Five ASCIs and deputy superintendent of teaching and learning agreed to participate. Three agreed through email correspondence, one agreed during a phone conversation with the researcher, and one agreed through communication between the researcher and the participant's secretary.

All five participants gave permission for taking part in the multi-case study (see Appendix A). The ASCIs and deputy superintendent of teaching and learning were given an informed consent form, which described the research examination, a guarantee that the school district, ASCI/deputy superintendent of teaching and learning would not be named in the study, and a voluntary statement indicating that the participant could leave the study at any time. The participants were asked to sign the informed consent form giving their consent to participate in the study (see Appendix B).

The school districts that were selected had to be large enough to include an ASCI or deputy superintendent of teaching and learning as a member of the administration team and participants had to have a master's or doctorate degree. The researcher wanted at least one female and one male participant and interviewees that were in driving distance from the researcher's place of residence.

Data Collection

Preceding the collection of data procedures, five ASCIs and a deputy superintendent of teaching and learning were contacted via email (see Appendix A). The emailed letter contained an overview of the research design, number of interviews that would take place, collection methods, and an assurance that school identities would

remain anonymous by assigning pseudonyms and all responses would remain confidential. Permission from the ASCIs and the deputy superintendent of teaching and learning was obtained to conduct the study (see Appendix B).

Data collection for a qualitative multi-case study primarily involved interviews, but also included field memos and a researcher's journal. Field research was suitable for a researcher wanting to comprehend an interrelating collection of participants (Neuman, 2011). The researcher used a list of predetermined questions for the interviews, a notebook for field notes that described the location, appearance, and interaction with staff at the school districts. A researcher's journal was used for comments during the interview process and for storing the job descriptions of ASCIs, job description of deputy superintendent of teaching and learning, and the district organizational charts.

Interviewees were offered an opportunity to view the researcher's notebook and researcher's journal for transparency. One participant briefly viewed the researcher's annotations. However, the rest declined because they conveyed that they trusted the researcher. According to Neuman (2011), " . . . field research rests on the principle of naturalism. Another principle of field research is that ongoing social life contains numerous perspectives that people use in natural social settings . . ." (p. 425). Data collection encompassed more than the technique and kind of data the researcher included in the collecting process. The researcher also obtained permission from participants or governing bodies of participants, a strategy for sampling, how information was digitally recorded, chronicled on paper, how the data was secured, and foreseeing any ethical problems (Creswell, 2013).

The data collection began with the researcher's notations. The entries were written upon the researcher's arrival at the interview location site. The researcher took notes during the interview process and gathered any artifact/artifacts the participant was willing to provide. Additional data collection included a series of responses from each participant, artifacts, and digital artifacts from district websites. All responses were audio recorded using the researcher's recording device. The recordings were uploaded to an online subscription service. NVivo 11 was used to organize the data and present emerging themes.

Field notes.

For the purposes of this study, the researcher chose to use direct observation notes. Neuman (2011) stated, "The basic source of field data are direct observation notes. You write them immediately after leaving the field, which you can add to later. You want to order the notes chronologically with the date, time, and place . . ." (p. 445). Not only did the researcher make direct observation interpretations on arrival to the interview site and before departure from the interview site, but the researcher also reflected on the interviews on the drive back home and added those reflections to the data collection. Additional annotations included nonverbal communication such as gestures, tone, and body language.

Researcher's journal.

The researcher used a journal for quick notes and the district's organizational chart. Brief notations were made while in the course of the interview process. Some notes entailed one or two words, which would serve to jog the researcher's memory at a

later date. Organizational charts, which depicted the organizational hierarchy of each participant's school district served as one of the artifacts collected in this study. Other artifacts included formal job descriptions from two participants. The organizational charts and job descriptions were added to a pocket inside the researcher's journal.

Exercising Merriam's (2009) recommendations, there were two areas to store comments. However, instead of using the same notebook divided into two sections, the researcher used one notebook as a journal for jotting down quick remarks as a reminder of important key words or phrases to revisit. A second notebook operated as a reflexive section where the researcher used briefly penned notes to write more direct observation notes, which contained personal reactions, feelings, questions, and interpretations.

Interviews.

The researcher conducted interviews with four ASCIs and one deputy superintendent of teaching and learning. The interviews were coordinated in a three-tiered design, which allowed each interview to build in reflection and insight from the previous interview. The researcher presented open-ended interview questions in face-to face interviews. After audio recording the interviews with an audio recording device, the researcher had the interviews transcribed using an online transcription service. All data were digitally protected by a secure password and all paper data were secured in a locked cabinet in the researcher's home.

A debriefing procedure followed each interview. This allowed the researcher to share any field notes, jotted notes and discuss any artifacts the participant offered for research purposes. The researcher reflected on all participant answers from each tier of

interview questions. Therefore, opening the opportunity for clarification or additional questions to be added for remaining tier questions.

The tier one interview provided the opening for introductions, building a rapport with the participant, and establishing a relationship of trust. Participant responses centered upon interest in the field of education, positions held, inspiration to become an ASCI or deputy superintendent of teaching and learning, experiences, and challenges (see Appendix C). Tier two interview responses spoke to responsibilities of the ASCI, working relationships, and program implementation as it related to student achievement (see Appendix C). Tier three responses focused on the sustainability of district initiatives, the high-stakes testing environment, and best practices used by the ASCI (see Appendix C).

The three tiers of interviews provided a full extent of information for the study. Each ASCI or deputy superintendent of teaching and learning were asked a series of questions (see Appendix C) with an expectation of collecting information regarding their role and practices. All questions were open-ended, which permitted the interviewee the opportunity to communicate their experiences and perceptions. The questions were formatted with the expectancy that all participants would be forthcoming and honest in their answers.

Throughout the three-tier interview protocol, jotted notes and audio recordings were used to capture all participant responses. Following tier one interviews, the researcher transcribed and analyzed responses in preparation for tier two interviews.

Additionally, tier two interviews were transcribed and examined for analysis and in preparation of tier three level interviews.

At the close of each interview, the researcher offered to share the her journal containing jotted notes and discuss any organizational artifacts with the participant for transparency. This allowed each participant to review the researcher's notes and have the opportunity to ask questions or have further discussion. The researcher then engaged in a personal debriefing session to ensure all aspects of the interview were recorded. This included direct observation notes of staff demeanor, office surroundings, and a review of any dialogue and impressions while they were fresh and easy to recall.

In addition, after each tier of interviews, the researcher ruminated on the drive home from the interview site and then added those reflections to the direct observation notes. Audio recordings on the researcher's recording device were uploaded to online transcription service. The transcription service then emailed the transcribed interviews to researcher. The researcher saved the transcribed interviews to the researcher's home computer and protected the transcriptions with a secure password. This allowed the researcher to protect and preserve the audio recordings.

Artifacts.

Neuman (2011) refers to artifacts in field research as " . . . physical objects . . ." (p. 293). Collecting assorted artifacts supports case studies by providing additional insight into the research. Yin (2014) stressed " . . . the most important use of documents is to corroborate and augment evidence from other sources . . ." (p. 107). Events, that a researcher is not able to view directly, rely on artifacts as a written record (Stake, 1995).

The participants in this study were in agreement with sharing their district's organizational chart. Two participants presented their formal job descriptions, which outlined the responsibilities of their position. The organizational charts illustrated the administrative leaders and the structure of the school district.

Other artifacts were located on participant school district websites' and included board policy, instructional departments, and district improvement plans. The district websites spoke to curriculum and instruction in various ways. For instance, three of the websites expressed support and goals for student growth and success. One district website included information on how they use technology to capture the essence and mentalities of their students. Yet, another district highlighted teacher support through enrichment courses and a commitment to cultivate success in students and teachers. Many times deemed as only cybernetic objects (Leonardi, 2010; Blanchette, 2011), digital artifacts offer a unique addition to the researcher's collected data. In fact, digital artifacts have been thought to represent physical and virtual relics (Leonardi, 2010; Blanchette, 2011).

Following the guidelines of the IRB, all artifacts were stored, along with all other data and related materials, in the researcher's home in a locked cabinet. The digital artifacts were preserved in digital files protected with the researcher's password. Only the researcher had direct access to the data and materials during the study and all stored files were secured per IRB guidelines.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was initiated by listening and reviewing the audio recordings of participants individually. The researcher reviewed field notes, listened to the audio recordings, and notated 2-3 subjects that showed up repeatedly through the individual participant's responses and comments from each case and developed a lean coding list of big ideas. Then, the researcher used an online transcription service to transcribe the audio recordings and NVivo 11 to organize the transcripts for additional coding. NVivo 11 used pattern-based coding and automatically codes text for emerging themes.

Coding.

Coding provided a visual look at classified data assembled from data the researcher collected during the study (Creswell, 2013). According to Creswell (2013), "beginning researchers tend to develop elaborate lists of codes when they review their databases. I proceed differently. I begin with a short list, 'lean coding' I call it-five or six categories with shorthand labels or codes" (p. 184). In this dissertation, the researcher used lean coding to identify 2-3 big ideas and generated a list with those themes. A first review of the data included affixing idea labeled and colored post-it flags to the data from the lean coding list. A second review of the data resulted in attaching additional colored flags to acknowledge and label other emerging themes. Supplementary emerging topics were added to the list of big ideas. The researcher reviewed the data a third time and included one more topic to the color labeled flags and the 'big idea list'.

The researcher chose a multi-case qualitative study design with a cross-case analysis to investigate differences within and across the cases. Once, the researcher

identified emerging themes from each participant, individually, the list of big ideas was compared against the emerging themes from NVivo 11. The researcher was able to solidify the findings reliably with the same themes emerging through NVivo 11.

The completion of the within-case analysis was " . . . followed by a thematic analysis across the cases, called a cross-case analysis, as well as assertions or an interpretation of the meaning of the case . . ." (Creswell, 2013, p. 101). In order to analyze the cross-case information, the researcher made a Microsoft Word table and listed themes across the top cells and participants in each cell vertically down the side of the table. The table allowed the researcher to find likenesses, differences, and patterns across the cases.

Acknowledging the fact that relationships would be depicted, the researcher was vigilant in choosing cases that would produce similar or dissimilar results centered on theory (Yin, 2003). The multi-case study permitted the researcher to look at similarities and differences amongst cases.

Merriam and Associates (2002) pointed out, " . . . in qualitative research, data analysis is simultaneous with data collection . . ." and that " . . . one begins analyzing data with the first interview, the first observation, or the first document accessed in the study . . ." (p. 14). The interview questions were developed to address the mindset of current ASCIs, their move into that position, and their experiences in that role as it relates to best practices in a high-stakes testing environment. This research depended on qualitative data that was abundantly personalized (Mason, 2002) through detailed interviews with

ASCIs. The data, obtained through qualitative research means, afforded significant insight into an ASCIs "lived experience" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

Role of the Researcher

The researcher was the primary instrument for this qualitative, multi-case study. The researcher acknowledged having 15 years of experience as a teacher, curriculum coach, and district literacy specialist. During this process, the researcher made every attempt to remain objective and ethical. The quality of evidence in qualitative research was known as objectivity (Schwandt, 2001). Many researchers search for understanding and clarifications as objectively as possible or at least that is how they see themselves (Stake, 2010). The researcher in this study used the precise language of the participants to the best of the researcher's ability.

Yin (2014) advised that some qualitative researchers pursue case studies to corroborate a biased position or to encourage a certain direction of opinions on particular subjects. It was critical that bias was circumvented by thoroughly understanding the problem. The researcher in this study made a great effort to understand her biases as a district literacy specialist, former campus instructional coach, and teacher. She had to disconnect from preconceived opinions she had, which were viewpoints on what teachers contend with on daily basis, modeling for teachers and coaching teachers to bring about quality instruction, and building relationships with principals and teachers as a district instructional specialist. In this study, the researcher was in a reduced amount of bias because she had not been a principal nor an ASCI or deputy superintendent of teaching and learning.

All participants were asked to complete member checks on transcriptions, reviewing the transcribed manuscript and editing for clarification approval. The researcher ensured participants knew comments made "off the record" were protected as well as assuring their anonymity. The researcher followed a strict ethical protocol for the study and held both moral and social ethics in the highest regard. The researcher did not discuss any part of the interviews with anyone and maintained confidentiality throughout and after the study.

The participants were interviewed three times, face-to-face. The researcher upheld a social and moral responsibility through the course of the research process and plans to maintain that ethical standard after the research has concluded. Creswell (2013) described the natural settings as " . . . qualitative researchers gather up-close information by actually talking directly to people and seeing them behave and act within their context. In the natural setting, the researchers have face-to-face interaction over time . . ." (p. 45)

Once all data collection was complete, the data were kept in a locked cabinet in the researcher's home and will be held securely for three years, per IRB rules. After three years, all data and related materials are scheduled to be destroyed.

Provisions of Trustworthiness

The researcher, in this qualitative study, had a significant responsibility to maintain a standard of trustworthiness. In order to present a valid and credible study, the researcher presented a sincere and reliable examination of the data. Neuman (2011) noted, "The reliability of field data addresses whether your observations about a member or field event are internally and externally consistent" (p. 455). Internal consistency was

"determined by having the researcher examine the plausibility of the data to see whether they form a coherent whole, fit all else that is known about a person or event, and avoid common forms of deception" (Neuman, 2011, p. 455). External consistency means the data from the field research is reliable though the process of comparing information from multiple sources (Neuman, 2011).

Researchers (Suoninen & Jokinen, 2005) proposed that the way an interviewer verbalizes the interview questions could have an indirect effect on participant answers, participant explanations, and interviewer's questions. There was no doubt that social matters affect researchers and individuals overall. Yet, people promote what they consider to believe is true (Stake, 2010). "An account is judged to be reliable if it is capable of being replicated by another inquirer . . ." (Schwandt, 2001, p. 226).

In field research, validity encompasses truthful representations of the societal humankind during the analysis of the data (Neuman, 2011). Fronts, evasions, misinformation, and lies were possible field data obstacles pertaining to reliability (Neuman, 2011). Data included face-to-face interviews, district websites, job descriptions, organizational charts, and field notes. Lincoln and Guba (1985) reported that participant checks or member checks epitomized a significant method for proving integrity. Therefore, all participants were given the opportunity to review, revise, or add responses in order to guarantee true data would be reported.

Stake (2000) stated "Good researchers want assurance of what they are seeing and hearing. They want assurance that most of the meaning gained by the reader from their 48 interpretations is the meaning they intended to convey . . ." (p. 33). A promise of

trustworthiness included triangulation of data to declare that statements made through the data analysis part of the study were substantiated and reinforced methodologically.

Triangulation, Stake (2006) explained, " . . . is mostly a process of repetitious data gathering and critical review of what is being said . . ." (p. 34). In order to attain triangulation, the researcher asked the participants' questions to validate the data collected from the interview transcriptions, organizational charts, job descriptions, and the information accessed from district websites. The researcher compared the organizational charts to participant interview responses and information available on district websites. In addition, the researcher validated job description documents through participant transcriptions.

Stake (2010) proclaimed, "It is the researchers themselves who provide the bulwark of protection. Through empathy, intuition, intelligence, and experience, we ourselves have to see the dangers emerging . . ." (p. 206). Qualitative multi-case studies aid against biases. Furthermore, reporting on multiple cases speaks to findings full of assurance and helps to reinforce the value and dependability of the research (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2003). In order to ensure that researcher bias did not enter the study, the researcher made sure to use the participant's words to work against bias. The researcher confirmed all participant responses and asked the participant to clarify when needed. The researcher probed the interviewee if an answer was inadequate or unclear.

Summary

The extent of this multi-case study concentrated on collecting data from four ASCIs and one deputy superintendent of teaching and learning to define their role and

strategies as related to school reform and instructional change practices. Chapter III described the methodology and design of the research with a description of the information gathered and the subsequent analysis of the data. The researcher described the setting for the research as well as the provisions for trustworthiness and role of the researcher.

Qualitative case study research design encompassed an examined bounded system and was used consistently by social scientist in order to evaluate how culture, as unambiguous illustration, played a role in a case study (Creswell, 2007). Yin (2009), suggested a qualitative design would help determine the "why" and "how" contained in the study. According to Chmiliar (2010), a case study is described as " . . . a methodological approach that involves the in-depth exploration of a specific bounded system, utilizing multiple forms of data collection to systematically gather information on how the system operates or functions . . .." (p. 582).

Chapter IV

Dr. Smith

Introduction to Case Chapters

The findings in this multi-case study reflected a sequence of five separate case studies with a cross-case analysis presented in Chapter IX. The case studies were reported in an organized format following the same protocol. Each case study began with an introduction to the assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction (ASCI) chronicled as it was introduced. Important historical and community information was given to help the reader understand the information presented.

The evidence described in this research was gathered using formal interviews, field notes, and artifacts. The purpose of this multi-case research was to study the best practices ASCIs and a deputy superintendent of teaching and learning used in a high-stakes testing environment. Three of the participants had doctoral degrees and two had master's degrees. There were four female interviewees and one male interviewee.

Lee ISD

The interview site for Dr. Smith was the administration building for Lee Independent School District. The administration building was of substantial size with many offices and meeting rooms. There was a large parking lot, which sat on a nicely

groomed property. It was located down a little road off a main highway, which ran through the town of Lee. Organized in the early 1900's, Lee ISD was rated a 4A district in UIL in academic and athletic competitions due to a reported ninth through 12th grade student enrollment of just over 750 students.

There were five campuses with a student population during the 2015-2016 school year at just under 3,000 students. There was a primary campus comprised of pre-kindergarten through kindergarten students, an elementary campus for first through third grade students, an intermediate campus for fourth and fifth grade students, a middle school campus for sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students, and one high school for ninth through twelfth grade students.

The organizational structure of Lee ISD began with the superintendent of schools and included a deputy superintendent and an assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction (ASCI). Also, a part of the organization's personnel included directors of finance, special education, special programs, technology, and a human resource officer, a digital learning coordinator, and three instructional coaches. In addition, Lee ISD's central administration office housed a migrant liaison, a public education information management system (PEIMS) and purchasing clerk, payroll clerk, and several administrative assistants and secretaries.

Dr. Smith-The Interview

Dr. Smith has been with Lee ISD in the position of ASCI for four years. Her previous experience in this school system had included a variety of assignments. Dr. Smith shared, "My first degree was in home economics, and I ended up teaching sixth

grade ELAR kind of by accident because home economic jobs were hard to come by at the time." The beginning years as a young teacher were not so easy for Dr. Smith, because, years ago, there was not much support for new teachers. She stated, "The first few years were a little hard because I was pretty young at the time, and there was not much support in those days for being new to the profession."

Dr. Smith served as a kindergarten teacher, first grade teacher, second grade teacher, third grade teacher, and a sixth grade English Language Arts teacher. Her career also included content mastery, a curriculum position for a middle school and an intermediate school, an instructional coach, a principal for an elementary and middle school campus, and a curriculum director before becoming an ASCI and has no regrets regarding her career path. She noted, "I wouldn't do anything differently because I feel like my life has had purpose. I feel like I've made a difference in what I've done, and I don't know that you get that in any other job." She admitted her position as an ASCI had been complicated at times, but the gratification she experienced made it rewarding. Dr. Smith recounted, "It's not an easy job, but there's not a more fulfilling job."

Inspiration

Dr. Smith's inspiration to leave the classroom and pursue the position of ASCI was based on life circumstances and the need for a higher salary. Dr. Smith stated, "I never thought I would leave the classroom, but, life circumstances happened, and I needed to move out to get a higher salary." She began this experience with a move into instructional coaching followed by a move into mid-management. Dr. Smith was offered an opportunity for advancement in the role of ASCI. "Of course, you never know what a

job is until you get into it. You may have an idea of what curriculum is, and then you get into it, and, sometimes it's totally different." Dr. Smith never thought she would leave the classroom, but, due to her love of learning, she believed she could help more campuses and teachers in the position of ASCI. "I love to learn and participate in trainings. I love to facilitate learning."

Advancing Challenges

Advancing out of the classroom and being a female desiring an administrative position were challenges for Dr. Smith. Although she applied for secondary positions, she was not hired. Dr. Smith felt she was not employed because she was a female and had a background in elementary education. She noted, "Being able to break through that mindset with people in East Texas was a challenge." Dr. Smith also expressed the opinion that when someone had worked for a district as long as she had, and had advanced through the system until becoming a supervisor to people for whom one worked with for years, created a difficult situation. This was especially true in a small community like hers. In her experience, obtaining upper level positions had been difficult. Dr. Smith recounted, "Being a female and moving up the ladder has been a big challenge to overcome."

Overcoming Advancing Challenges

Dr. Smith believed that overcoming challenges was more about the proof being in what you did, not as much about what you said. "I have worked with a lot of people who talk a good talk, but cannot produce the work. This is what I tell my instructional coaches. "There are some people you are never going to change, and so I work with the

people with whom that I can make progress and help them to be better." Dr. Smith has learned to "cope and compensate", instead of overcoming challenges based upon situations she confronted on a daily basis. She relayed, "I think it is more about learning to pick your battles. When people are grown and they have a fixed mindset, it is very difficult to change that." Some of these challenges have included working with principals, which can be a fine balancing act. She reported, "Trying to empower principals to be instructional leaders, I think, is kind of a balancing act."

Dr. Smith wanted to be the type of ASCI who could handle complications, but she realized overcoming certain obstacles was tough. She said, "I think the superintendent walks a fine line as well. I do not tattle to the superintendent about a lot of the difficulties I might face." Being straightforward with the superintendent as well as feeling supported by the superintendent was important to Dr. Smith. She tried to avoid arguments with any and all school personnel. She voiced, "I try to be frank with the superintendent, but I do not want to get into a "he said, she said" situation."

ASCI Roles and Responsibilities

At times, the roles and responsibilities of the ASCI was not what one might have thought. Dr. Smith shared, "You have a mindset of what you think the position is going to be. Then, you get there, and it is quite different. She communicated, "People laughingly say I do everything that the superintendent does not want to do." Dr. Smith's role evolved over the years in which she has been in the position of ASCI. Every year has been a little bit different for her. She noted, "I do curriculum for the district, plan and do staff development, and I am in charge of the instructional materials allotment. Every

year I have picked up additional responsibilities." The second year in her position, Dr. Smith picked up responsibilities of special programs. The federal programs director retired last year, and Dr. Smith picked up that job. She also handled gifted and talented, dyslexia, title one, curriculum and instruction, and federal programs.

In addition, Dr. Smith stated, "I have the budget for curriculum. I have the campus money for curriculum and I supervise and oversee the purchasing of everything for curriculum, as well as, textbooks, instructional materials, and programs." Her job encompassed the title one grant, the pre-kindergarten grant, and the title six grant. "I do walk-throughs, evaluate programs, and write the district plan. I oversee district meetings, the District Education Improvement Committee meetings, and attend all the campus improvement needs meetings."

Dr. Smith had instructional coaches who assisted in supporting teachers. The district used TEKS Resources, formerly known as CSCOPE, as their curriculum framework. The instructional coaches also oversaw the planning process with teachers, helped with vertical alignment, and vertical teaming. Last year, the district tried to pull back some of the instructional responsibility from the coaches and push more instructional responsibility on the principals so they would become true instructional leaders. However, the instructional coaches were still there to support instruction on the campuses.

Relationships

Dealing with multiple personalities was a part of the position at the ASCI level. Dr. Smith said, "Just like dealing with teachers is way different than dealing with kids,

dealing with administrators and directors is the next level up. I would like for it to be a team effort." There can be a high amount of friction. Dr. Smith expressed the feeling that her greatest frustration was not being able to move things forward. "I'm not saying I know it all, but just being at this level and seeing some of the things going on with directors and principals that I cannot fix is a source of frustration for me."

Dr. Smith experienced great joy when she was able to work as a team with some colleagues. She wished it could have been like that with all her colleagues because when they worked together, they were able to complete the task together. Dr. Smith recounted, "I wish it was like that with everybody because you just have such a sense of accomplishment when you have got that working relationship and you are on the same page. You can move forward."

Dr. Smith was responsible for the Performance-Based Monitoring Analysis System (PBMAS), which was one aspect of her relationships with teachers. This included teacher walk-throughs for her position. Dr. Smith stated, "I've been around long enough so most teachers are okay with my coming in to observe them. I'm sure it makes some of them nervous." There were instances that affected teacher relationships. "I had a principal misuse a conversation we had about a teacher and my name was brought up with the teacher. That was not a good situation, but before that most of the teachers were comfortable with my coming in their classrooms."

Dr. Smith did not always give feedback from her walk-throughs, but always gathered information on what she was seeing in the classroom. She visited teachers with instructional concerns more frequently and said, "I have done walk-throughs quite a bit

over the last couple of years with teachers in areas that were areas of concern." There were times when Dr. Smith had to check on teachers who were not meeting the expectation and following through on the modifications. She noted, "Teachers whom we were trying to help were not heeding the help or not making changes that needed to be made." It was common for teachers, in need of making changes to dislike visits from supervisors. However, it was possible to have a good rapport with teachers. Dr. Smith relayed, "I'm sure those teachers did not enjoy seeing us come in, but, overall, I feel like I have had a pretty good relationship with most of the teachers over the years."

Effectiveness

Improving the quality of instruction was one of the biggest challenges Dr. Smith faced. She wanted to be effective and expand teacher capacity through new ideas and strategies to improve student success. However, she felt certain colleagues prevented her from being able to move forward with those plans. Dr. Smith shared, "Probably part of the reason I'm getting out is that I see a lot of things I would like to fix that I cannot fix because of people who are in positions where they that have been for years, and they are not going anywhere."

Implementing New Programs or Initiatives

An example, which was fresh on Dr. Smith's mind, was a program initiative implemented last year. The district was struggling with reading and her background was literacy. The district had a consistent phonics program so Dr. Smith decided to pull together a team of teachers and asked the following questions, "Okay, I hear from all of you that reading is an issue. What do you feel like we are missing?" Dr. Smith and the

team of teachers began looking at a couple of programs, visited schools, and worked through the process of which program would work best for their district. Working through that process helped to build ownership for her teachers. Dr. Smith said, "I have done things in the past where I had the instructional coaches and principals choose programs, but I feel that involving the teachers, taking them to look, and letting them make the decisions gave us buy-in." Dr. Smith thought this process gave their district a leg up. She stated, "Usually, it is hard to have consistency and everyone implementing with fidelity. We see the results this year from the use of that program."

The district brought in an outside consultant to train the teachers for the new program. The consultant was from out of state and there were plans for the consultant to return the next year. In addition, teachers received face-to-face training and online training. The instructional coaches were involved as well. "The instructional coaches followed up with the teachers to keep an eye on how it was going." There was a follow-up at the end of the year and the plan was to purchase the online training again. Dr. Smith reported, "They are not going to be happy or excited about that, but I feel like it is important." She also emphasized that monitoring is essential particularly when a program is expensive. Dr. Smith stated, "We have not quite followed through like that on other things that we have done, but we are on this because it was such an investment."

Programs for Student Achievement

A few years back, Dr. Smith helped her district implement a developmental reading assessment (DRA) across the district as their reading measure. Even though some districts had moved away from DRA, they decided to hold on to the assessment to

monitor student achievement. She stated, "As a matter of fact, I have been DRA testing today." She also guided the district in implementing other phonics, reading, and math programs to monitor student achievement in all content areas.

Working with Teachers in the High-Stakes Testing Environment

The State of Texas standardized testing beginning in third grade created a high stakes testing environment for many school districts and aggravation for Dr. Smith. She shared,

> This is huge and I have a lot of frustration because when you are a teacher and you are teaching in your classroom, you think everybody thinks like you do and works like you do. Then you get on the other side of that and see that not everybody puts everything that they've got into it.

Teachers worried over the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR), but teachers who took their profession seriously and strived to do top-notch work tended to have students who performed better on the state assessments. Dr. Smith shared, "I don't think the testing environment is the best thing, but I do believe that if people came to work, did their job, gave it all they had while they were there. I think our kids could do well on the test."

Dr. Smith saw a lot of apathy, blame placed, and excuses made from teachers. She did not want to be down on teachers, but tended to see a lack of commitment. She said, "I really worry about education in the future because I do not see the commitment to the students and to the profession that I think has been there in the past." Dr. Smith did not see the same commitment from new teachers entering the field compared to the

commitment retiring teachers had. "As people, like me, who are retiring and leaving, we are not being replaced by people who are committed, and who will stay with it."

Additionally, teachers at Lee ISD were frustrated due to high-stakes testing. "I think teachers are frustrated and high-stakes testing is probably part of the "why"." Dr. Smith explained that she did not experience much of high-stakes testing in her career. She went on to say, "I did well in school. I did not have the best teachers, but I did well because I was a good reader." She also did not feel teachers needed to teach to the test. Dr. Smith related, "I really feel like you do not have to teach kids a test. You teach them the skills that they need, and give them a good foundation and they are going to pass the test." There were still some in the district who thought "teaching to the test" was needed. "We still have that mindset in a lot of people, they teach the test. The STAAR test is not a test you can teach. It is a thinking test, a critical thinking test."

Many educators in Lee ISD would like to have the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test back. She shared, "People still want the TAKS model. We were good at that. We taught the kids strategies, and kids were successful." The TAKS test was designed to be an inclusive measurement of state-mandated standards and curriculum. In 2003, Texas public school students began taking the TAKS test. In the 2011-1012 school year, the TAKS test was replaced by the STAAR test. Dr. Smith asserted, "You cannot teach strategies and be successful on STAAR. People are frustrated, kids, teachers, and administrators. I think too much emphasis is placed on the test. I think it is a scapegoat for a lot of things."

Best Practices Supporting Teachers in the High-Stakes Testing Environment

Making sure to provide needed materials was a "best" practice Dr. Smith has used to support her teachers. "I try to make sure the teachers have the materials they need, because I taught through the days where we didn't have what we needed. I spent thousands of my own dollars on materials, books, supplies, resources, and training." There is also instructional support for the teachers in Lee ISD. "I think the instructional coaches have been huge in making sure that teachers have the resources and support they need, an example of what good instruction looks like, or helping the teachers work through something."

Dr. Smith ensured instructional support through the instructional coaches by providing teachers with feedback, assistance in teaching lessons, and having lessons modeled for them. She explained, "The teachers have the mentoring and coaching support that I certainly never had. I remember crying my first year or two and there was not help." Dr. Smith has given teachers the guidance, the means, and the backing. "I feel that teachers have what they need, get the training they want, have the necessary resources, and are provided classroom support. I think that is best practices." Teachers, who were distressed or uneasy, knew they could contact Dr. Smith anytime. Dr. Smith stated, "If teachers have a question or concern or problem, they know they can email me.

I have people who email and come and talk to me if they have a concern or problem." Dr. Smith claimed to be a helpful listener and available for conversation and ready to hear about any difficulty or challenge. She noted, "I think having an open door

and being a good listener is “best” practices. Most of the time, I don’t do anything except just be willing to listen to them if they have a concern or problem.”

Summary

After four years in the position of ASCI at Lee ISD, Dr. Smith had decided to retire. She held several different positions on her path to the role of ASCI. A desire to be a bigger help to all campuses in her district and a need for a higher-paying position were the inspirations for accepting the job. Dr. Smith did meet challenges along the way including being a female desiring an administrative position.

The working relationship between Dr. Smith and principals was challenging at times and she struggled to maintain a positive and balanced working relationship with them. She tried her best to manage her working relationships with principals; however, she could not overcome the challenges she faced daily. Relationship challenges with certain colleagues have prevented Dr. Smith from being as effective in the role as she had hoped.

Dr. Smith had numerous responsibilities in her role of ASCI. The responsibilities included meeting with principals, campus instructional coaches, federal programs, grants, curriculum budgets, materials, and text books. Working with numerous personalities was a part of her job and she acknowledges that there could be tension at times. Another responsibility was implementing new programs and Dr. Smith has implemented several programs during her duration at Lee ISD. Some programs she implemented to improve student achievement include the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) and other phonics, reading, and math programs. In addition, she brought in an outside consultant to

support the implementation of one program that the district bought. There was buy-in for that particular program because Dr. Smith involved the teachers and principals in the decision-making process, which provided her teachers with a feeling of ownership. The new program was expensive, and, according to Dr. Smith, it was essential that the district monitored the program's implementation.

Newer teachers place blame and make excuses when test results are not good. Dr. Smith feels that teachers, who are now retiring, had a lot more commitment to teaching than the current pool of teachers. She conveyed that teachers in her district are frustrated and believe a lot of the frustration comes from the high-stakes testing environment. Dr. Smith supported her teachers with instructional coaching. Each campus had an instructional coach who would assist teachers with lessons, model lessons, and provide feedback. In addition, Dr. Smith supported her teachers with materials and resources, and assured the teachers they could call or email her anytime. She believed that having an open-door policy and being a good listener were included in best practices.

Chapter V

Dr. Collins

Bell ISD

The interview site for Dr. Collins was the administration building for Bell Independent School District. The building was located inside the city loop and down a nice drive lined with pine trees. Attractively groomed landscaping surrounded a spacious parking lot. Once you entered the building, there was a foyer with a reception desk and courteous secretaries. Founded in the early 1920's, Bell ISD was a 4A school district in UIL academic and athletic competitions due to a reported ninth through 12th grade student enrollment of just under 760 students.

There are five campuses in Bell ISD including a high school, a junior high, an intermediate school, an elementary school, and a primary school. The student population of Bell ISD in the 2015-2016 school year was around 2,700. The primary campus contained pre-kindergarten and kindergarten students. The elementary campus contains first through third grade students. Fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students attend the intermediate campus. The junior high campus was for seventh and eighth graders and the high school served ninth through twelfth grade. The organizational structure of Bell ISD included the superintendent of schools at the helm. There was an assistant superintendent

of curriculum and instruction (ASCI), testing, and federal programs. Others who fell under the direction of the ASCI were an assistant superintendent of operations, a business manager, an educational foundation director, PEIMS coordinator, payroll and insurance specialist, numerous secretaries, and several curriculum coaches.

Dr. Collins – The Interview

Dr. Collins spent the last twelve years as ASCI for Bell Independent School District. She worked in accounting for over ten years, taught classes at a community college, served as a high school typing teacher, a middle school English and reading teacher, librarian, technology teacher, and an elementary principal. Dr. Collins's first interests were not in education. She explained, "When I first graduated from high school, I decided not to go into education because all my friends were going into education and I just thought education was a fluff field."

Dr. Collins elected to consider accounting because it was more lucrative. She said, "I decided to go into accounting. I thought you could make more money in accounting than you could in teaching." Some individuals encouraged her to take some education classes, but she decided against moving into education. She stated, "Everyone told me, I should take some education courses too. However, I would not, so I took cost accounting and tax courses. I worked in the field of accounting for 10 years plus."

Dr. Collins entered the workforce as an accountant for a community college and coincidently found herself teaching a night course and adored it. She recounted, "I started working at a community college as an accountant. The community college needed an instructor for one of their night classes, and they asked me to teach it. I started

teaching the class and I loved it." Having the opportunity to intermingle with students of different generations and watch them pick up what she was teaching resonated with her. Dr. Collins relayed, "I loved the interaction with people. They were older students and I enjoyed teaching and watching them learn."

Dr. Collins enjoyed being an instructor at the community college and decided she wanted a career in teaching. She went back to school through the Jameson Bill, which is similar to alternative certification. After taking some education courses and passing the certification test, she began her career as a certified teacher in a small school district. "In a small school, you do a lot. I was their typing teacher and their accounting teacher. I was also the English teacher for sixth and eighth grade and the reading teacher for seventh grade."

Years ago, a teacher could teach subjects outside of their certification. "Back then, it did not matter if you had certification in that field or not. At least at that little school it did not matter." In the beginning, Dr. Collins did not feel as comfortable with English and reading as she did teaching business classes. She explained, "I felt very comfortable with the business courses, but I was ok, where do I start with reading? Where do I start with English?" Before the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) standards, there were the Essential Elements standards. Dr. Collins expanded, "Back then, there was Essential Elements instead of the TEKS so I got out the Essential Elements and started teaching from the textbook." In the middle of the school year, Dr. Collins realized her students were not being successful with the content. She noted, "About mid-term things were not going well. I decided to take a different approach. I

started with the big concept and worked my way down instead of starting with the little concepts like verbs and adjectives." Next, Dr. Collins tried other positions on her campus. She reported, "From there I became the librarian and began doing all the media and technology."

Inspiration

The inspiration for the path to ASCI started with Dr. Collins's superintendent. "One day, the superintendent told me they were starting a cohort at a nearby university for a principalship and asked if I would like to participate." Dr. Collins went back to school, earned her principal certification, and went from school librarian to an elementary school principal. She learned a lot at the little school because it was possible to have many jobs in a small school district. Some of the responsibilities that were assigned to her were 504, special education, curriculum, and testing. "You had a lot of hats, so I did a little bit of everything."

After several years as the elementary principal at the little school, Dr. Collins received a call from another school district wanting her to come apply for a principal position there. She was not sure she wanted to move to another town because she had her family with her. "I had my girls in the little school with me and one of them was just graduating." However, she got a call from the assistant superintendent advising that the superintendent wanted her to come. "Then assistant superintendent called me and asked me to come be a principal there because they were turning over principals every year. Then, the superintendent called and I thought, well, golly, if the superintendent calls, I think I'll go."

Dr. Collins had actually graduated from the district that was reaching out to her, but had been gone from that community for 30 years. She decided to accept the job of elementary principal. "They offered me an elementary school. I would not have to oversee high school, which I was doing at the little school. I said, okay." Dr. Collins was the elementary principal of a pre-kindergarten through fifth grade campus for six years. Someone notified her that the assistant superintendent of Bell ISD was moving into the superintendency and the school district had an ASCI opening. One of the principals at Bell told Dr. Collins that she needed to apply. "The superintendent that was here at Bell was over special education when I was at the little 1A school. She knew my work ethic, and she knew who I was because we had worked with special education together."

During the interview for the position of ASCI at Bell ISD, the superintendent pointed at a stack of papers out to Dr. Collins. Dr. Collins said, "That is a big stack of papers." The superintendent said, "These are all the applications that I've had for a year and I have not found the right person I want for this job." The superintendent told Dr. Collins that the stack of applicants contained people with doctoral degrees and master's degrees, but she wanted to go with Dr. Collins because she was well rounded. That was 12 years ago and Dr. Collins says she loves her job. "I came here and I love it."

Advancing Challenges

Constant changes from the state presented immense challenges for Dr. Collins. She expressed, "The biggest challenge I had were the changes that the state made continually. You would think you knew what they wanted and then it would be changed

completely." The adjustment to a new education commissioner was troubling to her as well. Dr. Collins stated, "Just like changes in commissioners, you would get comfortable with one and think you knew where you were headed, but then the targets moved."

Paperwork from the state was another area of frustration due to continuous changes. She affirmed, "They said they are eliminating paperwork, uh, they were not. If the federal government and the state government could get together, that would be very helpful because the federal government had their ideas and the state government had their ideas." Texas has not been an esteemed state in the eyes of the federal government as far as Dr. Collins is concerned. She avowed, "Texas has not been favored by the federal government because Texas keeps asking for waivers and such. The federal government keeps denying them. They are always in conflict and so it kind of trickles down to us." Dr. Collins did not express any challenges in working with colleagues or staff. She noted, "As far as working with people, they're great. You know, because we all whine together."

Overcoming Advancing Challenges

People handle challenges in different ways. Dr. Collins preferred to tackle some challenges by investigating. She acknowledged, "A lot of people are retiring, you know. I'm not ready to do that yet." To face trials, Dr. Collins chose to edify herself on the state's expectations. She said, "As far as facing challenges, the first thing I try to do is educate myself on what the state is asking for, or what they're doing. The more I can find out the better."

At the time of this interview, Dr. Collins was serving on the state's Accountability Technical Advisory Committee (ATAC). She reported, "Right now, I'm on the ATAC committee that helps decide the accountability in Austin. We look at what we think that the legislature wants as far as grading schools. We go and express our views, but that is all." Dr. Collins and other ATAC committee members do not make the ultimate verdict. That judgment is not the committee's responsibility, which was irritating to Dr. Collins. She advised, "The decision is not with us. We can recommend all day, but sometimes our recommendations weren't looked at, so that's a little frustrating."

Dr. Collins elects to teach herself in order to determine the reasons for certain decisions. She explained, "To deal with it I educate myself and try to pinpoint the whys. The whys depend on who is in power that day and the decisions they make. It's a lot of political stuff." Dr. Collins went on to say, "Politics are tied to how schools look at any given time. Mark my words, the election years is when you're going to see the schools doing really well."

She also spoke about the current climate of school accountability and pointed out, "Now, politicians don't want the schools to look good because of school vouchers. The politicians want schools to look bad, but they are supposed to be protecting public education and they're not doing their job." Dr. Collins expressed that the political plan was the motivational cause of the politicians not doing their job. She stated, "They are doing their agenda."

ASCI Roles and Responsibilities

Curriculum was a big part of what Dr. Collins oversaw, but she had other obligations as well. Therefore, curriculum presented an enormous challenge for her. "Curriculum, it is a big challenge for me because I have all these other responsibilities. I do not feel like I have enough time to devote to curriculum. I rely on my campus curriculum coaches that I've picked to help me." Dr. Collins believed in collaboration when undertaking curriculum decisions. She shared, "When we start working on new curriculum items, I'm going to gather all the curriculum coaches and lead teachers. We are going to decide what we want to do." She also believed in pulling her staff together and asking questions. Dr. Collins described, "We are going to ask ourselves, why are we here? How are we doing in this area? Let us look at some of the scores. How are we doing right now? What do we need to do?"

The belief that a curriculum is a living document was something that Dr. Collins believed strongly in. She shared,

> What I have read about curriculum is that it becomes a being. You have to give your curriculum a name. It will be named "Empowering Readers" or "Reading to Write". We will come up with a name for our curriculum. You own it if you name it.

Another important aspect of writing curriculum was referencing the TEKS because they were the teaching standards according to the State of Texas. Dr. Collins noted, "We go to the TEKS and we will look at each line. We will then have a big meeting with everyone and then we get into clusters." Having her clusters vertically

aligned according to campus was another valuable component to writing curriculum in Bell ISD. Dr. Collins outlined, "I'll have my kindergarten through third grade together and I will have my fourth grade through sixth grade together because that is the make-up of our campuses."

Dr. Collins has focused on primary through elementary grades lately because that is where there appeared to be a deficit. She said, "I concentrate right now on my kindergarten through six-grade because that is where we are losing ground. By the time students get to fourth and seventh grade, the writing that we are seeing is just okay." Dr. Collins emphasized that is imperative to have teachers understand exactly what the TEKS are wanting them to teach.

When she first arrived in Bell ISD, she had a school board member inquire about cursive writing. She stated, "You have to look and see what the TEKS are saying because people overlook for example, handwriting and cursive writing. When I first arrived in the district, I had a board member ask me why we no longer taught cursive writing?" Dr. Collins knew cursive writing was a teaching standard, but wanted to investigate further. She replied, "I said we were supposed to. Let me check into that. I went to the TEKS and it outlined what the letters were and when you introduce them." After inquiring into cursive writing instruction, Dr. Collins made a decision regarding handwriting. She affirmed, "That is when we said, no more printing. We are going to start cursive writing and it has been a challenge because of time. Time is our biggest curriculum challenge."

Attending conferences was another responsibility Dr. Collins had. "Another thing I do for curriculum is attend conferences." She claimed not to be an authority on curriculum so she read a lot to stay current on curriculum and other educational issues. She acknowledged, "I'm not the guru because there are new things out there all the time. One of the things that has really come along, but has not the focus in a lot of schools, is technology integration." Dr. Collins had been reading about technology integration. She stated, "One thing I was reading about the other day was, students in grade four should be able to compose on a keyboard or computer as fast as they can legibly write." She went on to mention that the middle school was using touch systems. She confirmed, "We would like to teach keyboarding skills or touch systems lower than what we're doing here at school. We currently start at seventh and eighth grade doing touch key and compositions on computers."

Dr. Collins was considering integrating more technology in the elementary grades. She wondered if she had enough staff to support the implementation. "We do not have technology teachers until you get to junior high and high school. That worries me about where we are right now with technology. We have a lot of hardware, but it's the time and integration of it." Dr. Collins felt the state continued to ask more of our students and she expressed a great desire to keep up with the changes to curriculum made by the state. She asserted, "I read a lot, talk to fellow curriculum people, go to the region educational service center where they have a curriculum directors group, and participate in distance learning to try and keep up with all the changes."

Relationships

Working relationships with directors, principals, and teachers is something that Dr. Collins considered a vital part of her job. She proclaimed, "I want to be very approachable." Dr. Collins provided a case in point, "We started "breakfast in the classroom", which the teachers were not very happy about. I heard the grumblings and so I went out and viewed it and yes, it was a difficult step." Dr. Collins considered the value of students receiving breakfast in the morning and expressed, "Think about how many children are benefiting from it. I asked one teacher what she thought about it and the teacher said, 'It's not really what I think about it, it's that you care what I think about it.' It made me feel good to hear her say that."

Dr. Collins believed that when teacher perspectives were considered, it supported positive relationships. She avowed, "You've got to get down on the teacher's level, because when you're in an upper level position, you forget what it's like to be a teacher. I try to remind myself all the time that it's tough being a teacher." Thinking about her beginning years in the trenches as a teacher, brought up the differences in pedagogy between then and now. Dr. Collins conveyed, "You have to try and entertain the thought that you're behind the times if you don't know the new lingo. The traditional way of teaching is going down the tubes and I'd really like some of it to come back."

In working relationships with principals, Dr. Collins noticed they do not have enough time to be the instructional leaders on their campuses. She relayed, "What I see a lot in our district and in other districts is that principals are so busy they cannot be the instructional leaders of the campus." Dr. Collins did not have the time to work on

curriculum with campus leaders. Most of her curriculum guidance was with the curriculum coaches. She stated, "I work with principals some, but not as much curriculum wise. The principals know how to interpret the testing outcomes and how the district addresses those outcomes.

Much of the instructional guidance comes from curriculum coaches." As Dr. Collins reflected on the day-to-day business of curriculum, she claimed, "As far as the daily curriculum is concerned, I usually have meetings and work mainly with the instructional coordinators/curriculum coaches." She acknowledged that in a perfect scenario the instructional leaders would be more involved, but the truth did not confirm that to be the case.

Dr. Collins shared that one of her campuses did not meet the state standard one year, which propelled that campus leader to take a closer look at instruction. The campus leader became more involved with instruction, curriculum, and testing, which allowed him to become a good instructional leader. There are some principals in Dr. Collins's district that are treading water, but she continued to support them and made sure they collaborated with other principals and had opportunities to work towards a goal. Dr. Collins emphasized that district leaders needed to work together toward a common goal.

Effectiveness

Being an effective ASCI entailed, according to Dr. Collins, researching a question when she did not have the answer. She professed, "Sometimes that means reading about current laws. I think I am effective in my position. I guess I should ask the staff that question. How effective do you think I am? Sometimes I'm spread thin." When

questioned about her effectiveness with testing coordinators and curriculum coaches Dr. Collins affirmed, “I’m close with the testing coordinators and the curriculum coaches and we work together well. If they do not know an answer, they will ask me. If I don’t know the answer, I will find it for them.”

She wanted her staff to know that she was willing to do the groundwork for the questions they had. She recounted, “If they ask me a question, I don’t want to leave them hanging. I want to know the answer, too. There are lots of calls to the region’s education center if I don’t know the answer.” High school curriculum questions many times have required that Dr. Collins check the laws. She said, “If I’m asked questions about high school curriculum and certain requirements, what you can do and what you can’t do, for dual credit and the new career and technical education (CTE). I have to go read about the laws.”

Implementing New Programs or Initiatives

Implementing new programs or initiatives could be difficult. Leaders had to consider implementation with the end in mind, which was sustainability. “The hard part of implementing a new initiative is sustainability because a teacher can say there are implementing it and then close the door and do something else.” There were different ways to monitor the sustainability of a new program or initiative. “Kids that are balanced as far as their learning from class to class and common assessments are some of the ways to evaluate sustainability.” The ASCI would want to look at teaching ability and the program or initiative as it related to the curriculum. If the students were not balanced, and the leadership at Bell ISD knew it was not the teacher’s ability, that it was what they

were teaching the students, then Dr. Collins knew it was a curriculum issue. Dr. Collins also discussed the Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS), which offers feedback to educators in an effort to help them make instructional improvements.

Bell ISD principals were required to go into the classroom and have many walk-throughs. Dr. Collins stated, "Now, I'm not going to say the T-TESS is good, but it's given the teachers a more heightened awareness. It is not a gotcha system. We have gotten a lot of good and bad things from the T-TESS." Dr. Collins believed that sustainability was the end product. She had questioned, "Are we doing what we are supposed to be doing? Do we send kids to the next level proficient in what they need to know?"

Programs for Student Achievement

STEMscope, TEKscore, and CSCOPE were some of the programs that Dr. Collins had helped to implement to improve student achievement in Bell ISD. Dr. Collins stated, "We implemented STEMscope. We liked STEMscope because it contains a lot of technology, and it covers the science and the math. We develop a lot of our curriculum from TEKscore, which was CSCOPE, but we didn't just rely on that." Dr. Collins shared that when she started her position as ASCI of Bell ISD, they were using the textbook as their curriculum. "When I first came here, that was it. You taught whatever the textbook was, that was your curriculum. Your curriculum is what you make it, you have to own it, and say, this is ours."

Bell ISD had been looking at programs to help improve their writing and Dr. Collins noted that bringing in consultants for new programs was money well spent,

> Other curriculum we had looked at for writing is Gretchen Bernabei. We've looked at her a lot. Some of the best money we have spent was having a consultant come in and look at our data and the TEKS with us, and our teachers. Having someone come in from the outside always helped. Now, they are expensive so you have to be careful where you place them, but they have helped a lot.

Dr. Collins shared that Bell ISD had not purchased curriculum lately. However, the new CTE TEKS would be implemented in the 2017-2018 school year, so high school would need to address the new standards. Dr. Collins stated, "As far as buying curriculum, I can't think of anything that we bought lately, other than our textbooks we buy every year." Dr. Collins went on to discuss CTE curriculum concerns, "With our Career and Technical Education (CTE), we've tried. I know we usually do not talk about CTE when we are talking about curriculum. It is important because the new CTE endorsements, which is coming out this year." Dr. Collins helped to guide high school with CTE as they build their curriculum. She explained, "I help CTE, we do not have a CTE director, so I kind of guide them and there's a lead teacher who helps them on curriculum. They know pretty much and they go to the CTE conference every year."

Working with Teachers in the High-Stakes Testing Environment

Some challenges that Dr. Collins has encountered in the high-stakes testing environment included stressed teachers and students. She noted, "Teachers are feeling a disconnect about what they are teaching and what the state is testing." Dr. Collins expanded, "Oh, I feel the teacher's pain and they know it. I tell them, we're in this

together, these are my students too and I want them to look good just like you want them to look good." She also noted, "Like I've said, the powers that be have not been very helpful to us as far as what we're supposed to be teaching, when we're supposed to be teaching it. A lot of our children are stressed out."

To address the stress Bell ISD was seeing in their students, Dr. Collins indicated, "We have little things, like during the test we give them snacks. We have little breaks and we say, it's ok, this is just one test." She maintained, "We try to handle it like that, but in reality, it's all about when the results come back. Unfortunately, it is like that because it is high-stakes. My teachers say, here we go again." However, they're all fairly conditioned to it now." After the tests were over, the teachers at Bell ISD felt relieved, and teachers wanted their students to have a good time following all their hard work. Dr. Collins continued, "We know we're going to have to give the tests, but after the test, it's like, now, I can have fun with my kids. Isn't that pitiful?"

Testing guidelines were very clear in Texas and it was imperative that teachers know the testing rules. If a teacher breaks a testing rule, it could result in the loss of their certification. Dr. Collins said this about her teachers, "My teachers know testing protocol. They are very aware of shenanigans like the bubble party some had. Also, the teacher that was going and putting a green M&M or a red M&M down on the student's desk." Honesty and virtue are critical as an administrator of the STAAR test. She pointed out, "I can't believe people do that because integrity is everything. Whether your students pass or not, you do not want to jeopardize your career and your reputation like that."

Sometimes the guidelines for testing at the high school level can affect students when they have to move out of state. Dr. Collins told the following story,

> One of the saddest experiences I had was when we had the 15 tests in high school. I think it was 15. The students had to do all of them. A girl passed all of them, but the science test that she had to take. Her family moved to Florida and her mother called and said, "Can you please give my daughter her diploma? She finished all her classes and she just has that one test?" I said, "I can't, I can't do that." The mother was crying and said her daughter would never have her diploma then. That really makes you wake up and go . . . These tests are ruining our children's lives, if it's so high-stake. That was just a slap in the face, because I felt responsible that the child did not pass her test. However, what do you do? I could not do anything. We could not give her the diploma because she did not pass the test. Now, the state has it a little bit better. They now have committees to address this type of scenario.

Best Practices Supporting Teachers in the High-Stakes Testing Environment

Bell ISD supported teachers through common conference times, opportunities for data review, and collaboration activities. Dr. Collins said, "One thing we do is try to get the teacher's conference times together, which that is almost impossible. Therefore, we have substitutes who come in once every six-weeks so our teachers can plan together." She had brought together her elementary teachers for teamwork and planning. Dr. Collins asserted, "They collaborate and say, "How are we going to teach this?" "What are we going to do?" Then a lot of times we get together and look at the data." Dr.

Collins advised that they had arranged longer days in an effort to give their teachers time to plan together. She confirmed,

> Our school days are 30 minutes longer now. The kids leave and the teachers stay. That was not a popular decision, but I think they like it now because they can meet regularly and it is only once or twice a week.

When the test results come back from the state, Dr. Collins has made sure they look as those together.

Other supports for teachers sustained by Dr. Collins included making sure they had training, attended requested workshops, were offered positive book studies to participate in, and experienced optimism with teachers. She gave teachers comp days for partaking in summer trainings and she facilitates books studies that were uplifting and fun. They did not give money incentives in the Bell school district. Instead, they worked on hiring the best teachers. They preferred to hire teachers that were certified and experienced. They also conducted thorough background checks. Dr. Collins said, "We do a lot of background checking on them and that is just good practice anyway. We keep them trained and keep them up to date. We help them keep learning. I think everybody like to work here. I do."

Summary

Dr. Collins has been the ASCI in Bell ISD for twelve years. Prior to her position as ASCI, she had held many different types of jobs in the field of education. Some of those appointments included business classes, English classes, librarian, and principal. Constant changes from the state, including the commissioner of education, have been

among Dr. Collins's biggest challenges. She wished the state government and federal government could get on the same page. However, she had a great working relationship with co-workers and teachers because they shared their grievances about the state changes and understood the politics involved.

Dr. Collins was on the accountability committee in Austin and had the opportunity to express her views, but had no say in the final verdict. She pointed to politics as being the decision maker and the driving force as to how schools look at any given time. Dr. Collins believed that when challenges do come up, it was always best to investigate. Therefore, she called the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to educate herself. She insists they were very helpful and could answer many questions for her.

Curriculum and testing were areas that Dr. Collins managed. However, curriculum was her prime challenge usually because of time. Teachers had a set time when they could plan together and that was helpful. She was not interested in a prepackaged curriculum; she preferred a curriculum developed by her teachers and coaches through collaboration. Curriculum coaches supported teachers in the classroom through modeling and through curriculum design. Curriculum planning encompassed referencing the TEKS and working on vertical alignment. Dr. Collins wanted her teachers to understand the TEKS and accomplished this goal through team planning. Bell ISD gave their curriculum a name and considered their curriculum to be a living document. Dr. Collins believed bringing in an outside consultant was always great as long as it was in the budget since they were expensive. Additionally, she worked to integrate technology and ensure sustainability for all programs and/or initiatives.

Teachers at Bell ISD had been feeling stressed about the standards and the high-stakes testing environment. They felt that the test did not match the standards. Teachers were not the only ones, who felt the stress, but students were experienced stress as well and Dr. Collins had shared their pain and had personally experienced great sadness related to the standardized tests. She made sure her teachers understood the guidelines and rules of standardized testing in Texas. The teachers at Bell ISD knew the importance of adhering to the rules for high-stakes testing. They followed the rules in order to keep their teaching certificates. Dr. Collins supported her teachers by being positive and approachable, providing requested trainings, allowing teachers to attend conferences, affording time to plan, and facilitating fun book studies.

Chapter VI

Dr. Reed

Clark ISD

The interview site for Dr. Reed was a quaint little café in a small town that was half the driving distance between her office in the Clark Independent School District's administration building and the community where she lived. The small restaurant was located on the corner of the town square. There were wooden tables of different sizes and a long bar with a glass case, which held various desserts. The smell of coffee filled the air and the staff was courteous. Founded in 1847, Clark ISD was classified UIL 5A for academic and athletic competitions due to a reported ninth through 12th grade student enrollment of just over 1,200 students.

There were five campuses with a student population during the 2015-2016 school year of 4,600 students. The primary campus encompassed pre-kindergarten and kindergarten students. There were two elementary schools that were comprised of grades first through fourth, a middle school that housed the fifth and six grade students, a junior high for seventh and eighth grade students, two high schools for the ninth through twelfth grade student, and an alternative campus for students who had not adhered to the student code of conduct.

The organizational structure of Clark ISD began with the superintendent of schools at the helm. Under the superintendent was the assistant superintendent of human resources, the assistant superintendent of business and finance and student services, the assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction, the assistant superintendent of facilities and planning, the athletic director, principals, director of communications and public relations, and the education foundation director/coordinator of sports marketing. Reporting to the assistant superintendent of human resources was the coordinator of student services, director of PEIMS, lead nurse/health services, and director of transportation.

The assistant superintendent of business and finance presided over the district's tax assessor/collector and director of child nutrition. Under the assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction was the director of accountability/assessment and advanced academics, and the academic dean. Also under the ASCI was the director of special education and 504, the director of technology, bilingual and ESL, elementary English Language Arts and Reading, social studies coordinator, secondary math and science coordinator, kindergarten through twelfth grade instructional technology coordinator, elementary math and science coordinator, and advanced academics/GT and secondary ELAR and social studies coordinator. The assistant superintendent of facilities and planning managed the work of the maintenance supervisor, shipping and receiving supervisor, and grounds supervisor.

Dr. Reed – The Interview

Completing her fourth year as ASCI of Clark ISD, Dr. Reed had held many different positions in education. She taught fifth and sixth grade math and science, sixth grade math, dance, been an academic advisor in a grant-funded position by TEA, an assistant principal, executive director of curriculum and instruction, and ultimately an assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction. Dr. Reed shared, "I did not go to school initially to go into education. I went to school to be a dance teacher, because I danced through college. I danced through high school and I danced through college. That was my first major. My second major was psychology."

Dr. Reed had both a mother and sister who were teachers and their influence is what guided her into teaching. She described their impact, "Probably my mom and my sister were a huge inspiration, and just hearing their heartwarming stories about how they've touched people's lives and those connections have meant so much to them." Dr. Reed found she enjoyed helping and encouraging others. She recounted her experience, "I realized that I like to help people. Whether it's helping adults or helping little people, but shaping their world and attempting to be a positive influence." Dr. Reed also enjoyed letting her students see what they could do with their lives. It seemed like a natural fit for her and she has not regretted the decision to go into teaching in her 20 years of service in education.

The route to the position of ASCI, took Dr. Reed through many educational jobs. She related her path, "I started out as a fifth and sixth grade science teacher. I have my degree because I pursued many initially. I did not go the traditional education route for

my degree. I went with a bachelor of general studies with an emphasis in mathematics." She took many of the upper level mathematics courses and earned her certification for grades one through eight self-contained. She taught sixth grade science her first two years and her third year she taught sixth grade math. She taught math for three years and her last year teaching she taught and interned for a new position. Dr. Reed recounted, "The last year I taught I was a half time math teacher, taught dance, and then was a half time administrative intern." After her internship, she became an academic advisor. She explained, "The district I was working for decided to have academic advisors, they had counselors as we have them now, but the academic advisors were going to do everything but the counseling."

As Dr. Reed reflected upon her previous positions as she continued to share her path to ASCI. She mentioned that the academic advisor position had been one of her favorites, which she did for several years until something new emerged. Dr. Reed reported, "I had an opportunity to go work for the dean of education at Texas A&M Texarkana. The dean happened to be my superintendent's wife. It was a grant-funded position with TEA for struggling districts to help their ELL student population as well as mathematics." She served in that capacity for two and a half years until the TEA grant ran out.

Dr. Reed was not sure what she would do next. However, an opportunity arose in the role of an assistant principal. Dr. Reed recounted, "Then I became an assistant principal at an elementary campus." After serving for three years as an assistant principal, Dr. Reed found out that they were going to split the campus she was working

on due to a large student population. She said, "We had about 700 students, it was a pre-k through grade four campus. I interviewed for the principal job for one of the campuses and got it." She was ready to accept the principal position and prepare for a move, but at the last minute, another opportunity became available.

Dr. Reed debated over which job to accept. She stated, "However, the superintendent of another district, who was in my doctoral cohort called me, just kind of out of the blue. He said, 'Hey, I've got this executive director of curriculum and instruction position available. Would you consider coming in for an interview?'" Dr. Reed interviewed for the job and found herself having to decide between two formidable options. Both positions would have required relocating because the principal job required an 18-mile move and the executive director of curriculum and instruction necessitated moving to another town. Dr. Reed explained, "I thought, if I'm going to make a move, I'm going to make a move. I opted to pick up everything and move to be the executive director of curriculum and instruction. I was in that position for four years."

Inspiration

The inspiration to move into the position ASCI came about by request. Dr. Reed's superintendent did not have an ASCI; he had an assistant superintendent that presided over student services, maintenance, and transportation. Dr. Reed decided to ask about moving into an ASCI position. She stated, "I went to my superintendent and said, I really want to be an assistant superintendent and I know you're looking at the budget. I'll sacrifice a pay raise if you'll make me an assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction."

Dr. Reed served as ASCI in that district for three years and then wanted to experience the position of ASCI on a bigger scale. She acknowledged, "I got to the point that I wanted to do something different. I wanted to experience a larger district and a position in another district became available." The position was in a school district that had a good reputation and she chose to explore the opportunity a bit more. She said, "I applied and investigated the superintendent, I realized she too was a former ASCI. I thought well how great is that to work for somebody that's walked the path that I've walked, and to continue to learn from them." Dr. Reed had held the position of ASCI in Clark ISD for four years.

Advancing Challenges

Making sure that principals had buy-in was necessary, but was also a challenge. Dr. Reed expressed,

> We are at a central office level not at the campus level. We are truly a support team, and we can have much influence, but if we do not have the principal's backing, as I tell myself, we are dead in the water.

There were times when a principal was inflexible or hesitant. She voiced, "Sometimes it's a matter of overcoming that obstinate principal or a principal that is reluctant. They may even be trying to get the backing of the superintendent." In those instances, Dr. Reed had to ask that the message came from the superintendent. She stated, "You know what, I need your backing on this and it really needs to come from you. I need to make sure that everyone knows this is not my initiative, this is the way the district is going."

Overcoming Advancing Challenges

Dr. Reed believed in making sure the principals shared the same vision. She stated, "Everything that we do, we have got to work through the principal and we've got to get them on our side. It is not about our side and their side. It is not a "we versus them." She had experienced working with principals who had been inflexible. Dr. Reed shared, "It may be about overcoming that obstinate principal. I am very collaborative and democratic in my decision-making. I like to pull people around the table because I know the importance of that role." Dr. Reed knew that when she and the principals were on the same page, more was accomplished. She affirmed, "I have learned, if I don't have them on board with what I'm doing or what we are doing as a district, it's not going to go well."

ASCI Roles and Responsibilities

The ASCI for Clark ISD was responsible for more than curriculum. Her role included supervising CTE, ESL bilingual, dyslexia, 504, federal programs, testing, met with principals on a regular basis, and sat side-by-side with her superintendent during principal evaluations. Dr. Reed had a team of people who helped with the large scope of responsibilities. She explained, "I have an academic dean kind of under my review, two ELAR people, one elementary, one secondary and three math coordinators. I have an instructional technology coordinator who kind of helps me with math, she's one of three."

The instructional coordinators assisted with supporting teachers within their assigned content areas. The technology coordinator also supported teachers with math

instruction. Dr. Reed had a testing coordinator and a special education director under instructional services as well. The testing coordinator made sure everything ran smooth with curriculum-based assessments and the STAAR tests each year. If a problem arose, the testing coordinator was the person that was to remedy the issue. The special education director ensured that special education students, students under 504, and students with dyslexia were receiving the appropriate instruction based upon their needs. Other responsibilities consisted of instructional and program management, implementation of federal, state, and local policies, staff development, effective communication with the community, adhering to the budget, disseminating information to other school professionals, personnel management, and supervisory responsibilities.

Relationships

Working relationships were sometimes dependent upon who the evaluator was. In relationships with principals, Dr. Reed reported, "When talking about principals, the bare bone bottom line depends on if you're their appraiser or not." She communicated that in her role as ASCI she only had influence over principals up to a certain point. Dr. Reed had a principal who decided they did not agree and did not want to follow her lead as ASCI because she was not their direct supervisor or evaluator. There were times when she and a principal had to work through that. Dr. Reed shared what she experienced, "When I was in a previous district, I was not their appraiser. In my current position, I'm not their 100% appraiser, but I sit side by side with my superintendent of schools and we do it together."

Dr. Reed facilitated PLC meetings and planning sessions. She often visited the campuses and conducted classroom walk-throughs. She indicated, "I have input. The position of the ASCI is different depending on the district. Whenever you look at the sample of an organization, in some instances, there's a dotted line from the assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction to the principals." Meeting with principals is something that Dr. Reed did frequently. In fact, Dr. Reed met with principals more than the superintendent. She confirmed, "We have a principal meeting every month where I work with them." There were times when a principal was obstinate or especially reluctant and tried to get the superintendent to support their position on a matter. Dr. Reed recounted, "Sometimes, there is a conversation that has to take place with a principal side by side which I don't typically like to do because I'm very collaborative, very democratic in my decision making."

Dr. Reed, at times, needed the backing of her superintendent to implement an initiative. She described, "In some instances, you have to tell the superintendent that you need their backing in this and it really needs to come from them." There were instances even this year where Dr. Reed had to ask the superintendent for help. She stated, "I really need you to say this for me. I really need you to make sure that everybody understands this is the way the district is going."

Dr. Reed made sure to inform her curriculum team that they needed to work with principals and encouraged her curriculum team to connect with the principals when they visited campuses. Additionally, she urged her team to go on walk-throughs with the principal so they were observing the same thing. Dr. Reed expressed, "I really encourage

my team to stop and say, let's do this hand in hand. Let us walk side by side. Let us walk this journey together." If the principal was unable to go on walk-throughs with a member of the curriculum team, Dr. Reed instructed the curriculum team to circle back with the principal and say, "Hey, this is what I saw today."

Reliance and determination needed to be present when working with and leading colleagues. Dr. Reed said,

> It's about building trusting relationships with our principals. If they do not trust us, again, it is about getting relational capacity. You have to have it with your teachers, with your peers, with your colleagues, and especially with your principals."

She went on and conveyed, "You just work through it. It is just persistence, persistence, persistence."

Effectiveness

As an assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction, Dr. Reed experienced frustration at times and claimed being effective could be difficult. She noted, "Effectiveness depends on the scenario. It can be very difficult, but I am very hard on myself. I think I'm doing a good job communicating, but then someone will say they didn't know about it." The communication between Dr. Reed and staff had become better with time. She stated, "I think communication has gotten better with experience. Anyone who sits in this position has to understand different personalities and how to work them."

Table discussions and buy-in helped to support the effectiveness of the leadership at Clark ISD. Dr. Reed described the process, "There have been times where we've gotten teacher groups with us, alongside the principals, to give a different perspective that maybe we didn't think about. That's helped a great deal." Dr. Reed believed in collaborative conversations and validation. She stated, "In my opinion, it's getting everybody around the table and having a face to face conversations and letting everybody voice their opinion. They feel validated; they feel heard."

Implementing New Programs or Initiatives

The implementation of programs required collaboration, time, design, and communication. Dr. Reed reported, "It is a process that we've spent hours designing. It's a lot of collaboration, a lot of communication." She continued, "I prefer doing face to face communication rather than emails or texts, because you can't tell inflections in emails or texts."

Programs for Student Achievement

Dr. Reed helped design a matrix to get a complete picture of students for the purpose of student achievement. She explained, "We're trying a new initiative at our high school next year, we designed a matrix where we looked at the whole picture of the students: academic history, STAAR grades, attendance, discipline, RTI, and a couple of other things." She ran into an issue when a principal did not agree with her plan of action. Dr. Reed shared, "A principal and I kind of butted heads on that, because she just wanted to go off the first administration of STAAR." Dr. Reed presented the principal with some questions to help walk the principal through the reasoning behind the matrix.

She said to the principal, “What about if they drop off the second tier, what are you going to do?” The principal informed Dr. Reed that she would probably leave the student on list because if the student passed the second time remediation was possible. Dr. Reed said, “It wasn’t until yesterday that she finally took my advice and went through the entire matrix. We will provide whatever services those students need to be successful because the matrix was able to identify that they are needy.” Dr. Reed also explained that when a new initiative is being implemented, “sometimes you have to tell a teacher, “No, you will do it this way. Trust me. Trust me."

Working with Teachers in the High-Stakes Testing Environment

Dr. Reed definitely believed all students could learn and had little patience for those who thought students with challenges could not learn. She expressed, “The high-stakes testing environment, I think one of the challenges that we’ve encountered over the last few years is we’ve got some individuals who just don’t think kids can learn.” Dr. Reed had some teachers that thought a special education student could not learn with the same rigor that other students could. She conveyed, “They think if they’re special education students, they can’t learn, and they can’t learn with the same rigor. My heart hurts when I go into meetings and there’s excuses, excuses, excuses as to why kids can’t learn.”

Dr. Reed recognized that she seemed a little tough at times because she had very little patience for teachers who thought children were incapable of learning. She avowed, “There are times when I come across maybe a little too harsh, because I have very little tolerance for those thinking students can’t learn. I temper it as best I can so that I don’t

turn them against me." Dr. Reed attested to the fact that there were times someone in her position had to let certain remarks go. Then find a time to circle back around and address remarks another time. She noted, "Sometimes you let comments slide because you don't want to tarnish the relationship. I file them away and then the next time I circle back with them and we talk about it. I want their perspective."

Dr. Reed's title was ASCI, but she would preferred to be viewed as a fellow educator and stated, "They put a title to it, but most of the time I just want to be me. This is what I know, this is what research says, this is what I've seen that is best practices or most effective practices." She preferred talking educator to educator with her teachers. She remarked, "The teachers know me as assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction. Take my title away, and just look at me as a fellow educator and let's just really talk about this."

After the release of high-stakes testing results, most districts studied the data. Dr. Reed recounted, "Probably the biggest piece is trying to find that fine line in getting teachers to understand that yes, we look at scores. We do not rank teachers, but we look at scores." She mentioned, "If I've got five teachers in one area, I want to know who had the highest scores? That was considered in the decision-making process for preparing our second administration of the state test." Dr. Reed and her ELAR coordinator were the ones who designed the remediation process. They looked at the teachers and the scores and decided the most effective teacher would take a strategically grouped set of students. Dr. Reed commented, "I've worked with people who say, it's not personal, it's

business." If the shoe were on the other foot and they were talking about your child and their personal learning, you would want the most effective teacher."

Dr. Reed expected a lot from her teachers, and the leadership at Clark ISD knew where their instructional holes were. The leadership worked to figure out what kind of professional learning would increase teacher capacity and instructional quality. Many times, that involved difficult conversations with teachers. She confirmed, "Nobody likes to make anybody feel uncomfortable, but everybody needs to get comfortable being uncomfortable, and you're going to have to have some conversations in order to get to the heart of people. In addition, Dr. Reed had to have tough conversations with teachers at times. She affirmed, "Those are hard conversations, but they have to be had. Nobody likes confrontation, including myself."

Clark ISD expected teachers to represent the vision and mission of the district. Dr. Reed shared, "I may have to let a teacher know that if they are not on board with the vision and mission, then perhaps Clark is not the place for them." Clark ISD did not like to lose teachers, but they also wanted what was best for their students.

Best Practices Supporting Teachers in the High-Stakes Testing Environment

The high-stakes testing environment involved the support of teachers, but also included critical conversations. Listening, corroboration, co-teaching, and providing feedback were some of the ways Dr. Reed supported teachers. She said,

> One of the best supports is just being there. Listening, validating, asking questions, and asking follow-up questions. In my instance, it's sometimes being

there, side by side, co-teaching with them, or just monitoring, or just getting to know the kiddos.

Dr. Reed supported teachers by conducting instructional walks and then provided teachers with positive feedback. When performing instructional walks, Dr. Reed also enjoyed the opportunity to sit down at the table with students.

Another way teachers were supported, according to Dr. Reed, was providing a teacher the tools needed to improve their instructional practices. Then, the ASCI determined what type of professional learning the teacher needed. Dr. Reed stated, "We understand where our holes are, so then we need to figure out what kind of professional learning the teacher needs to increase their capacity."

Summary

Dr. Reed was initially interested in a career of teaching dance, but her mom and sister were teachers and they inspired her to be a teacher. She held many different positions including, but not limited to middle school math, senior academic dean, director of curriculum and instruction, and as ASCI for Clark Independent School District. Dr. Reed was the ASCI for three years in another school district before accepting the ASCI position at in Clark ISD.

Many responsibilities fell under her leadership. Dr. Reed's duties were directing the instructional and program supervision, implementing federal, state, and local policies, management of staff development, effective communication with the community, adhering to the budget, disseminating information to other school professionals, personnel management, and supervisory responsibilities.

Principal buy-in had been a challenge at times and Dr. Reed believed that having principal buy-in and trust was crucial. She considered her working relationship with principals key in order to reach district goals, but believed some working relationships were dependent upon who the evaluator was. If principals were not on board with the desired direction of the district, Dr. Reed asked the superintendent for help in delivering the message. Principal relationships were vital in backing the curriculum specialists and curriculum coaches. Specialists and coaches modeled and guided teachers to improved instruction, but if the support of the principal was not there, then the available support never had a chance to succeed. Dr. Reed conducted classroom walk-throughs and made a point to circle up with the principals once the walk-throughs were completed.

Implementing new programs or initiatives necessitated time, communication, collaboration, and design according to Dr. Reed. She helped design a matrix to look at STAAR results to identify any students who might need support. In addition, she facilitated Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings and planning sessions district-wide. A PLC is a group of educators that met on a regular basis and collaborated in order to improve student achievement and teacher instruction. Dr. Reed and others spent hours collaborating and discussing the high-stakes testing outcomes and she believed that face-to-face communication was best.

Dr. Reed had very little patience for excuse makers when it came to educating students. She expected a lot from her teachers and leaders. If a student had a disability or a special consideration, it did not mean the child could not learn. A teacher should not presume a child, who was a little behind, could not learn and show progress. The high-

stakes testing environment had some teachers worried about the rank of their students' scores. Clark ISD looked at teacher's scores. They did not rank them, but wanted a teacher with good scores to help support students before a second administration of STAAR. Those conversations were difficult at times. Trying to support teacher stress during high-stakes testing time, validating, listening, coaching, and delivering positive feedback were all best practices, according to Dr. Reed.

Chapter VII

Mr. Jones

Ellis ISD

The interview site for Mr. Jones was the administration building of Ellis Independent School District. The building was located on a state highway and situated next to Ellis High School and Ellis Middle School. There was a walkway leading up to the building and a large reception area. The receptionist was very polite and so were other employees who passed by and introduced themselves as I was waiting. The room where I conducted the interview had large picture windows that soaked up the sunshine and greenery from outside. Started as a one-room schoolhouse in the early 1880's, Ellis ISD was rated 4A in UIL academic and athletic competitions due to a reported ninth through 12th grade student enrollment of fewer than 800 students.

There were four school campuses with a student population during the 2015-2016 school year of roughly 2,700 students. There was a primary campus for pre-kindergarten through second-grade, an elementary campus for grades three through five, a middle school for sixth through eighth grade, a high school for grades nine through twelve. The organizational structure of Ellis ISD started with the superintendent followed by the assistant superintendent, chief financial officer, district PEIMS coordinator, payroll and

benefits clerk, director of curriculum, director of maintenance, directors of careers, director of special services, athletic director, director of food service, director of transportation, director of technology, and administrative assistants and secretaries.

Mr. Jones – The Interview

Mr. Jones served as assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction among other duties in Ellis ISD for the past five years. He will be moving into the position of superintendent of schools next school year. He has been a sixth-grade math teacher, a high-school physics teacher, an at-risk coordinator, an assistant principal, principal, and assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction plus other duties.

Mr. Jones became interested in education early in life. He stated, "In high school, I really was not at all interested in education, and that was not going to be a dream that I had. In fact, I wasn't even planning on going to college." Two high school teachers caused him to reconsider. He said, "It was in high school that I had two teachers in high school, beginning of my junior year and senior year that were super inspirational to me." Mr. Jones felt that having those exceptional teachers, who inspired him, was a defining moment. He expressed, "That was my turning point with education, where I started putting forth a lot of effort in school, and I felt they saw a lot of potential in my ability to describe things and explain situations to others."

Mr. Jones became a student who was called-upon to help other students get the picture. He stated, "The teachers used me to help explain and help teach, not teach the class, but I was that person that had to go to the board all the time to describe some things." The last two years of high school, Mr. Jones became more interested in college

and began attending college, which he said was a result of the encouragement from his two high school teachers. He affirmed, "I became much more interested in the potential of going to college because of two teachers. I really owe it all to them, one math teacher and one physics teacher. I wound up going to college with their support."

Mr. Jones was the first member of his family to graduate from college. He received support from family and teachers. He recounted, "I was raised in a family where I had lots of educational support, but I was the first in my family to ever go to college. I was coming from a family that knew nothing of that procedure." Mr. Jones credits the two teachers and, said, "These two teachers took me under their wings, basically. I wound up going to college and majored in physics, minored in mathematics, obviously, straight from the two people that inspired me the most."

Soon after Mr. Jones graduated from college, he got a call from his former physics teacher, who was soon to be a principal, and he wanted Mr. Jones to come teach for him. Ready to transfer to A&M and finish an engineering degree, Mr. Jones was not sure if going to be a teacher was what he wanted to do because he was also looking into the field of engineering. He revealed, "I thought, I think I'll take that teaching job. I took the position not so much for the job, but really, I did it as a favor to the man who inspired me to go to college to begin with." Mr. Jones found out what he needed to do for teacher certification and took some additional classes. He stated, "I found out what I had to do in order to become a teacher. I took some summer block classes and certification tests. I carpooled with my former teacher as he was working on his principal

classes as well." Mr. Jones disclosed it was a unique experience and he has enjoyed being in education ever since.

Inspiration

Inspired by his high school math and physics teachers, Mr. Jones has subsequently held many positions in the field of education. He taught sixth grade math his first year. Then, he taught math and physics at the high school level. Mr. Jones then transferred to Ellis. He stated, "Then, I transferred to this district, taught here for two years. At that time, our district had a new position. It was a district at-risk coordinator position with a transition into an assistant principal position."

Ellis ISD was growing and needed to employ a second assistant principal at the high school level. Mr. Jones' took the position as a transitional type of job. His job duties included being a district-wide at-risk coordinator, managed parent outreach services, and dealt with truancy. Mr. Jones was learning about the role of the assistant principal at that time. The next year was different. He asserted, "It was a full-blown assistant principal position at the high school level."

After training other assistant principals, Mr. Jones became a high school principal. He noted, "Then, I became principal of the high school and I did that for 11 years. Then I served five years as an assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction plus other duties." Next year, Mr. Jones will be starting his first year as superintendent of schools.

Advancing Challenges

Mr. Jones talked about the challenges of various positions in education and was very clear about which position had the greatest challenges. He expressed that every role

in the field of education has challenges and were different depending on the role. He pointed out, "Teaching, by far, in my opinion, has the greatest challenge. Teachers are on the front line every single day, and the challenge that they have is getting greater and greater and greater." Kids were no longer going to school because they wanted to go to school. Students were required to go to school by law. Mr. Jones declared,

> We have a lot less support coming from home, kids coming from broken homes and broken families, kids coming with more issues, issues that have always been around, but they're coming with bigger issues than they have ever come with. Emotionally, socially, physically, it's just different.

As an assistant principal, Mr. Jones faced challenges with discipline and negativity, which was why he thinks many do not stay in that principal for long. Mr. Jones explained, "An assistant principal deals with discipline predominantly, because that's a high percentage of their job. They are at times the most disliked person on the campus, because of dealing with negativity on a day-to-day basis." In Ellis ISD, assistant principals were known to be diligent workers. It was not an easy job and they face much pessimism. It was important for them to remain upbeat. Mr. Jones said, "What you have to do is find really positive sides of things with an assistant principal role. You're constantly faced with negativity as an assistant principal, because anyone that knows you, they know you from a negative circumstance."

Principals faced challenges that were different compared to the challenges assistant principals encounter. Mr. Jones confirmed, "As a principal, challenges are different. As an assistant principal, the challenges you are dealing with are kids and their

parents; as a principal, your challenge really changes." Principals found that their job dealt primarily with teachers if they had an assistant principal in place. Mr. Jones indicated, "Quickly, the challenge becomes more about personnel issues, as you really find out that dealing with teachers is many times much harder than working with students in discipline situations."

Challenges in the customary role of being a principal encompassed being a building manager and an instructional leader. Mr. Jones shared, "Other challenges in general with the role of principal is that the principal is seen as the instructional leader of the campus. That is what they should be. I came through at a time when all that was changing." Many years ago, principals were more of a building manager. It was a challenge for many principals to be the building manager and the instructional leader. Mr. Jones affirmed, "Principals at one time were more of a campus manager, and then you had to transition into this role of instructional leader, I think we still rely on folks like our curriculum people. They're critical partners in that."

Assistant superintendent challenges were mainly district-wide. Mr. Jones related, "As assistant superintendent, moving into this role, the challenges now become more district-wide. Now all of a sudden, instead of having 50 teachers you have 190 teachers that kind of somewhat fall under your leadership." In his role as ASCI, Mr. Jones dealt more along the lines of compliance, federal programs, and state programs. He also learned about different programs, how those programs more effective at the campus level, and worked with individuals in a different way.

In role of ASCI, Mr. Jones worked with principals more than teachers. Campus level and district level leaders encountered different tests. He stated, "Now, in this role the principals seem to come to me for guidance, so my role is not so much with individual teachers like it is on the campus level, but more with the administrators at the district level."

The principal dealt with pressures that were different from the ASCI demands. At the high school level, Mr. Jones experienced stress when dealing with parents and teacher issues. The demands of the ASCI involved working with administrators at the district level, and the challenges of the superintendent were dissimilar from the ASCI position in Ellis ISD. Mr. Jones said,

> The challenge at this level, in my experience, is not the same as the challenge you have at the principal level. As a high school principal, you deal with a lot of stress, dealing with parents and dealing with issues.

The demands of the ASCI were different from those of the superintendent of schools because the ASCI tended to not have the political stresses the superintendent had Mr. Jones reported, "You don't have the political pressures as an assistant superintendent, as you do as a high school principal."

Additional assistant superintendent challenges involved daily actions. Mr. Jones acknowledged, "Other challenges are learning the day-to-day operations, handling projects, and special projects that the superintendent wanted you to learn." Mr. Jones shared that the role of ASCI required lot of resourcefulness. He stated, "This role of the ASCI requires a lot of self-initiative because as a principal or a teacher you can always go

to somebody and ask. As a teacher, you can go and ask. This role is just different. It is a unique position."

Overcoming Advancing Challenges

Conquering challenges required staying the course and developing as a leader. Mr. Jones recounted, "I think going through the process, and working in so many positions. When you go through all the different firsts that you go through in different roles, it really helps you to get a better understanding holistically." Mr. Jones went on and said,

> As a teacher, you only see one world, and that is your classroom. Then when you move into campus administration, you see one world and that is your campus. When you go to the district level, you see the district as a whole, and when you move to this role or into the superintendency role, you are seeing the community as a whole.

Every position that Mr. Jones has held assisted him to understand the inner workings of the challenges that were unique to that particular position. He expressed, "Each level that I've gone through has helped train me to understand those challenges. Just experience in working within one district for such a long period of time is a huge help." Mr. Jones has been with Ellis ISD for 20 years. He believed transitioning within the same district helped because there was understanding of how the district operated.

Mr. Jones shared,

> When someone comes into a district brand new, they do not know the community, they do not know the school, they do not know the teachers, it is difficult and all

> of those challenges hit you at one time, whereas I have just slowly, gradually, been able to work through those challenges. I think that is something good about our district, is all of our administrators, for the most part, we tend to retain staff for a lengthy period of time, which really helps us in our success in the district.

ASCI Roles and Responsibilities

The position of assistant superintendent included more than just curriculum and instruction in Mr. Jones' case. He described, "My role as an assistant superintendent, first and foremost, is to do anything that the superintendent needs, because I am considered the assistant to that superintendent." Whether it was a special assignment or something else, Mr. Jones took care of it. He conveyed, "If there's a special project, if there's something that just needs to happen, then that comes to me. That changes from day to day, you never know what you might be asked to do or take care of."

Mr. Jones' other duties included operating as the district testing coordinator, director of special programs, section 504, dyslexia, English as a Second Language (ESL), and gifted and talented. Mr. Jones stated, "When it comes to 21st century planning or district improvement planning, we use 21st century learning plans. I oversee the implementation of the plans. I see that our principals are reporting those plans back to the superintendent."

Accountability was another large aspect of Mr. Jones position. He noted, "As far as accountability, it is another big role here. Just keeping up with and doing many reports regarding accountability. Board reporting is that kind of thing as well."

Mr. Jones also managed curriculum and instruction and has a director of curriculum and instruction that reports to him. He said,

> The director falls underneath the level of assistant superintendent. The director handles curriculum and instructional needs, and obviously, if there is an issue that needs to go to me, if we need to get more principal buy-in on something, or if she needs my assistance on something she will come to me.

Mr. Jones also worked with assessment. In fact, a lot of the work that he did with curriculum was under the umbrella of assessment. He affirmed, "The work I've done as far as curriculum and instruction specifically, would be under assessment. All of our principals in their campuses, they design unique nine-week assessments that they have." Mr. Jones made sure that principals review all assessment according to a rubric. The principals were required to conduct a thorough review of all assessments. They had to ensure that questions were meeting the district expectation of rigor.

It was important to Ellis ISD and Mr. Jones that the TEKS were taught and tested. Many times, Mr. Jones helped to review the assessments. He reported, "They'll also ask one of us to come in and review, and if it's math or science, nearly every nine weeks I'll go and review some form of a nine-week test with some of the principals." It was very important to Mr. Jones that the assessment questions were aligned with the state standards.

He also supervised and helped with professional development activities by making sure the activities were in line with the district's requirements and expectations. Mr. Jones worked hand in hand with his director of curriculum and instruction on many

of the professional development opportunities provided by Ellis ISD. He gave his director lots of accolades and voiced his high opinion of her and ability to do her job effectively. Mr. Jones commented, "My director is just so good at that, she pretty much runs that whole department. I'm there if she needs me."

Relationships

Mr. Jones believed in building great relationships with the principals in his district. He explained, "I think I have a really good working relationship with most everyone in the district. Obviously, there's always someone that's a difficult person to work with, that's human life, but my working relationship with everyone is pretty good." The principals at Ellis ISD went to Mr. Jones if they had an issue before going to the superintendent. He maintained, "With this level, if the principals need anything at all they will come to me prior to going to the superintendent, as I'm a buffer, that go-between person, and so I have to work very well with them."

Mr. Jones believed he had earned a certain level of respect from the staff in his district. He reported, "Respect, has been earned, I guess, because I try to be fair, equitable, caring, and supportive. Yet, if something needs to be addressed we can also address that issue, because that level of respect has been developed."

According to Mr. Jones, ASCIs should avoid developing close friendships with colleagues. He reported, "It's interesting at this level, because in a small district where you have administered there a long time, you become friends with your administrators. You don't want to be social buddies or anything like that." Mr. Jones shared that he does not hang out with his colleagues outside of school time. He continued, "You do become

friends with those people, but there are times when you may have to address some serious issues. You have to have a level of respect that is developed. I think I get along well with them."

Relationships with school counselors were very solid. Not all ASCIs work closely with school counselors, but in Mr. Jones' position entailed working directly with counselors. It was a unique configuration, which Mr. Jones inherited. He said, "I work closely with the campus counselors, and a lot of our campuses think that I'm the supervisor for our campus counselors because I work with them so well." Mr. Jones believed the working relationship with the school counselors developed because of his work with special programs. He noted, "The working relationship there is very, very strong, even though I'm not their supervisor."

Mr. Jones believed he had good relationships across the district. The relationships he spoke of included, for example, teachers, maintenance department, and other staff. He explained, "I'm able and expected to be on the campuses a lot, to just see what's going on, and oversee the direction that campuses are going, and the atmosphere and the culture of the campus." Mr. Jones had the responsibility of assessing the atmosphere and culture of campuses, although, it was not listed in his job duties. He recounted, "It's kind of unspoken, it's not a written requirement in this job, but that's part of what I've had to do get that district feel, and really go in and test that and assess it."

Mr. Jones visited classrooms frequently to see teachers at work. He was also in the hallways so he was visible to many school employees. He addressed his relationship with other district staff, "I have a very good relationship with the staff in general,

including our maintenance department and our custodial department." Mr. Jones believed developing strong relationships were very important. He stated, "You have to develop strong, strong relationships. I would say one of the most important works that we've done in this district, is to work on positive relationships with people."

Mr. Jones spoke about student and teacher relationships as well as principal and teacher relationships. He pointed out, "As a teacher, it's huge, to develop positive relationships with your students, and then as a principal with teachers, and vice versa." Mr. Jones understood that it could be difficult to make improvements and implement changes without building positive relationships. He avowed, "Relationships are by far, 100% important."

Effectiveness

Mr. Jones viewed his effectiveness with principals and directors as high. Mr. Jones stated, "I would say my effectiveness with the principals and directors is fairly high. It's really a question that they would have to answer." In a respectful way, Mr. Jones truly believed that whether he was an effective leader or not rested with his staff. He replied, "Humbly, I think they would have to respond to that question, but believe they would say that, based on recent statements regarding some job changes and things, they feel very comfortable in communication with me, and feel I'll be fair."

Mr. Jones described his effectiveness with his staff: "I'm very approachable and very personable, so I would say that my work with them is good. Again, you've got to be cautious as you have that little line between being a friend, versus being a coworker." Mr. Jones wanted all staff members to accept their responsibilities as being part of a

team. He expressed, “I think we have to look at it, not from a perspective of, I’m your boss, so you’re going to do what I say, but more we are all a team, and we all have a role to play.”

Mr. Jones mentioned that there is a chain of command and sometimes the ASCI must play that card. However, he maintained,

> You want to be a team player and have everybody pull his or her weight. You lead by example, but every now and then, you have to address an issue or something. My work with administrators and directors has been effective. I will not say 100% effective all the time, because everybody has their own personality.

Implementing New Programs or Initiatives

Before the implementation of a new program or initiative, it is imperative that a district needs are evaluated. Mr. Jones noted, “First of all, you always do your needs assessments everywhere. That is our 21st century learning plan. What are our needs? You have to really look holistically at your growth, where’s your major growth aspect versus your weaker areas?”

It was essential that Ellis ISD looked at strong areas and weak areas together and not focus only on one area at any given time. Especially when looking at implementing new programs or initiatives. One program that Ellis ISD decided to implement was the Neuhaus program. The Neuhaus program was a researched based language program that taught phonemic awareness, how to decode words, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. The program provided professional development on these research-based instructional techniques (Neuhaus, 2017). Mr. Jones reported, “We initially stuck

to the program in its entirety because we wanted it done with fidelity. It is a scripted program, and we felt that was the way it needed to be done first."

Programs for Student Achievement

Most schools implemented new programs or initiatives to help their students be more successful. Mr. Jones said that his district looked at issues holistically, seeing what programs could give them the most for the money, and programs that could help close the achievement gap. He explained, "In seventh grade math our advanced students had a really difficult time doing their multiplication facts. They could solve a problem outside the box with no problem, but it was the computation they were having issues with." Mr. Jones looked at the concern holistically and questioned why they were having the problem and where it was coming from.

Mr. Jones had to make some changes in the lower grades to make sure all students were given the skills necessary to be successful with computation. Ellis ISD addressed these types of concerns through a process. He explained, "We looked at it holistically and asked some questions. We had to make some changes in our lower grades to make sure that our advanced kids, and all kids, were given those skills." Mr. Jones continued,

> You do your needs assessment and you talk to your principals. We are small enough that we can walk down the sidewalk and talk to a principal at any time we feel like we need to, and that is key.

The director of curriculum and instruction who reported to Mr. Jones uncovered some issues fifth grade students were having with decoding words. Mr. Jones shared, "We discovered fifth graders had a difficult time attacking new words. It wasn't

necessarily a vocabulary issue, we sometimes get that confused." According to Mr. Jones' philosophy, if a student can sound a word out, they can figure out what the word is. However, the fifth graders were not being successful at decoding. The director of curriculum and instruction started investigating what it was, what kind of programs they had, where it was coming from, and what they needed to do. According to Mr. Jones,

> We decided to go ahead and go back to teaching phonics. We had a balanced program, nothing wrong with the program, it was just a balanced program, but everybody's balance is different. Our balance was a little off, and we felt that we needed to do some direct teaching of phonics.

Ellis ISD implemented the Neuhaus program to address phonics instruction. There was one teacher in the district, who was an interventionist, and had experienced exceptional growth with her students using the program. Mr. Jones said, "Common sense tells you to take what you have that's working and expand it, and so basically that's what we did. We expanded our Neuhaus into lower grades as, we have a 45-minute block that they teach direct-teach." He also reported, "It has really, really improved our Scholastic Reading Inventory Lexile (SRI) scoring. The kids are reading much better than they did in the past." Continued training and positive support were key in sustaining the Neuhaus initiative. Dr. Jones stated, "Realizing that we were in the process, we felt that to sustain, and really to help them grow in their knowledge base, we needed to make sure that we had a positive training aspect."

Ellis ISD teachers received Neuhaus training through an online training course. However, they also brought in a coach from Neuhaus to their district, who was a 25-year

veteran. The Neuhaus instructor was brought in for support and guidance. The teachers were appreciative of the support and felt comfortable asking questions. Mr. Jones asserted, "They saw her as a very pleasant person, and they were able to ask questions, and now they want to know constantly when she's coming back." Mr. Jones also used a coaching model from Neuhaus. He expounded, "We felt that a coaching model would be good for training, so that teachers understood the process and how important this was for our kids and for them."

Ellis ISD began sharing their assessment results with Neuhaus. Mr. Jones confirmed, "Then now we share the results from our Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) with them, our assessment results. Our lexiles went from BR zeroes to 450 to 500 or even higher for our average kids in second grade."

Working with Teachers in the High-Stakes Testing Environment

The Ellis ISD made a decision not to focus on high-stakes testing anymore. Mr. Jones explained, "We live in a state where testing is a high-stakes environment. Our district chose, about five years ago, to not focus on the tests anymore." Mr. Jones did not believe that his district had a high-stakes culture any longer. He noted, "I would not say that we're a high-stakes testing culture in this district at all." Mr. Jones believed tests and assessments were valuable. He stated,

> Testing is important and assessment is important. The state assessment is one small piece of what we ought to be doing. We do assessments differently to make sure our kids are learning. We do not put a lot of stock in the state assessment system.

The students of Ellis ISD still have to take STAAR because that is the law. However, they did not work to improve STAAR test scores. Mr. Jones had the following to say regarding the STAAR test, "That is fine, we will play that game, but we do not play the game of constantly working to improve our test scores and that type of thing. We do not focus on the test."

In Ellis ISD, teachers were not permitted to discuss STAAR testing. Mr. Jones said, "Our teachers are not allowed to talk about STAAR testing, they're not allowed to send home worksheets that have STAAR written on them." Some districts worked to prepare parents and students before the day of the STAAR test, but Mr. Jones affirmed, "We don't even call parents the night before the test and tell them that their kids need a good breakfast and a good night's rest. They show up, they take a test, and that's just what they're expected to do."

Students were informed they will be taking a test, but Ellis ISD steered clear of applying any pressure regarding the STAAR test. Mr. Jones said, "We let the kids know they're going to take the test a couple days before, so they know it's going to happen, but as far as putting a lot of pressure on kids, those days are gone."

Ellis ISD viewed high-stakes testing as unethical, unlawful, and valueless. Mr. Jones outlined, "Several years ago, we made the transition away from focusing on high-stakes testing, and I was here when we made this transition, and it's criminal." Mr. Jones strongly believed that the state test was not good for students. He stated, "It is not okay for kids to break out in hives and have health issues because we put so much pressure on them to pass a test or in order to achieve something. That's ridiculous."

Data from the state STAAR test was only one small piece of data according to Mr. Jones. He explained, "If that's the only piece of data then it's worthless. It is absolutely worthless and we don't use it. It's skewed, you can't rely on it, and by itself it is totally unreliable." Ellis ISD had charts of data to analyze and the STAAR data was viewed as one very small piece in Mr. Jones' district.

The transition to a non-test focused district took a little time. He pointed out, "When you make that transition to become a non-test-focused district, there's this sense of, I guess, lack of trust, and that takes time for people to really realize, "Wait a minute, this is really the direction we are going." It took time to change the mindset of focusing on the test to only focusing on instruction. Mr. Jones, avowed, "It's taken some time to really have teachers make that transition to not focus on a test, but to focus on good quality instruction."

Mr. Jones believed that if the focus were on quality instruction, the students would do fine on STAAR. His understanding was that Ellis ISD's assessment were just as rigorous if not more rigorous than the STAAR test. Mr. Jones confirmed, "Our assessment is very rigorous. It's more rigorous than the state assessment, in all that we do, but as far as state assessment, it's on the back burner, way on the back burner."

Teachers at Ellis ISD do not have the high-stakes testing anxiety they once had. Mr. Jones reported, "You have some anxiety. It is not near what it used to be, because in this district we have always been very competitive about the way we do things. I recall back when we were playing testing games, we were very competitive." Mr. Jones does remember when there was test anxiety in his district. He said,

> By golly, yes, there was a lot of anxiety then. It flowed downhill. Our principals were highly anxious about testing, absolutely. Teachers still take a personal measure for how their kids do. We cannot take 100% of that out, but every year we remind people that is not what is important, and if that is your focus then shame on us.

Best Practices Supporting Teachers in the High-Stakes Testing Environment

Ellis ISD supported teachers all year and acknowledged the impact they were making. Mr. Jones stated,

> We try to make sure all year long that teachers get the kudos they need, and we try to support their classes. We do try to help them along, especially come February and March. Here is a soda. Relax a little.

Best practices for Ellis ISD did not include having big celebrations over good STAAR scores, but did include praising achievements on ACT, SAT, successful initiatives and school developed assessments. Mr. Jones reported, "Our teachers know they get no kudos if their kids come back a 100% pass rate on the state assessment. Even a 100% level 3, we do not make a big deal out of that. We don't mention it."

Ellis ISD administrators told teachers, whose students did well on STAAR, that was great, but they did not make it a big deal. Mr. Jones asserted, "It is important to lead by example. Therefore, we'd better not make an issue out of it, or we're telling our teachers it's important."

Mr. Jones continued,

> We do not have banners. We do not talk about it. We brag about our kids performance on the SAT or ACT, how they're doing with NWEA, how they're doing on SRI, all other assessments, nine-week assessments, UIL, and all of the other things that go into the overall big picture, but we do not talk about it if a teacher had great scores or poor scores on state assessments. If they have poor scores on the state assessment, they have poor scores in everything. We do not have to talk about state assessment. We do not. We are very adamant about that. We try to make sure we call out everything that we can outside of STAAR. Our goal is to make everything else important so that the STAAR test is of minimal importance.

Summary

After five years as ASCI plus other duties for Ellis ISD, Mr. Jones will move into the superintendency next school year. He was inspired to go to college by two of his high school teachers. He has been a teacher, an at-risk coordinator, assistant principal, and principal before moving into the position of ASCI. As ASCI of Ellis ISD, Mr. Jones handled the day-to-day operations, special projects, directing principals, worked on district improvement plans, managed special programs, section 504, dyslexia, ESL, gifted and talented, and anything the superintendent needed.

Mr. Jones had developed into leader throughout his journey in education and believed that developing as a leader required staying the course despite any challenges that came his way. He knew there were challenges in any position in the field of education. However, Mr. Jones felt teachers face the hardest challenges and assistant

principal positions were difficult because they had to deal with pessimism on a continual basis. He made sure to visit classrooms frequently and supported teachers all year. Mr. Jones believed in building great relationships and he worked to be approachable, fair, and did his best to address needs.

Mr. Jones though it was important to look at the needs of the entire district before implementing new programs. He said a district-wide assessment was necessary along with identifying areas of growth and weaker areas. Mr. Jones believed that 21st century planning required 21st century lesson plans and he supervised the implementation of those plans. In Ellis ISD, the district must sustained implemented programs by providing positive supports and continuous training. Mr. Jones also noted that most programs were tweaked in order to fit district needs and help students be more successful.

Teachers, in Ellis ISD, were not to discuss the STAAR test, nor did they send home worksheets of any kind that bore the name STAAR. Ellis ISD declared that the high-stakes standardized testing in Texas was unethical and criminal. Therefore, Ellis ISD had taken steps to protect their staff or students from the stress associated with the high-stakes testing environment. In Ellis ISD, they treated STAAR test day like any other day a student would take a test. Mr. Jones did not believe in having celebrations over successful STAAR scores. However, he did believe in praising good American College Testing (ACT) and Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores, successful initiatives, and school-developed assessments.

Chapter VIII

Mrs. Adams

Davis ISD

The interview site for Mrs. Adams was the administration building for Davis Independent School District. The Davis administration building was located downtown and situated across the street from the Davis Railroad. Inside the administration building, there was a large reception area with hallways of offices on either side. One hallway was like a long big room with desks. There were numerous secretaries, who were all very courteous. Mrs. Adam's office was located at the end of the room filled with secretaries sitting at their desks. The walls of Mrs. Adam's office were covered with color-coded charts of works in progress. Davis ISD was a 6A school district in UIL academic and athletic competitions due to a reported ninth through 12th grade student enrollment of just over 2,100 students.

There were 15 campuses in Davis ISD, which were comprised of one pre-kindergarten three campus, one pre-kindergarten four campus, five kindergarten through second grade campuses, five elementary campuses for third grade through fifth grade, a middle school campus for grades sixth through eighth, a high school, and an alternative

campus. The student population of Davis ISD in the 2015-2016 school year was a little more than 8,000 students.

The organizational structure of Davis ISD began with the superintendent of schools at the top of the hierarchy followed by the deputy superintendent of teaching and learning, and assistant superintendent of administrative services, chief financial officer, principals, executive director of communications and public relations, police chief, and athletic director. The deputy superintendent of teaching and learning's job encompassed the position of assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction (ASCI) and more.

The deputy superintendent supervised the executive director of student services, executive director of technology, director of student activities, director of CTE, director of counseling, executive director of professional and digital learning, and executive director of primary and elementary instruction. The assistant superintendent of administrative services managed the director of maintenance services, director of transportation services, director of human resource services, and the director of student nutrition services. The chief financial officer directed the accountant, PEIMS coordinator, payroll and benefits supervisor, and purchasing and risk management coordinator. The director of special education and the director of health services both reported to the executive director of student services.

The technology staff members were under the direction of the executive director of technology. The executive director of professional and digital learning managed the digital learning specialists. The executive director of primary and elementary instruction directed the district content specialists. The executive director of communications and

public relations supervised the public relations specialists. There were numerous administrative assistants, clerks, and secretaries.

Mrs. Adams – The Interview

Mrs. Adams had worked in the same district for her entire educational career and was completing her 42nd year in Davis ISD. She started out as a high school Spanish teacher. However, she had held several other positions within the district including cheerleader sponsor, managing student council and the proms, curriculum principal, and in her last years at Han Solo high school, she was the associate principal of curriculum before becoming deputy superintendent of teaching and learning. Mrs. Adams shared, "I became interested in the field of education completely by accident. I was a student at a nearby university with a double major in sociology and Spanish and a minor in social rehab services."

Mrs. Adams' plan was to work in social services, but that did not come to fruition. She acknowledged, "My goal was to be one of those helper type people. I didn't really get into counseling but I was going to work in social services and use Spanish." Mrs. Adams continued, "When my parents moved away from Texas, and wanted me to come home in the summers, they weren't home anymore. They moved to Arkansas and so I stayed and went to school. I finished before I knew it." Mrs. Adams decided to earn her master's degree in Spanish, while she worked as a graduate assistant. She affirmed, "I signed up to go ahead and work on my master's in Spanish, was a graduate assistant there during that time, and had my list of freshman students that I was about to teach in the fall."

A principal in a nearby school district approached Mrs. Adams about teaching a Spanish course at his high school. She recounted,

> The principal of Davis ISD came and asked if there was any way I would be interested to come and teach? In those days, as a girl, you got your teaching certificate to make your parents happy. I had it, but I never intended to use it. However, the money teaching was a little better than being a graduate assistant. The principal had a pregnant Spanish teacher, and back in the day, if you were pregnant and you were a teacher, you had to go home. He had to get rid of her because she had to go home and have her baby. That is how I got a job and I did my master's at night, and have been in Davis ever since. I mean, all my experience has been with Davis ISD and starting year 42.

The path to the central office position came after many years of serving at the high school in many different capacities. Mrs. Adams stated, "I've almost had every job in the building including where I am now." She started as a teacher and became a cheerleading sponsor, student council sponsor, curriculum principal, associate principal, and organized the high school proms for 27 years. Mrs. Adams said,

> I was a teacher, cheerleading sponsor when they started a cheerleading squad to support girls' basketball because of Title IX. Mrs. Adams continued to talk about her track to central office. She resumed, "I did student council and the prom for 27 years. I was curriculum principal and I ended 30 years at the high school as the associate principal in charge of curriculum with the principal that had first hired me.

The principal, who had hired Mrs. Adams all those years ago, moved into the superintendent position. She stated, "When my principal moved into the superintendent position, he had made it known early on that when he moved, he would bring me when he could because we had a working relationship for over 26 years." Mrs. Adams mentioned that her superintendent at the time wanted her to get her superintendent certification. She noted, "I love going to school so I was always going to try to do it. No, I'm not going after my doctorate, it wouldn't do me any good now, but he told me I needed to look at the superintendency."

Mrs. Adams pointed out that her job included a willingness to offer support in different roles. She stated, "I think in the field of education, you've got to be willing to do any job required of the day. Sometimes, you are required to be a janitor. Sometimes you walk in and there's a puddle on the floor." Part of having that willingness includes cleaning up that puddle because you do not have time to go get the person in charge. Mrs. Adams shared, "You have to be the chief volunteer, you have to be willing to do things and you have to be willing to do anything that's needed."

Mrs. Adams had a willingness to support her district, which meant she took care of any task. She noted, "I guess that's why I've had every job in the building except the superintendents. You could say that the deputy sometimes is acting in her stead. It's been enjoyable and you just have to be willing to do just about anything."

Inspiration

An interest in curriculum and a desire to learn more led Mrs. Adams to her current position. She explained, "I was always interested in curriculum and I was always

interested in helping." Mrs. Adams maintained, "I think my challenge was that I did not teach in four core areas." She taught Spanish, which is not tested on STAAR. She pointed out, "I taught Spanish all those years and while you can say it's related to English language arts, it really wasn't the subject that was going to be tested in anything, standardized testing, so I had to make it my challenge."

Mrs. Adams volunteered her services as much as possible in conjunction with her Spanish teaching assignment. She said, "You have to become knowledgeable about something that you're not currently in every day. There was never going to be a proficiency test in Spanish in the states so I became the chief helper." She was willing to help with various tasks and coworkers became aware of her service. Mrs. Adams shared, "If you needed me to count test booklets or I need to learn how to do this and when you go around trying to help the person or help the people involved, they tend to notice you."

A previous superintendent saw potential in Mrs. Adams, which helped her increase her potential job possibilities. Mrs. Adams recounted, "Several superintendents ago, the division of instruction was actually out at a nearby community. The superintendent at the time must have seen something in me." Mrs. Adams always agreed to undertake any duty. She added, "I think because my hand was always open and I was volunteering; they started to say you need to learn more about this to expand your horizons. They brought me in and gave me certain tasks to accomplish."

Mrs. Adams continued to take on extra jobs here and there and learned from those jobs. She developed a hunger for more. She confirmed,

> I was already a department head or we called them facilitators back in the day. I was head of the language department. They just gave me challenges and tasks and allowed me to learn. That kind of ignited I guess a flame to learn more, followed the assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction around quite a bit, worked with her when I got my current position.

Advancing Challenges

Mrs. Adams faced challenges on her path to the Davis ISD's deputy superintendent of teaching and learning. She reported, "Interestingly enough, when I was promoted to the associate principal and the curriculum principal, I was probably not the first choice in the eyes of the assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction at the time." The deputy superintendent of teaching and learning at the time thought Mrs. Adams might be better serving in a different capacity. Mrs. Adams explained, "She saw me in a different light. When my principal moved into the position of superintendent, he fought for me to be the assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction. Mrs. Adam's superintendent insisted on having Mrs. Adams in the role of deputy superintendent of teaching and learning. She shared, "I have to have Mrs. Adams and here's why, we work well together and you just don't see all of her talents. The assistant superintendent at the time said, okay, it should be your decision anyway."

After all the dust had settled, the deputy superintendent of teaching and learning at the time agreed that Mrs. Adams was the right person to step into her place. Mrs. Adams noted, "When it was all over, it was like okay you are the right person to come

over here. We did a unique training model in that I started in July, but the deputy superintendent of teaching and learning at the time didn't leave until December."

Mrs. Adams trained under the deputy superintendent of teaching and learning for six months before taking on the position by herself. She reported,

> I followed her around for six months. That was the beginning of my spiral notebooks. When I followed her around, I did not want to forget anything because she was so knowledgeable. I wrote everything down because I said, 'She's going to leave me in December and I'm not going to know what to do.' I am currently on notebook 218.

Earning the respect of others was also a challenge when Mrs. Adams moved into the deputy superintendent of teaching and learning position. She said, "I've been here 11 years, my challenge when I came over here was earning the respect of other people because they had pigeonholed me into you've been at the high school for 30 years, you only know high school." Mrs. Adams endured a few growing pains moving into her position as ASCI. She stated,

> Now, I will tell you kindergarten teachers still scare me on a good day. I think when you are a long-standing person in a job and someone new comes in no matter where they come in, but especially if it's the superintendent, I think you have a little bit of growing pains that happen.

There was an uncomfortable period when the current superintendent came in and began working with Mrs. Adams. She expressed, "The current superintendent and I had a rough three months in the beginning because I think she was brought in with the idea

that as a woman, you're going to come in and change the good ol' boy network." Although Mrs. Adams said there was not a good ol' arrangement, there were bound to be challenges adapting to someone new for Mrs. Adams and the new superintendent. Mrs. Adams shared, "We didn't really have a good ol' boy network but the new superintendent has sitting right next to her, as her right hand, someone that she didn't get to hire, she didn't get to choose and she didn't know me."

All the new superintendent really knew about Mrs. Adams was that she had been the previous superintendent's assistant. Mrs. Adams recounted, "All she knew about me was that I was the previous superintendent's girl and so I'm sure she worried about whether or not her new right hand could be supportive. In times of uncertainty, remaining professional is key. Mrs. Adams affirmed, "I think at those times, you have to rely on your professionalism and you have to put personal feelings aside because I was one of the first persons she made cry."

Many times changeovers could be difficult. Mrs. Adams stated, "We talk about now because it was just a rough transition and anytime you come in a new job, there's an uncertainty about what you're going to be able to do in the job." The new superintendent was going through a large transition as well. Mrs. Adams reported,

> It was a big move for my current superintendent to come from her previous district to this district and not get to choose her right-hand person. I was knowledgeable about the district, but she still did not get to choose me for this position. She probably a questioned my loyalty and whether or not I could adapt to her. I think she learned that I was trustworthy and that I could be her girl

because that is my job. If I am going to put the district first and if I am going to do my job in a professional manner, then I am going to support you publicly.

There were other challenges that came with the position of deputy superintendent of teaching and learning. Mrs. Adams described, "Now, I still want the right to go in and say, we're really making a big mistake by doing that or it's not right." When a superintendent and an ASCI or deputy superintendent have a professional relationship, many times you had a rapport that let you speak frankly to one another if you happened to disagree on something. Mrs. Adams explained, "You have that relationship, you can express your objections. The superintendent can do whatever they want and you support them in public, you may not always agree so you have to always be adaptable to new people that come in."

Mrs. Adams valued her time with Davis ISD. She said, "I'm old enough and I've only been in one district and to have been here this long and to have the ability to be able to move up in a district this size is an opportunity that I appreciate." Some districts do not promote from within and some do. Mrs. Adams asserted, "Most districts would say, "We can't promote from within. We need to get new blood and we need to look outside the district. I'm very grateful for the opportunity, but it does come with challenges."

Mrs. Adams had worked for several different superintendents, but only two in her current role. She confirmed, "She is the fifth superintendent I've worked for, but the second one in this capacity." Remaining flexible was vital because there would be good times and difficult times. Mrs. Adams reflected, "It's a learning experience all the way around. Be ready to be adaptable, be ready to do whatever, be ready to weather hard

times because sometimes it happens. It's a challenge and it's sometimes a tightrope, it just depends."

Overcoming Advancing Challenges

Many times, conquering challenges meant learning how to adjust to a new set of trials. Mrs. Adams stated, "You have to learn to adapt and realize that one of the hardest things in a business is not really all personal. It should be personalized, but it's not about if someone corrects me or makes me cry." Mrs. Adams continued, "It's not because they wanted to do that to me personally, it's the situation and once you understand and you agree to be professional, then you can have a relationship beyond that, but you still have to keep it professional."

Overcoming challenges required diving into uncharted waters and learning about an area that was not familiar. Mrs. Adams explained, "I made a concerted effort to not go back and visit the high school that often because they know me. They know what I can do. They know that's where my strengths lie." Mrs. Adams had to make an intensive effort to move into uncharted territory. She stated, "I've got to be in primary and elementary, and I've got to show that, okay I may not know what it's like to have centers or to everything primary teachers do, but I can learn it."

Mrs. Adams could identify quality instruction and new she needed to learn what was unfamiliar. She acknowledged, "I recognize good teaching so that is where I dedicated my focus my first year. I immersed myself in primary and elementary and knew they were either going to like me or they're not, but I'm going to learn." One of Mrs. Adams first duties was to design a consistent grading policy. She noted, "Now, my

first task was to create a uniform grading policy for the district because we did not have one at that time. You had one school grading this way and one school grading that way."

Mrs. Adams recognized the district had 12 individual campuses doing different things. She said, "It was like no, no, no. We have to be unified, because we had little islands. The district wanted to move the 12 individual grading policies to a district wide grading policy. Mrs. Adams shared, "We had 12 little islands and to some extent, we still have those little islands but we're trying to standardize some of the things they do."

The creation of the district-wide grading policy required pulling representatives from each campus and grade level. It also required looking at how many grades should be taken for a nine-week period, and what counted as a daily grade. Mrs. Adams conveyed,

> Creating a uniform grading policy means you had to get representatives from every grade level, you had to bring them together. They had to agree on this is what the daily grade means and this is what the major grade means. This is what we are going to do. At the time, we were using Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA). Here is how much the DRA's going to count. In the end, everything went fine and took two meetings. Every grade level agreed, but not the kindergarten teachers. Six meetings later, we were still arguing over what the math checklist should look like and what the reading checklist should look like. We finally got a consensus. I laughingly say that I would take a stadium full of drill team moms complaining about the tryout results than to have five kindergarten teachers gathered in one place.

Some leaders approached decisions differently depending on their years of experience. Mrs. Adams said, "I'm at a point in my career where I can go, "Okay, alright we'll see if this works." I am 62 and have 42 years in this district. I could go home. It would be okay. Mrs. Adams recognized that she would not have her current position forever. She avowed, "You approach things differently when you know you don't have to do this job for another 20 years."

Mrs. Adams did what she could and knew if it did not work that it was not derogatory. She shared, "I'm going to do what I can and if it doesn't work, again, it's not personal, it's just not meant to be." Mrs. Adams was not going anywhere yet. She assured, "I'll ride off into the sunset having had a great career, but until that little voice sits on my shoulder and says, it's time to go, you're not being effective anymore, you have to do what you can."

Deputy Superintendent of Teaching and Learning Roles and Responsibilities

According to Mrs. Adams' job description, she had a number of duties under her supervision. They included instructional management, organizational climate and demonstrating high expectations, effective communication with all stakeholders, professional growth and development, customer care skills, the recommendation of hiring and firing of employees within the teaching and learning department, and any additional duties assigned.

Organization, being a taskmaster, ensuring that all areas under the deputy superintendent of teaching and learning's supervision were up and running properly, communication, staffing, projection meetings, and much more were all a part of the

deputy superintendent responsibilities of teaching and learning. Mrs. Adams described, "As deputy superintendent of teaching and learning, you are the next in line as far as decisions go. You sometimes have to take things on even though you're not making the final decision." Decision-making is central to the role of the ASCI. Mrs. Adams voiced, "You have to be the one to walk the decision through. If you know there's something to be done, then you have to see it through and if it's going in there and saying, okay I need 10 decisions made."

Taking care of multiple duties and being organized were important to the deputy superintendent of teaching and learning as well as realizing that some endeavors need modification. Mrs. Adams, asserted,

> You have to be a taskmaster, and you have to stay organized. You have to arrive at your role again with a different person you are working for because some people treat what that role is differently. You have to customize the role for what you need and for the person that you are working with. In addition, you have to make sure that all divisions are up and functioning and running, and you are working together as a team. It is not perfect every day and there is a new challenge every day, but you have to oversee that. You have to keep the communication going.

Mrs. Adams would change some things if she had the opportunity. She stated, "The one thing I would most like to change, if I could, is the fact that there's only one of me and sometimes when things are happening here, you can get completely inundated by what's happening here." The deputy superintendent of teaching and learning needed to

be able to handle an emergency while simultaneously keeping the other systems operating. Mrs. Adams explained, "You've had an emergency at the school, you had a mandatory suspension or expulsion, you had a bus wreck, or you had a hurricane. You have to deal with those things and keep the other system running." Mrs. Adams appreciated the leaders under her direction, which were the executive directors of primary and elementary instruction and student services. She could depend on them and other support staff to keep the system functioning when she was dealing with other urgent district needs.

Davis ISD has worked hard on staffing to best support their principals, teachers, and students. Mrs. Adams shared, "We have a luxury here that we don't really realize and it took us many, many years to get an instructional coach on every campus." There had not always been a position for campus coaches. Mrs. Adams confirmed, "For a while, it wasn't the norm to have a coach on every campus and every campus got one when they could, based upon funding and so forth. We had the luxury of having support staff on the campuses."

Having above average leaders and excellent support staff in a school district was always a bonus. Mrs. Adams said, "We have great principals, content specialists at the district level, an executive director of primary and elementary instruction and the executive director of student services." Next year, the division of instruction will be moving into the same building as other central office staff. Mrs. Adams stated, "I'm excited that central office and the division of instruction are all going to be in the same building one day soon."

Staffing and budgeting were areas Mrs. Adams had to keep up to date. She pointed to a wall in her office covered in charts and explained, "This whole wall here is staffing, we have projection meetings, here is everything we need to take care of at the district level and whether staffing is up or down and each color says something to me." Other colleagues needed to check in on the staffing charts as well. Mrs. Adams noted, "The business office comes down here and checks it. It's a central place to keep up with what we're trying to do." Mrs. Adams' wall charts reminded her of when she created the schedules at the high schools. She asserted, "It's like I used to do the schedule at the high school, which we had to put into the system by hand, and this is very similar to it and since you're keeping up with 15 schools it's good."

Staying abreast of the budget was crucial and the deputy superintendent of teaching and learning needed to know on an on-going basis what their budget looked like. Mrs. Adams confirmed, "You need to know where you are with the budget. You need to know if you are over or under budget." Mrs. Adams was in charge of approving purchases, which encompassed a little bit of monetary accounting. She conveyed,

> The executive director of student services handles the day-to-day things with the federal grants, but my ladies and I approve and process the requisitions and I approve the purchases and work with the schools about what's allowable to purchase and how they support their program and so forth. There is a little bit of financial budgeting that goes into my position. It is a little bit of everything.

Public relations were a big part of Mrs. Adams role. Sometimes she had to meet with upset parents who required a reference from school policy. Mrs. Adams noted,

"Sometimes you have to field the bad phone calls and you have to quote policy and you go from there. Every day is different both challenging and exciting." There are times when Mrs. Adams may be surprised by certain situations. She shared, "You just have to roll with the punches."

Another aspect of Mrs. Adams duties involved the board of trustees. She said, "You don't realize it because they are a team of eight and the superintendent works for them. I don't work for them, I work for the superintendent but I'm still a liaison to the board and I'm an information officer." Mrs. Adams also works with the district principals. She offered, "I work with the principals. I try and keep them informed and poll them about what needs to be done."

Relationships

Relationships involved being able to speak to others on their level, be a mediator, being upfront and honest, taking one for the team, and knowing it was likely that you were going to make someone mad. Mrs. Adams communicated, "I think you have to talk to everybody on their level and you have to talk to them and actually listen. Sometimes you had to go and find an answer when there was an answer."

Mrs. Adams' job entailed being the mediator at times. She pointed out, "Sometimes you have to mediate between two teachers who can't get along. You may need to help the principal in that situation. Mrs. Adams had come to the realization that there were always three sides to every story, everybody's version and the truth in the middle." It was important to uncover the truth. Mrs. Adams expressed, "You have to take the time to get to the truth or get to the bottom of it and everybody's not

intentionally misleading you, but sometimes there's an interior story in the background so you have to do that."

Deputy superintendents of teaching and learning needed to be strong and sound in decision-making. They had to realize that they might not have 100% buy-in on a verdict. Mrs. Adams concluded, "I always say, be it a principal, director, or teacher, if you're on a job and you're making decisions, somebody's going to be mad at you every single day and you have to be okay with that." There are ways in which a deputy superintendent of teaching and learning worked through the decision making process. Mrs. Adams stated, "Here's the way I'm going to do it. I'm going to tell them upfront or I'm going to handle this way." However, you categorize yourself; you've got to be steady in that."

Deputy superintendents of teaching and learning should always do what is in the best interest of their district. Mrs. Adams affirmed, "I think the worst thing you can do in an organization is play favorites and you have to keep the bottom line, you have to do what's best for the district." Sometimes making decisions in the best interest of the district were hard for others. Mrs. Adams shared, "Sometimes you're going to make somebody mad.

Mrs. Adams has also dealt with teachers who needed assistance and sometimes she had to relocate them." She continued,

> Think about a teacher who's been in a place for two weeks and guess what? You do not need her there, but you need her over on another campus. On the third week of school, she is packing up and moving. Sometimes others have to be asked to take one for the team.

Mrs. Adams explained,

> . . . sometimes you have to go to a teacher or the principal and say it's your turn to take one for the team. I know it is not fair, but this is what is going to be best for the district. That happens every year but again if you navigate through that and you have a moral compass that leads you then everybody knows that you are going to be fair to everyone else. Working to make the organization better has been the goal.

Mrs. Adams stated,

> It's not about your position, it's the fact that you work for an organization and you try to make the organization better. Even if that means you come to work, make the coffee, and clean up the puddle on the floor.

Effectiveness

According to Mrs. Adams, a leader measured their effectiveness by the success of the students and if there was substantial strife among personnel. She stated,

> In my position, it is important to gauge whether or not students are successful. I think the unfortunate thing about a job at this level is that you do not get to see every day the day-to-day. You do not get to see the one-on-one, the student who knows his math facts or the student who has mastered writing a legible sentence or a student who can write their letters, you do not see that on a day-to-day basis at this level. Sometimes you have to go there and search that out so you remember why you are here because you can get lost in all the adult stuff and the adult stuff is not the fun part of education.

As a deputy superintendent of teaching and learning, Mrs. Adams knew that changes took time. If you implemented a new program or hired a new principal, you had to give it time. She said, "If you hire a new principal, to turnaround a campus, be sure you give them the time to turn it around. It's not fair to judge them on first year scores." Efficacy in the role of deputy superintendent of teaching and learning required judiciousness. Mrs. Adams noted, "You have to be sensible. If students are ultimately successful, you see the results and kids are making progress, and teachers are happy, leadership is good." Mrs. Adams continued, "If a school has a lot of unrest and the teachers were never happy because they didn't like their leader, you get a new leader."

Deputy superintendents of teaching and learning should pay attention to clues with new leadership. Mrs. Adams asserted, "If you stop hearing those parent complaints, if you stop hearing those teacher complaints, you know you've been successful. You have to look for little clues to say that it's working because it's a puzzle." Deputy superintendents of teaching and learning needed to continue to look at what worked. Mrs. Adams reported, "You don't really know if the one thing you changed made the difference or the 17 things you changed make the difference. You're always looking for all sides of the story because you've got to figure out what works."

Communications with principals was vital. Mrs. Adams conveyed, "If principals are talking to you, that's a good sign. If a principal will not come and say, I did not like what you did. Have a conversation, but they need to know they've got to come and talk." Deputy superintendents of teaching and learning sometimes needed to step up for their principals. Mrs. Adams acknowledged, "Sometimes in my role, you've got to go to bat

for the principal with your leader because sometimes your leader doesn't see it all because she's wrapped up in board relations and relationships with the community." Principals did not always agree with the answers they were given, but knowing that a leader was supportive helped when things did not go their way. Mrs. Adams shared, "That's what I try to do. If they don't run from me, if the kids are successful and you don't have massive staff unrest, you're probably being pretty effective."

Implementing New Programs or Initiatives

A new program needed time to reflect progress. Mrs. Adams noted that there would be an up and down period. In addition, you could not implement programs in primary grades then sit around and wait for more than 10 years for the benefits to make their way to the high school level. Mrs. Adams said, "When you make changes, give it time. There may have been a dip when it became hard. We had some trying times with a metacognitive program this past year. We had to ask if each campus was carrying it out." Sometimes the deputy superintendent of teaching and learning had to investigate further, "We had one campus, probably not doing that, but that was the fault of the coach not doing it to the level needed because she was not there monitoring it."

Programs needed time to develop. Mrs. Adams explained, "There's a lot of variables. You have to give something time to develop and take off. You can't start Neuhaus, for example, at kindergarten grades and just have high school wait for it to come their way." Deputy superintendents of teaching and learning needed to think about the scope of an implementation. Mrs. Adams recounted, "You've got to incrementally make changes at each level. You've got to do something three through five and six

through eighth." Deputy superintendents of teaching and learning knew program changes happened at all levels. Mrs. Adams stated, "Make sure you make changes at every grade level because you can't make the end result wait and you're all a part of it. Give it time, monitor it, and don't expect it to be perfect because it won't."

New programs or initiatives usually needed some adjustment. Mrs. Adams gave the following reasons as to why implementation models needed tweaking. She said, "Your kids are different, your teachers are different, your kids' needs are different, the needs of poverty kids are different than the model. You cannot go in and change 17 things at one time. It takes a huge commitment."

Programs for Student Achievement

One of the programs Mrs. Adams implemented recently for improved student achievement in Davis ISD was the Neuhaus program. Davis ISD saw a need for a program that would support district students in reading. They did some researched and decided on the Neuhaus program. The Neuhaus program included phonemic awareness, decoding words, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (Neuhaus, 2017). She asserted, "We brought in Neuhaus and TI inspired calculators at the high school. They are interactive and have graphing. It syncs with a device so you can send things to the calculator and it gives real world application."

Davis ISD had a cooperative with six other school districts. Mrs. Adams explained,

> We have a cooperative high school with the six districts in the county because they need some CTE help, and we are the fiscal agent for that in giving them

> some input on CTE but we are also going to start our own for the associate's degree and that is something we are doing at the high school level.

Davis ISD also had a gap in their Language Arts Gifted and Talented program from fifth grade until ninth grade. They had to add that program to the middle school. Mrs. Adams shared, "We have a language arts program at the middle school. It will be interesting to see it in its second year and how it's progressing."

Working with Teachers in the High-Stakes Testing Environment

There was obviously some pressure with high-stakes testing, but Mrs. Adams thought it was important to hold teachers accountable for their results. She stated, "It is not a pleasant topic. It is much easier to say here is how the grade level did, but sometimes you have to drill down and have that difficult conversation." There were times when results were surprising and not what Mrs. Adams thought they would be. She reported,

> Until you get down to the data, you may have a different opinion of that teacher until you see the results of what they are doing. I think being able to walk into a room and see compliance does not naturally translate into learning.

Mrs. Adams believed that teachers should be held accountable for STAAR results because their instruction was crucial in getting students to the next level. She shared,

> It is not fun. I am not against standardized testing in any way. People would think I am crazy for saying it. I think in STAAR, we finally have a test that measures what it is you have done and what you have contributed to the student throughout the year.

Best Practices Supporting Teachers in a High-Stakes Testing Environment

Mrs. Adams believed in supporting teachers in the high-stakes testing environment. She explained, "We support teachers in the high-stakes testing environment by giving them all the training, support, and coaching they need." Davis ISD had a curriculum coach on every third through fifth grade campus to assist teachers in their instructional delivery. In addition, district literacy, math, and science specialist supported campus coaches and teachers with information and techniques that furthered good instructional practice.

Summary

Mrs. Adams had served 42 years in education in the same school district. Beginning as a high school teacher, she has held the positions of cheerleader sponsor, curriculum principal, curriculum principal, associate principal of curriculum, and deputy superintendent of teacher and learning. She had to earn the respect of others when she first moved into the position of deputy superintendent of teaching and learning and knew remaining professional and learning how to adjust to any circumstance was key.

Mrs. Adams had many duties she was responsibilities. They consisted of the supervision of the district's instructional management, the overall organizational climate, demonstrating high expectations, effective communication with all stakeholders, professional growth and development, customer care skills, the recommendation of hiring and firing of employees within the teaching and learning department, and any additional duties assigned.

Public relations were a big part of her role and there were times when she had to field unpleasant phone calls and quote policy. Mrs. Adams had multiple duties and described herself as a taskmaster and a helper. Some of her duties involved the board of trustees. She did not work for them, but acted as a liaison and an information officer. She made sure all areas under her supervision were running properly and managed any challenges that arose.

Staffing and budgeting were areas that Mrs. Adams kept updated. The budget was crucial and she knew what the budget looked like at all times. Mrs. Adams made decisions based on what was in the best interest of the district. One area she worked on was developing a consistent grading policy across the district. She was always interested in curriculum and helping in different capacities. Mrs. Adams had implemented several programs in Davis ISD. She knew that you had to give goals time and had to tweak a new program or initiative to fit your particular school district. Additionally, Mrs. Adams believed you had to give a new program time to reflect progress and make changes incrementally. She also believed in giving teachers the training or professional development to be successful.

Mrs. Adams knew relationships with principals were crucial. There were times when she acted as a mediator. Many times, she had to take time to get to the truth of the matter; there was interior story that she needed to uncover. Mrs. Adams thought it was important to be honest and up-front in relationships and she measured her effectiveness by the success of the students in her district. She knew ASCIs must be strong, sensible, and sound in making decisions. In addition, she thought it was

important to become knowledgeable in something you were not experiencing on a daily basis.

Mrs. Adams held teachers accountable for student scores. She admitted those conversations were not pleasant, but had to take place. She was not against standardized testing because she believed it truly measured what a teacher had taught throughout the year. Mrs. Adams knew good teaching when she saw it and she ensured that teachers received the coaching and training support they needed to be successful.

CHAPTER IX

Case and Cross-Case Analysis

The purpose of this multi-case study was to examine best practices used by assistant superintendents of curriculum and instruction (ASCI) in a high-stakes testing environment. In particular, (a) roles and responsibilities as an ASCI, (b) relationships with directors, principals, and teachers, (c) implementing new programs or initiatives, (d) challenges working with teachers in a high-stakes testing environment, (e) best practices used to support teachers in a high-stakes testing environment.

All research sites were located in deep east Texas. The researcher interviewed Dr. Smith, Dr. Collins, Mr. Jones, and Mrs. Adams at their district's administration building. Dr. Reed's interview was conducted at a small café. The researcher used 13 questions to guide this study and those findings are discussed in this chapter along with the emerging themes, which were identified by the researcher and NVivo 11.

The participants in this study are professionals in the field of education and come from varied backgrounds. They all impact teacher instruction and student achievement. The ASCIs in this research have different degrees of education varying from master's degrees to doctorate degrees. Some have additional job duties, but all serve as the ASCI and one called deputy superintendent for teaching and learning for their respective

district. The participants were asked a series of questions regarding their desire to enter the field of education, positions held in the field of education, challenges they have faced, building relationships with colleagues and best practices they use in the high-stakes testing environment.

All participant responses were recorded and transcribed, which were indicated in chapters four through eight. During this study, several themes emerged based upon the perceptions and experiences of the participants and their practices in the field. Even though all of the ASCIs interviewed for this study were over curriculum and instruction, some of their responsibilities were varied. The researcher examined all interview responses from each participant. There were noteworthy differences in ASCIs practices as well as common ground. All participants, participant's colleagues, and participant school districts were given pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality. The findings from participant interviews depicted the following: role of the ASCI, district size, the ASCI and principal relationship, curriculum, programs for student achievement, longevity in the position, and best practices concerning high-stakes testing.

Case Analysis

Dr. Smith.

Dr. Smith became interested in the field of education by accident. She earned a degree in Home Economics, but those jobs were hard to find at the time. Therefore, she took her first job in education as a sixth grade teacher, Dr. Smith held many different positions in education prior to her current role as assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction (ASCI) including teacher, content-mastery, curriculum coach, principal,

and curriculum director. A challenge she faced on her educational journey was being a female desiring an administrative position. Dr. Smith learned to cope and compensate in areas that she could not necessarily overcome.

At the time of Dr. Smith's interview, she served as the ASCI of Lee ISD, which served around 3,000 students and was rated a 4A school district by UIL guidelines of having a reported ninth through 12th grade enrollment total of just over 750 students. She had served in the position of ASCI for four years. However, Dr. Smith planned to retire at the end of the 2016-2017 school year.

Role of the ASCI. There were many responsibilities associated with the position of ASCI, Dr. Smith had many tasks the superintendent or the deputy superintendent would normally do. She was in charge of curriculum for the district and staff development. To enhance teacher instruction, school leaders have assumed additional obligations, expert knowledge, and added responsibilities (Elmore, 2002; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2007; Youngs, Holdgreve-Resendez, & Qian, 2011). Other responsibilities she had acquired over the years included special programs, gifted and talented, dyslexia, and Title I. In addition, she handled the curriculum budget, curriculum and textbook purchasing, instructional materials, Title grants, and conducted District Education Improvement Committee (DEIC) meetings.

ASCI and principal relationships. Dr. Smith encountered daily challenges working with principals. She wanted to support principals and help them grow into instructional leaders on their campuses. However, she found that some of the principals she worked with were not open to her support. Dr. Smith learned to handle and balance

her work with principals, who had as she expressed, “When people are grown and have a fixed mindset, it is very hard to change that.” Therefore, she focused her efforts toward people she could work with to make progress. Dr. Smith tried to empower principals to be instructional leaders and found it to be a fine balancing act.

Curriculum. Dr. Smith had her first experiences supporting courses as a curriculum person for intermediate school and middle school. She was also very involved with curriculum as an instructional coach. Before moving into the position of ASCI, she was a curriculum director for Lee ISD. Dr. Smith enjoyed and assisting and supporting learning, which in turn led her into the position of working with curriculum. Togneri and Anderson (2003) reiterated that district leadership was in charge of purposefully guiding school reform efforts. One of the reasons she took the ASCI position was because she felt she could help more campuses with curriculum and instruction.

Programs. In Lee ISD, students have struggled with reading. Dr. Smith pulled together a vertical team of teachers, and investigated possible programs to help their students be more successful. The team visited other schools and examined programs to see what would best meet their needs. The district already had a phonics program in place, but they needed something more. Lee ISD implemented Johnny Can Spell and the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) to increase student achievement. Lee ISD chose to go with both of those programs because they were cost effective and sustainable.

High-stakes testing environment. Teachers at Lee ISD were tired and stressed over high-stakes testing. Dr. Smith did not think the testing environment was the best thing, but she also thought that if teachers came to work and were the best teachers they could be that their students would do well on the test. Dr. Smith noticed a lot apathy and various excuses made regarding test scores. She also perceived that some teachers felt they had to teach to the test. Stauffer and Mason (2013) stated, "Teachers often noted that curricular changes were difficult to manage and that they felt like they had to "teach to the test" rather than their students" (p. 825). Dr. Smith believed as long as the students had a good foundation and the necessary skills; the students would pass the test. She also considered the state test was a critical thinking test that was impossible to teach, and alleged too much importance was placed on the test.

Dr. Collins.

Dr. Collins had set her sights on being an accountant, but after a stint teaching a night class at a community college, she decided to go back to school and earn her teaching credentials. She worked in a small school district for many years and held a number of different positions. She taught reading, English, and accounting. Eventually, she became the librarian, taught technology, became a principal, and ultimately an assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction. Dr. Collins loved to learn and enjoyed returning to school for certifications in various areas including mid-management.

At the time of the participant interview, Dr. Collins was the ASCI for Bell ISD, and had been the position for 12 years. Bell ISD had a total student population of around

2,700 and was categorized a UIL 4A school district based upon a reported ninth through 12th grade student enrollment of just over 750 students.

Role of the ASCI. Being the ASCI for Bell ISD came with many job duties. Dr. Collins supervised curriculum, federal programs, and testing. She had been in the position of ASCI for twelve years. Her main concern was curriculum because she did not get to work on it as much as she had wanted due to other responsibilities with federal programs and testing. Therefore, she handpicked campus curriculum leaders to help her with curriculum and support teachers. A united commitment, determined leadership, and professional influence proved to be a formula for sustainability (Boyle, 2009).

ASCI and principal relationships. Principals did not have enough time to be the instructional leader, according to Dr. Collins, and she did not get to work with principals as much as she was able to work with curriculum coaches. Dr. Collins recognized that principals were usually balancing a multitude of issues. However, she considered relationships with principals to be crucial. She met with principals on a limited basis and made sure the principals knew their data. The importance of collaborating with principals and working toward a common goal was particularly important to Dr. Collins. She had a great relationship with principals and conveyed that when she and principals did not like the decisions the state made, they all whined together.

Curriculum. Dr. Collins studied curriculum through reading, attending curriculum conferences, and meeting with a curriculum directors group from the region service center. She believed that scores drove instruction so she brought teachers and curriculum coaches together to look at scores and determine how the district was doing.

Together, they made decisions on needed curriculum changes. Bell ISD gave their curriculum a name because they considered their curriculum to be a living document. Dr. Collins vertically aligned teachers by campus and they would then go through the TEKS in groups. She also made a valiant effort to keep up with all the changes from the state. Dr. Collins called the curriculum department at TEA regularly and insisted that they were a great resource for curriculum information.

Programs. Bell ISD loved technology and one of the programs they implemented was STEMscope. The STEMscope program was a tool for math and science. They also used TEKscore, which was the former CSCOPE. They had consultants come in and claimed that was some of the best money ever spent. Dr. Collins suggested that it was important to be cautious when bringing in outside consultant because they were expensive.

High-stakes testing environment. To ensure teachers had consistent support, Dr. Collins told curriculum coaches and teachers that they were in the trenches together when it came to high-stakes testing. Having an effective leader was vital, when a school was working towards improving student performance (Finnigan, 2012). In order to provide encouragement to students during high-stakes testing, Bell ISD provided brain breaks and supplied small sacks to support their students during the test because many of them had test anxiety.

Once test scores came back from the state, it was all about the scores. Dr. Collins did not like that it was that way, but conceded that was how it was. She also knew that her teachers were very aware of the mischief associated with tampering with tests or test

materials. She worked hard to convey to staff that integrity was everything and not endanger their teaching credentials. Dr. Collins thought that standardized tests were ruining children's lives. On one occasion, she had to deny a diploma to a student that was moving out of state and had passed all of tests except one. Since the student was moving and would not be there to retake the test, Bell ISD was unable to give the student their diploma.

Dr. Reed.

Dr. Reed went to college to be a dance teacher. However, was influenced by her mother and sister to teach in a different capacity. Dr. Reed had been a science teacher, math teacher, senior level academic advisor, had worked for a dean of education at a nearby college, was an assistant principal, executive director of curriculum and instruction, and, at the time of the study, was an ASCI. Clark ISD served a total student population of around 4,600 students and was a UIL classified 5A district due to a reported ninth through 12th grade student enrollment of just over 1,200 students. Dr. Reed had been in the position of ASCI in Clark ISD for four years.

Role of the ASCI. The job responsibilities for Dr. Reed included curriculum as well as federal programs, testing, ESL bilingual, dyslexia, and CTE. There was little evidence regarding the role of assistant superintendent and their position as an instructional advisor or assessment director (Anderson, 2003; Pajak, 1989). She also had various people under her direction that were comprised of an academic dean, two ELAR coordinators, a gifted and talented coordinator, one elementary and one secondary ELAR coordinator, three math coordinators, an instructional technology coordinator, testing

coordinator, and a special education director. Dr. Reed's director of special education assisted her with dyslexia and 504, which had been very helpful due to such a large scope of duties. She held meetings with principals and curriculum coaches. In addition, Dr. Reed attended an executive cabinet meeting once a month.

ASCI and principal relationships. The idea that the working relationships between ASCIs and principals was imperative encompassed the beliefs of Dr. Reed. She understood that having a principal's buy-in or having them share the same vision and mission was advantageous. Having principal backing was necessary to the success of any initiative. Dr. Reed considered relationships with principals as contingent upon who their appraiser was. She did have influence with her principals, but stressed it was only up to a certain point. If a principal did not like the current direction, they would go a different way. In her current district, she sits side-by-side with the superintendent on appraisals and that helps.

Curriculum. Clark ISD took a different angle with curriculum this past year by introducing the term backward design. Dr. Reed stated, "Anyone who knows backward design, knows that it is just good planning." Introducing the backward design into the curriculum caused a lot of unease. According to Richards (2013), "backward design starts with a careful statement of the desired results or outcomes: appropriate teaching activities and content are derived from the results of learning. This is a well-established tradition in curriculum design in general education." Clark ISD made sure they walked everyone through the design and all of the layers of the design, because some could not see the connection between the design and its effect on curriculum and lesson planning.

Noble leaders influenced teachers to make purposeful decisions and choices over the why, how, and what of academic learning was occurring in the classroom. Without direction, a few teachers may essentially be unsuccessful at executing rigorous instruction (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2012). Dr. Reed came away from the experience of implementing backward design knowing that when it comes to curriculum, principals and teachers needed to understand the "why" and "how" a change to curriculum planning and lesson planning would improve teacher instruction and student learning.

Programs. Dr. Reed believed in collaboration when it came to implementing new programs or initiatives. She saw Patrick Briggs, the state director of Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), a few years ago and thought what he was bringing to the table was moving. He presented culturally relevant teaching. Dr. Reed would love to invest in the AVID program. She was considering bringing Patrick Briggs in to her district to see what recommendations he could offer. She also wanted a collaborative conversation with curriculum coordinators, instructional coaches, lead teachers, and principals to see if culturally relevant teaching might be a direction they wanted to take. Dr. Reed understood that there were times when you had to let staff know that the district was going in a certain direction and the staff could either get on the bus or off the bus.

High-stakes testing environment. The high-stakes testing environment had been a challenge at Clark ISD. Dr. Reed thought there were some teachers who truly believed that some kids could not learn. For example, if the student was a special education student, the teacher thought the student could not learn. It broke Dr. Reed's heart that she had some teachers with that mindset. Sometimes, when she had meetings with teachers,

all she heard were excuses. Some teachers were using a rationale that it was okay to change research based instructional practices because some students were unable to learn. Dr. Reed considered the researched based instruction to be best practices and reasoning of the teachers troubled her.

She had very little patience for that mentality, but tried not to be too critical because she needed her teachers and hoped she could bring them on board in other ways. For instance, in order to preserve the working relationship between Dr. Reed and the teachers, she would sometimes let comments slip by and then circle up with the teacher at a later more appropriate time to address the concern.

Dr. Reed worked hard for the teachers, in her district, to understand that while she reviewed the scores from the state's standardized testing, administration did not rank the teachers. However, when preparing for the second administration of STAAR for fifth grade students, the district did look at teachers who had the highest scores. Those would be the teachers to help prepare fifth graders for their second attempt at passing the STAAR test before moving to sixth grade. Brown (2007) suggested teachers and leaders are working to meet the passing rate on standardized tests.

Dr. Reed believed that validating, listening, asking questions, and asking follow-up questions were some of the best practices to support teachers in a high-stakes testing environment. Another way Clark ISD supported their teachers and students was by providing positive feedback. Dr. Reed knew it was important that students and teachers knew they were backed by, principals, and other leaders in the district.

Mr. Jones.

Inspired by two of his high school teachers, Mr. Jones entered the field of education. One of his former teachers, who had just moved into the position of principal, asked him to come teach on his campus. Mr. Jones had taught middle school math, high school physics, had been an at-risk coordinator, assistant principal, principal, and an assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction among other duties, and will be moving in the position of superintendent of schools for the 2017-2018 school year. At the time of the participant interview, Mr. Jones served as ASCI for Ellis ISD. He had been in the position for five years. Ellis ISD served a total student population of around 2,700 students and was a UIL rated 4A district based on a reported ninth through 12th student enrollment of fewer than 800 students.

Role of the ASCI. Taking care of anything the superintendent needed was a top priority for Mr. Jones and those tasks were different depending on the day. Other responsibilities included special programs, district roles for state assessment, and curriculum and instruction. He had a director of curriculum and instruction that worked with and reported to him on a regular basis. If the director of curriculum and instruction needed principal buy-in or assistance with anything else, he was there to help.

Additionally, Mr. Jones supervised implementation plans for being a 21st century school, which encompassed district improvement planning. He ensured all principals submitted their plans for his review. Marzano and Waters (2009) investigated actions taken by school leaders that resulted in increased student achievement. They discovered that campus principals, closely linked with central office leaders, tended to have the most

increases in student achievement. Mr. Jones also completed many reports on accountability as well as board reporting.

ASCI and principal relationships. Mr. Jones has worked hard to build quality relationships with his principals. He recognized that some people were easier to get along with, but believed he had a great rapport with principals in his district. Principals in Ellis ISD would come to him with a problem before going to the superintendent. Mr. Jones aimed to be equitable and supportive. However, he had worked to establish an atmosphere of respect, so if there was an issue, he took care of it. Although, Mr. Jones had great relationships with his staff, he did not promote being social with them outside of school.

Curriculum. The director of curriculum and instruction handled most of the curriculum and instructional essentials. School leaders, who formed a clear vision, cultivated group goals, maintained high expectations, and acted as a role model for others were transformational leaders. Those types of leaders could bring all staff on board, but only if the staff had faith in the leader (Bush, 2014; Podsakoff et al., 1990; Tschannen-Moran, 2003). All principals designed a unique nine-week assessment and all the principals and instructional coaches reviewed all the assessments to ensure the level of rigor was there and that the curriculum was meeting expectations outlined by a rubric the district designed, which addressed the TEKS and curriculum.

Programs. Before implementing any program in Ellis ISD, thorough needs assessments were performed district wide. They pinpointed where their major growth contrasted with weaker areas. Mr. Jones and his director of curriculum and instruction

felt very strongly that you must focus on both math and reading as opposed to just one area. The middle school and the high school at Ellis ISD were in close enough proximity to the administration building that Mr. Jones and his director of curriculum and instruction could talk to principals and observe classes on those campuses at any time. At Ellis ISD, it was important to keep lines of communication open to ensure everyone was headed in the right direction. Ellis ISD believed that teachers needed support when implementing new programs and that many times programs required tweaking to make a good fit for particular district needs.

High-stakes testing environment. Several years ago, Ellis ISD made the decision not to put a lot of stock in the state assessment anymore. Schoen & Fusarelli (2008) expressed, "high-stakes environments create a single-minded focus on avoiding sanctions, accompanied by fear to attempt anything new or untried" (p. 192). The leaders agreed not put the added pressure on the students or the teachers. Ellis ISD teachers were no longer permitted to discuss the STAAR test. They were forbidden to send home any homework that had the name STAAR printed on it anywhere. The district did not use practices that many other districts used to prepare their students for taking the state assessment. For example, Ellis ISD did not call or text parents the night before the test and remind them to provide their children with a healthy breakfast the next morning or to make sure their children had a good night's rest. Instead, Ellis ISD only let the students know they would be taking a test in few days.

Ellis ISD thought the pressure put on school districts, administrators, principals, teachers, and students for a standardized test was ridiculous. Furthermore, they believed

it was criminal for their students to break out in hives or to have other health issues just because they had to pass this one test. The district believed the pressure from high-stakes testing was immoral, unethical, and on its own, unreliable.

Mrs. Adams.

Completely by accident was how Mrs. Adams would describe her entrance into the field of education. She had a double major in sociology and Spanish and a minor in social rehabilitation services. She also had a teaching certificate, at the time, only to make her parents happy. Davis' high school principal recruited Mrs. Adams to teach high school Spanish. She has been with Davis ISD for 42 years. During her career at Davis ISD, Mrs. Adams had served as a Spanish teacher, cheerleader sponsor, oversaw student council sponser, prom coordinator, and after 30 years became the associate principal of curriculum and at the time of study was the deputy superintendent of teaching and learning. Mrs. Adams has served as the deputy superintendent of teaching and learning of Davis ISD for 11 years. Davis ISD served a total student population of just over 8,000 students and was a UIL rated 6A school district based on a reported ninth through 12th grade student enrollment of just over 2,100 students.

Role of the deputy superintendent of teaching and learning. Mrs. Adams was the deputy superintendent of teaching and learning, which meant she was an assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction, but she had additional responsibilities, which entailed being next in line in decision making after the superintendent. There were times when she had to walk a decision through from beginning to end. Mrs. Adams'

position required her to be a taskmaster, extremely organized, and able to customize the position to fit the expectations of the current superintendent.

Additionally, the ASCI or deputy superintendent of teaching and learning had to make sure all departments under her supervision were running effectively. There were new challenges every day and communication was of the utmost importance. Central office leaders worked to assist the board, because those leaders handle numerous concerns, disputes, and political questions (Larson, 2007). Mrs. Adams was a liaison to the board of trustees, worked with the principals, facilitated projection meeting, dealt with some public relations concerns, and handled a little financial budgeting.

Deputy superintendent of teaching and learning and principal relationships. Communication with principals was something that Mrs. Adams knew was of the utmost importance. She wanted principals to be forth coming and talk to her if they did not like the way she handled something. Principals may have not liked certain decisions, but they did understand they were supported when things did not go their way. There were times when the deputy superintendent of teaching and learning had to defend a principal and his or her actions to the superintendent. However, there were times when the principal had to take one for the team as well. Mrs. Adams believed if principals were talking to her, the relationship was good.

Curriculum. Davis ISD had the luxury of supporting curriculum that took the district many years to acquire. For instance, the district hired an instructional coach for every campus. According to Chenoweth (2015), improved student outcomes were credited to district school leaders, but to create a thriving culture of learning took a

district working together. There were great principals at Davis ISD and they accepted the task of being instructional leaders. The district also had a division of instruction where there was an executive director of primary and elementary instruction and four content area specialists who helped with curriculum and supported campuses with instruction.

Programs. Mrs. Adams had noticed in her years of experience that there were many variables to consider before implementing a new program or initiative. She believed that change implementations were done in increments at each grade level and gave programs time to work. Davis ISD worked hard to make sure programs were implemented with fidelity. Mrs. Adams thought any program a district implemented would need tweaking because every district's students and teachers were different.

High-stakes testing environment. There was obvious pressure with the state test. However, it was important that teachers were held accountable for their scores even though it was not an easy conversation. Difficult conversations were important because until the data from the tests were examined, a teacher who was regarded as effective may not have had matching results. Teachers had to be accountable for results because results were what was going to get the student to the next level. Hallinger (2005) offered that the primary reason educational leaders interpose on classroom instruction was to increase student achievement and hit accountability targets. Mrs. Adams was not against the state's standardized testing. She believed STAAR measured what a teacher had taught throughout the school year. If a test was able to determine if a third grade student was ready for fourth grade, it was a legitimate test. What Mrs. Adams did not approve of was

what they do with tests and accountability. However, she thought teachers still needed to be held accountable.

Cross-Case Analysis

The four ASCIs and one deputy superintendent of teaching and learning, who agreed to participate in the study, all held public school district leadership positions located in Deep East Texas. Throughout the interview process, each participant conveyed a passion and commitment to the field of education, while communicating honestly about their journey, which included teaching positions, instructional leadership, challenges they faced, relationships, and the high-stakes testing environment. They all expressed a desire to support teachers and students with quality instructional practice. Dr. Smith, Dr. Collins, Dr. Reed, Mr. Jones, and Mrs. Adams represented school districts of varying sizes and UIL categories. Three of the participants held their position at a UIL rated 4A school. One participant represented a UIL rated 5A school district and one participant represented a UIL rated 6A school district.

UIL classifications.

The three school districts that had a similar UIL 4A classification had ninth through 12th grade student enrollments ranging from just over 750 to a little under 800 students. The ASCIs for those districts were Dr. Smith, Dr. Collins, and Mr. Jones. Dr. Reed's district was categorized as a UIL 5A conference with a ninth through 12th grade student enrollment of just over 1,200 students. Mrs. Adams' district was ranked as a UIL 6Aconference with a ninth through 12th grade student enrollment of just over 2,100 students. The differences of reported student populations representing the districts for

UIL classification were just under a 900-student variance between the UIL 6A district and UIL 5A district. There was just over a 1,300-student disparity between the UIL 6A district and the three UIL 4A districts. The difference between the UIL 5A district and the three UIL 4A districts was a 400-student dissimilarity.

Demographic profile.

The demographic profile of each of the participants' districts showed similarities and differences. Although, the total population sizes of their districts varied, the percentages of various demographics revealed like comparisons. For example, the African American populations in the districts of Dr. Smith, Dr. Collins, Dr. Reed, and Mrs. Adams presented percentage numbers in the 20's. Two or More Races were denoted as 2% for Dr. Smith's, Dr. Collins's, Mr. Jones', and Mrs. Adams' districts. Dr. Reed's district showed 3% for Two or More Races.

Hispanic student district percentages were the highest in Dr. Smith's district and Mrs. Adams' district with 42% and 40% respectively. Dr. Reed's district had 34% Hispanic students, Mr. Jones district had 24%, and Dr. Collins had 18%. The district with highest percentage of White students was Mr. Jones' district with 66% followed by Dr. Collins's district with 57%, Dr. Reed's district with 40%, Dr. Smith's district with 32%, and Mrs. Adams' district with 28%. ELL demographic comparisons were similar in Dr. Collins's district with 9% and Mr. Jones' district with 7%. Dr. Reed and Mrs. Adams had comparable percentages as well with 14% and 19% respectively. Dr. Smith had the highest with 31%. Dr. Smith and Mrs. Adams had alike percentages in the economically disadvantaged student category with a reported 77% from Dr. Smith's

district and a 73% count from Mrs. Adams' district. Dr. Collins's district had 53% similar to Mr. Jones' district with 54%.

Longevity.

Dr. Smith, Dr. Reed, and Mr. Jones experienced a similar length of time in the position of ASCI. Dr. Reed and Dr. Smith had served in their respective districts for four years. Mr. Jones was in his position for five years. Mrs. Adams had more than double the time in the position of deputy superintendent of teaching and learning as the three previous mentioned ASCIs, with 11 years of experience. Dr. Collins had the most longevity in the position of ASCI with 12 years in Bell ISD.

High-stakes testing environment.

Among the details expressed in the interviews and a thorough analysis of all the data, three predominant themes surfaced for each of the five participants. The first theme was testing or the high-stakes testing environment. Standardized testing had been a source of frustration for most of the participants throughout their years in the position of ASCI or deputy superintendent of teaching and learning. All four ASCIs and the deputy superintendent of teaching and learning had corresponding views that there was obvious pressure and or stress associated with high-stakes testing and the high-stakes testing environment. There was a fear of not succeeding to meet AYP among school stakeholders. Failure to meet AYP lead to humiliation and generated compliance with leaders and teachers (Brown, 2007).

Dr. Collins and Mr. Jones had similar opinions that student anxiety caused by the high-stakes testing environment was severe and senseless. In fact, Mr. Jones' district

believed the pressure from high-stakes testing was iniquitous, unethical, and on its own, untrustworthy. Therefore, his district had made the decision not to focus on the STAAR test in his district. According to Landry (2005), the " . . . climate of high stakes tests undoubtedly translates to increased student anxiety and 'self-doubt'" (p. 36). Dr. Collins had shared a story about a student, who was not able to earn a diploma because the student did not pass one of the state's mandated end of school tests.

The ASCIs and deputy superintendent of teaching and learning thought teachers experienced stress connected to high-stakes testing. However, they had varying viewpoints. Stauffer and Mason (2013) stated that in their study, teachers sensed district expectations affected their work capacity, time demands, and raised their stress levels. Both Dr. Reed and Mrs. Adams felt standardized test scores were important. Dr. Reed's district chose teachers with the highest test scores to prepare fifth graders for their second attempt at passing the STAAR test. Mrs. Adams believed that while the tests did cause some stress, teachers should be held accountable for their students' scores because the scores measured what they were taught throughout the school year and the results let the district know if the students were ready to enter the next grade level.

Dr. Smith thought there was too much emphasis placed on the test and teachers in her district felt they had to teach to the test, which she did not agree with. Stauffer and Mason (2013) stated, "Teachers often noted that curricular changes were difficult to manage and that they felt like they had to 'teach to the test' rather than their students" (p. 825). Dr. Smith believed if the teachers taught the standards then their students would do fine on the test. She noted that teachers could not teach to a critical thinking test. Over

the course of time, worry and amplified anxiety transforms into impeded education achievement and performance not only in education, but also in the real world (Orsillo, Danitz, & Roemer, 2015). Mr. Jones and his district were so against the standardized tests that they made the decision to not put that pressure on their teachers anymore. Consequently, teachers were banned from using STAAR related materials or use practices that many other districts used to prepare their students for the state assessment.

Best practices. Another aspect of the high-stakes testing environment theme that emerged was the best practices ASCIs and the deputy superintendent of teaching and learning used to support teachers. Three of the participants said that they supported their teachers by making sure they had the training they needed. Three of the interviewees mentioned coaching or co-teaching as a way they support their teachers. Sailors and Shanklin (2010) noted, " . . . sustained classroom-based support from a qualified and knowledgeable individual who models research-based strategies and explores with teachers how to incorporate these practices using the teachers' own students . . ." (p. 1).

In addition, three of the ASCIs and the deputy superintendent of teaching and learning made sure there were curriculum coaches who modeled instruction and supported teachers with their instructional practice. Most of the districts had academic coaches that traveled to each campus, but Mrs. Adams' district had an instructional coach on every campus. Research highlighted that instructional excellence in the classroom was tied directly to district leadership (Hightower et al., 2002).

Other ways the participants supported teachers in the high-stakes testing environment included trying to be positive with their teachers. Mr. Jones shared that

their district tried to give their teachers as much praise as possible. Dr. Smith, Dr. Collins and Dr. Reed spoke to supporting their teachers in the high-stakes testing environment. Dr. Smith had an open door policy and let her teachers know they could email or come see her anytime. Dr. Collins made sure her teachers and staff knew that were "in it together" and would support one another in the high-stakes testing environment. Dr. Reed supported her teachers by listening and validating their concerns.

Standardized testing and accountability. All participants worked in their district to provide best practices that would propel student achievement. Accountability and mandated school reform efforts influenced teacher practices in the high-stakes testing environment (O'Day, 2002). However, there was a clear distinction between two participants. Mrs. Adams had no issues with standardized testing in her district and supported accountability as it related to quality instruction and student performance. She believed that the STAAR test measured whether or not students were ready to go to the next grade level. Teachers usually determined the academic progress of their students.

Conversely, Mr. Jones' district had created a united front against high-stakes testing and had taken steps to treat the STAAR test like any other test. Students in Mr. Jones' district had to take the STAAR test by law, but teachers and students were only held accountable for the district's developed assessments. Mrs. Adams did take issue with how the state was addressing accountability amongst districts with their new A-F grading system. The specifics of how that system was to be measured was not fully decided at the time of this study.

Implementation of new programs or initiatives.

The second theme identified was the implementation of new programs and or initiatives. Programs and initiatives were important for improving instruction and increased student achievement. The four ASCIs and the deputy superintendent of teaching and learning talked about their efforts to support improved student achievement through the implementation of new programs and initiatives.

The literature available on central office leaders did support the idea that district leadership had an impact on the priorities of a district and their attempts to improve instruction through reform efforts (Gallucci & Swanson, 2006; Honig & Copland, 2008; Marzano & Waters, 2009; Togneri & Anderson, 2003). The participants in this study prioritized the implementation of programs or initiatives based upon their district's greatest needs.

Mr. Jones, and the deputy superintendent of teaching and learning, Mrs. Adams implemented identical Neuhaus phonics programs in their districts. Dr. Smith's district had already had a phonics program in place, but implemented additional programs, Johnny Can Spell and the Developmental Reading Inventory (DRA) to supplement the phonics program. Dr. Collins and Mrs. Adams were instrumental in implementing technology programs in their respective districts. Dr. Collins's district implemented STEMScope, which was a program that provided tools for Math and Science. Mrs. Adams' district TI calculators were brought in to give high school students real world application. Dr. Reed was considering bringing in the director of Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) to see what program or initiative recommendations he

would have for her district that related to culturally relevant teaching. She also developed a matrix for teachers to work through in an effort to not miss any student who needed further instructional support.

Relationships.

The final common theme that emerged was relationships. All the participants in the study spoke to the importance of their relationships with principals. In addition, three of the ASCIs and the deputy superintendent of teaching and learning shared information on their relationship with their district superintendent.

Relationships with principals. The importance of the relationship between an ASCI or the deputy superintendent of teaching and learning and principals was evident in the data analyzed across the five case studies. Fullan (2001) described, "The principal is in the middle of the relationship between teachers and external ideas and people. As in most human triangles there are constant conflicts and dilemmas" (p. 137). Two of the participants, Dr. Collins and Mr. Jones characterized their relationships with principals was great. Although, Mr. Jones stressed that socializing with principals outside of school was not a good idea. Mrs. Adams indicated that the way she could tell if her relationships were going well was if the principals were communicating with her.

Challenges were also a part of the relationships with principals. However, the trials appeared to differ among the cases. Dr. Smith experienced daily challenges of doing her best to grow principals, who she felt had a fixed-mindset, to be instructional leaders. Dr. Collins attributed the growth of the principals as instructional leaders was impeded by time constraints. Dr. Collins and Dr. Reed knew it was important that they

were working toward a common goal with their principals. "District efforts to create a shared sense of purpose about student achievement are fundamental strategies for generating the will to improve" (Leithwood, 2010, p. 252). Dr. Reed believed that it was advantageous to share the same vision with principals, but she only had influence up to a certain point. The partnership between central office leaders and principals is critical to sustaining improvement efforts across a district (Leverett, 2004).

Although, Mr. Jones described his relationships with principals as great, he had to work hard to earn their respect and at times acted as a buffer between the principals and the superintendent. Mrs. Adams' challenges involved having to ask principals to " . . . take one for the team . . . " and defending a principal's action to the superintendent. Some of the interviewees had closer relationships with their principals than others, but all felt communication was key in working with principals.

Relationships with superintendents. Three ASCIs and the deputy superintendent of teaching and learning expressed variable differences and a few similarities concerning their relationships with their superintendent of schools. One parallel example was that Mr. Jones and Mrs. Adams were ready to do whatever the superintendent needed them to do and fulfill the superintendent's responsibilities in the event the superintendent was absent.

Dr. Reed described her relationship with the superintendent as comfortable enough to ask the superintendent to deliver a message or directive for her when faced with principal resistance. In Dr. Reed's district, she sits side-by-side with the superintendents during principal appraisals. A different view regarding the ASCI's

relationship with the superintendent came from Dr. Smith. She tried to handle, herself, any problems and challenges that arose. Dr. Smith commented that she tried to be frank with her superintendent, but did not want to get into a he said, she said situation.

Summary

Chapter IX was a report of the findings based on information collected through artifacts, field notes, and interviews with assistant superintendents of curriculum and instruction and one deputy superintendent of teaching and learning. The data analysis revealed three major themes. Those themes were: (1) the high-stakes testing environment; which encompassed best practices in supporting teachers in the high-stakes testing environment; (2) implementing new programs and initiatives; and (3) relationships.

All the participants in this study were very passionate about education and supporting their teachers in a high-stakes testing environment, implementing new programs and initiatives, and relationships with colleagues. They held positions in public school districts with UIL classification range of 4A through 6A. Three of the districts were 4A, one was 5A, and one was 6A.

The demographic descriptions for all of the districts were comparable and dissimilar in many of the categories. Several of the districts had like percentages for two of the student demographic reported populations. For the other sub populations, the demographics were less similar.

One of the participant had the longest permanency in the position of ASCI with 12 years of experience followed by a deputy superintendent of teaching and learning with

11 years in the role. There was an ASCI with five years on the job that would be moving into the superintendency the next school year. The other two ASCIs had each served in their post for four years.

There was agreement among ASCIs, and the deputy superintendent of teaching and learning that standardized testing and the high-stakes testing environment created a certain amount of stress. However, participants were not in accord with their views regarding the STAAR test. One participant did not see a problem with the standardized while one participant went as far as to say it was criminal.

The deputy superintendent of teaching and learning and the four ASCIs all believed they provided best practices for instruction and improved student achievement in the high-stakes testing environment. They all offered instructional modeling and or training whether it was through district instructional coaches, in-house professional development, or through bringing in outside consultants. Another aspect of best practices in the high-stakes testing environment included emotional supports for teachers. One ASCI made sure to offer praise. Two ASCIs made sure they were available to listen, and one ASCI assured all staff that they were "in it together".

All participants operated to provide best practices that would increase student performance. However, three participants had dramatically different opinions of the accountability measured of standardized testing. One had no issues with the tests, although, the participant was not happy regarding the new A-F grading campus and district accountability system. The other two participants thought the state's standardized testing was disgraceful.

New programs and or initiatives were implemented by all participants. Several of the new programs that were implemented were reading and or phonics programs. Technology programs were employed by two participants and one participant developed template format proposal that was used to identify students needing further support. Several of the programs put into action were supported with hands-on training or were reinforced by an outside consultant. A few of the participants spoke to the sustainability of newly executed programs and how those programs needed to be tweaked to fit their individual district needs.

It was important to ASCIs and the deputy superintendent of teaching and learning that communication was a key component to their position. Additionally, it was vital that all stakeholders shared a common vision. Some of the participants had better relationships with principals and superintendents than other participants.

Chapter X

Summary, Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

Introduction

This chapter offers a summary, conclusions, connotations, and recommendations obtained from this study. The purpose of this study was to examine the best practices of four Assistant Superintendents of Curriculum and Instruction (ASCIs) and one deputy superintendent of teaching and learning in Texas and determine how they use best practices to bring about change with new instructional initiatives in a high-stakes testing environment. Information was collected from personal interviews with five ASCIs, which took place at their district's administration building with the exception of one participant who was interviewed at a small café in town half way between the researcher's home and the participant's office.

Summary of the Study

The qualitative case study and cross-case analysis of four ASCIs and a deputy superintendent of teaching and learning was driven by the following question:
How do ASCIs bring about change and successfully implement new academic initiatives in the environment of high-stakes testing?

The research design utilized three types of data collection to aid in the study. These included artifacts, field notes, and interviews. The interviews provided the opportunity to query the participants in a face-to-face meeting. The interaction with interviewees was comfortable and the participants were open and candid in their responses. The researcher presented questions and obtain significant data, which was pertinent to the study. Creswell (2013) stated,

> A hallmark of a good qualitative case study is that it presents an in-depth understanding of the case. In order to accomplish this, the researcher collects many forms of qualitative data, ranging from interviews, to observations, to documents, to audio visual materials. Relying on one source of data is typically not enough to develop this in-depth understanding. (p. 98)

Four ASCIs and one deputy superintendent of teaching and learning were participants in the study. One chapter in the study was devoted to the interview of each participant. Chapter IX included a case analysis of all participants individually and cross-case analysis of all participants. The cross-case analysis included creating a lean coding list and comparing that list to NVivo 11's pattern-based coding of emerging themes and trends. Inferences derived the data analysis regarding ASCIs and the best practices they use in the high-stakes testing environment are represented in the conclusions.

Conclusions

There were three categories of conclusions that were drawn from this study. The collection included the high-stakes testing environment, implementing new programs or initiatives, and relationships. The category of high-stakes testing encompassed the

participant's perceptions of the high-stakes testing environment and best practices they used in that environment. The section on implementing new programs and/or initiatives contained specific programs or initiatives the participants had executed in their respective districts and their advice regarding the realized sustainability of those initiatives. The final area addressed was on the importance of relationships between the ASCI or deputy superintendent of teaching and learning and school personnel such as teachers, principals, and superintendents.

High-stakes testing.

Deputy superintendents of teaching and learning and ASCIs experience varying degrees of pressure associated with high-stakes testing and the high-stakes testing environment along with other stakeholders. However, ASCIs and deputy superintendents of teaching and learning must find ways to increase student achievement, so that students are successful on the state mandated assessments. There are different approaches used to accomplish that include academic and emotional methodologies.

The four ASCIs and the deputy superintendent of teaching and learning were all of the mindset that standardized testing created stress for school districts. Numerous scholars have not been encouraging regarding accountability assessments at the federal and state level (McGhee & Nelson, 2005; McNeil, 2000; Valencia, et. al, 2004). Although, there were differing opinions considering the extent of that pressure. When public schools began to answer to accountability, educators were affected in many ways. Schools and districts that did not reach passing standards faced penalties, which added tension to the work environment (Schoen & Fusarelli, 2008).

Some central office leaders stand up and voice concerns about what they feel is wrong for students. There were a couple of participants, who felt high-stakes testing was detrimental and just plain wrong for students. That opinion falls in line with some support groups, who urged educational leaders in the state to reconfigure their educational design and focus more on the 'whole child', which encompasses social learning, emotional learning, self-regulation, and student support (Blad, 2017). One participant thought the state tests were fine even though they caused a bit of pressure. The participant believed the standardized assessment revealed the work the teacher had put in throughout the year and was evidence that a student would be ready for the next grade level. However, there remains a dispute on how accountability policies influenced outcomes and teacher instruction (Au, 2007; Mintrop & Sunderman, 2009).

Deputy superintendents of teaching and learning and ASCIs support their teachers by providing professional development or training, academic coaching, needed resources, programs, listen to concerns, and praise their efforts. These practices are used to drive school reform in order to meet accountability targets. However, some measures implemented with high-stakes testing are seen as damaging to a teacher's instructional craft and teachers think the assessments bring about unnecessary analysis (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2008).

Almost all the participant's districts had instructional coaches that modeled quality instruction for teachers, which they considered best practices. ASCIs and deputy superintendents of teaching and learning know that some teachers need support to achieve quality instructional practice. Desimone (2013) stated, "At the heart of

standards-based reform is the goal of improving instruction. Thus, a useful way to study reactions to school based reform is to examine what teachers are doing differently" (p. 61). Academic coaches are able to suggest strategies, show what good instruction looks like and sounds like through modeling, and observe to see if changes in the instructional delivery are taking place. Academic coaching is considered a best practice to aid in school reform efforts.

Implementing new programs and/or initiatives.

In order to move with rigor of standardized test, ASCIs and deputy superintendents of teaching and learning employ new programs or initiatives. Participants in this study executed proposals that support student achievement, phonics programs, supplemental reading programs, and technology, which were all examples of implementations of new programs or initiatives by the participants in the study. The ASCI may be in charge of getting the latest standards from the state to curriculum directors, curriculum coaches, principals, and teachers. In addition, the ASCI monitored the implementation of new standards through the best instructional practices (DiMuzio, 2013).

When implementing new programs or initiatives, ASCIs or deputy superintendents of teaching and learning know that they are embarking on a great task and that these endeavors must be sustainable. Many researchers have shed light on and debated the fact that ASCIs, as leaders of principals, instructional coaches, and teachers, face an extremely challenging implementation process for student achievement (Dufour & Marzano, 2011; Elmore, 2000; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2007).

Many times sustainability involves an adjustment to fit the unique needs of an individual district. Maintaining professionalism during change or school reform requires conviction, competition, and resolve to accomplish great feats (Boyle, 2009). Combine determined leadership, commitment, and professional power, and there will be sustainability (Boyl, 2009).

Several ASCIs agreed that it is difficult for principals to be the instructional leader on a day-to-day basis with all their other responsibilities. Supovitz and Weathers (2004) communicated,

> School principals spend most of their time and energy operating within, managing, and responding to the particular issues of their own school communities. Within this din, the snapshot activities act as a reminder to principals and teachers of the larger framework within which they are operating and of the priorities of district leaders. (p. 10)

Having principals support new programs, in considerations of improved student outcomes in the high-stakes testing environment, is crucial. According to Glatthorn, Jailall, and Jailall (2016), the " . . . tested belief is that developing and implementing effective curricula are cooperative ventures in which district leaders, school administrators, and classroom teachers should together toward a common goal . . ." (p. xiii).

Relationships.

Deputy superintendents of teaching and learning and ASCIs build positive relationships because they are central to the success of a school district. Relationships with teachers, principals, and superintendents.

Some of the participants in this study had great relationships with principals. Marzano and Waters (2009) found that school principals that were tightly connected with district administration tended to have the most accomplishments in student achievement. Principal relationships for other participants were a source of frustration. Several participants expressed that they needed to share a common goal with principals; needed principal buy-in. Guiding principals through quality training with a vision of targets and supervising their work toward the objective helped to ensure success of reforms (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2012).

A couple of participants in the study talked about trying to grow their principals into instructional leaders because they recognized the impact it would have on student achievement. Central office's responsibility for school reform includes working with principals in an effort to strengthen the principal's instructional leadership role (Honig, 2012). However, one participant believed there was not enough time in the day for principals to achieve that goal and the other participant

Some of the practices the participants established in working with teachers included listening to their concerns, letting teachers know that they were "in it together" as a united force, fulfilling requests for attending trainings or conferences, and praise for their efforts. Barber and Mourshed (2007) examined school organizations in many

countries. Their research showed one central theme, which was that teachers, students, and parents had to be respected and appreciated.

Other participants shared that there were times when critical conversations were necessary based on subpar instructional delivery or low student test scores. ASCIs and deputy superintendents of teaching and learning provide teacher training and other supports to help teachers improve their instructional practice, but sometimes relationships with teachers involve a critical plan for instructional improvement. Good leaders guide teachers to make purposeful and specific choices over how and what academic learning takes place in the classroom. Without guidance, some teachers actually fail to execute instruction in a rigorous fashion (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2012).

ASCIs and deputy superintendents of teaching and learning build a positive relationship with the superintendent. They also support the superintendent with anything the superintendent needs and take on the superintendent's job responsibilities when required. Marzano and Waters (2009) pointed out that certain characteristics were present in tightly woven organizations and those organizations have abilities to self - correct, distribute information, compromise, and anticipate issues before they arise. A couple of participants expressed that they were there to assist their superintendent with anything that was needed. Most participants felt supported by their superintendent and one even sat side-by-side their superintendent for principal evaluations.

Implications

Each year, school districts across the state of Texas prepare for the annual STAAR test. Campuses, districts, principal, and teachers are held accountable for their students' scores. In many cases, this causes undue stress and anxiety for many teachers. This study examined what practices ASCIs are using to help support these teachers in high-stakes testing environments. The results from this multi-case study were in consensus with the literature that currently exists regarding challenges with teachers in a high-stakes testing environment. The results from this multi-case study aligned with research shared in the literature review section in this dissertation.

School board policy.

Local school board policy usually sets curriculum and instruction expectations for school districts and should have those policies developed and recorded. The school boards responsibilities include,

> Creating a vision, using data, setting goals, monitoring progress and taking corrective actions, creating awareness and urgency, engaging the community, connecting with district leadership, creating climate, providing staff development, developing policy with a focus on student learning, demonstrating commitment, and practicing unified governance. (Johnson, 2011, p. 90)

Many times district school boards guarantee the administrative processes for budgeting, planning, staff development, curriculum, school organization, and staffing design. These policies include time frames, resources, implementation guidelines, and planning procedures. The school board gathers information on staff development,

planning, curriculum, and resources to make sure the policies in place are effective and structured to impact student achievement in a positive way.

However, after conducting a search on the participants' district websites for local policy related to the position of ASCI or deputy superintendent of teaching and learning, there was a lack of information. In addition, a search for local district policy on curriculum and instruction was also unsuccessful. The school board, as a governing body, should have local policies in place that speak to the responsibilities of the ASCI or deputy superintendent of teaching and learning. In addition, the school board should have a developed local policy that outlines the goals in the area of curriculum and instruction. Board policy is important because it is the written rule and any problems that arise related to curriculum can be checked through board policy.

ASCI and principal relationships.

Another implication illustrated in this study is the fine balancing act between assistant superintendents of curriculum and instruction and principals. Fullan (2001) articulated, "The principal is in the middle of the relationship between teachers and external ideas and people. As in most human triangles there are constant conflicts and dilemmas" (p. 137). Principals have been encouraged to be the instructional leader of their campus in recent years and not only the building manager.

This can create a challenge for ASCIs and principals to be able to get on the same page and move forward with new programs or initiatives. However, the reality is that the campus principal has other daily challenges as well. Therefore, district leadership must ensure there are other support measures in place. Teachers, who need support to develop

their instructional practice, require additional assistance, which is usually more than the principal can undertake alone. With that being said, it is still imperative that the ASCI or deputy superintendent of teaching and learning have a quality relationship with the principal of each campus. If the principal is not on board with ASCI or deputy superintendent of teaching and learning, then the efforts put forth to develop quality teacher instruction is not supported, which makes the endeavor less likely to be successful.

ASCIs and principals and their working relationship is crucial to district-wide improvement efforts (Leverett, 2004). He stated,

> Silos of independent, segmented decision-making that spin schools in many different directions must be replaced with integrated efforts across central office to reduce opportunities for messages that are incongruent with system-wide instructional focus. The instructional focus must become everyone's work at all levels of the district. (Leverett, 2004, p. 4)

ASCIs and principals need to know that implementation of new programs or initiatives require buy-in, time, and tweaking. ASCIs should have a timeline of the implementation of new programs. They must also be prepared to know that most programs need to be fine-tuned to fit the individual district and students. However, if there is not buy-in from principals and teachers, the road will be a difficult one. According to Honig and Copland's (2008), central office needs to be involved in school reform. Leaders from central office should: (a) make sure to build relationships, (b) offer staff development or training to principals and central office staff, (c) build capacity and

estimate the work needed in order to support schools, and (d) provide outside organizations to increase learning.

Higher education preparation programs.

Suggestions for institutions of higher learning for principal and the educational leader preparation programs is to incorporate course studies on communication and the working relationship between principals and ASCIs. The relationship between ASCIs and principals is a complex balancing act at times. Courses for principals should include course study covering the positions of district curriculum specialists, ASCIs, campus instructional coaches. Many of these positions are prevalent in public schools and chances are principals will be working with stakeholders as well as the superintendent, teachers, and students. Course study regarding instructional support positions allow future principals insight from lenses of those positions and how to work with the colleagues in those positions for the benefit of their campus, students, and teachers.

Additional course work, needed in higher education preparation programs, are courses that cover the development of curriculum guides, working with teachers on writing and rewriting curriculum, how to ensure the curriculum meets all of the state standards. In addition, other criteria that would be beneficial for higher education curriculum courses includes developing curriculum-based assessments (CBAs), and resources for curriculum based assessments. Usually all curriculum related positions in schools review CBA data. Therefore, another unit of course study would include practice analyzing test results and the testing instrument, how to guide teachers through the

connections between their instruction and assessment outcomes, and how to determine if low student performance is related to a curriculum problem or an instructional problem.

Finally, students seeking administrative positions in curriculum and instruction would need to have course work, which covers the usual job descriptions of curriculum coaches, district curriculum specialists, curriculum directors, executive directors of curriculum and instruction, and ASCIs or deputy superintendents of teaching and learning. Furthermore, how the executive curriculum directors and ASCIs manage the other curriculum related positions as well as available board policy related to the positions.

Recommendations for Practice

The recommendations that surfaced from this study are included for those in the role of ASCI or deputy superintendent of teaching and learning, aspiring to obtain the position of ASCI or deputy superintendent of teaching and learning, and higher education instructors, who educate aspiring leaders. The suggestions are intended to improve the implementation of new programs and initiatives, relationships with principals, and higher education preparation programs.

Recommendations for implementation of new programs and initiatives.

Today's schools are continually implementing new programs and initiatives to improve student achievement. However, if steps are not taken to guide the implementation process as well as the sustainability of the program, then districts are implementing one program after another and teachers are questioning why they should "get on the bus" when the program is not sustained much like the previous programs.

The implementation process should include conducting a collaborative needs assessment, which consists of some if not all of the following stakeholders, teachers, principals, an ASCI or deputy superintendent of teaching and learning, a district instructional specialist, and campus coaches. Once the needs are determined, the implementation team reviews various programs, or they develop initiatives that will best serve their individual needs as a district. There needs to be an agreement on how the district will execute the new program along with a timeline beginning with the training of district personnel through the plan of steps to ensure the sustainability of the program. Furthermore, those leading and monitoring the implementation will need to be trained either before the teachers are trained or are trained at the same time as the teachers are trained.

It is advised to have a principal, curriculum coach, and a district level leader to monitor the implementation on individual campuses as well district level leaders who supervise the progress across the district. The process may need to include coaching and modeling for successful delivery and additional support along the way. After the implementation, the implementation team should come back together and collaborate yet again over what went well and what did not go well. Many districts will need to tweak a program or initiative to better fit the needs of their individual district or an individual campus. From there, the program must continue to be monitored with fidelity.

Recommendations for relationships with principals.

The importance of the relationship between an ASCI or deputy superintendent of teaching and learning and principals cannot be stressed enough. First, if they are not

united in their work towards a common goal or vision, new programs, daily instructional practice, and improved student learning suffer. Second, for many districts, district curriculum specialists support instruction in the classroom along with reinforcing quality instructional modeling through work with campus coaches. The ASCI or deputy superintendent of teaching and learning along with campus principals benefit from making sure all of these stakeholders are on the same page.

Third, ASCIs and deputy superintendents of teaching and learning should make every attempt possible to meet with principals on a regular basis. They need the opportunity to share concerns, celebrations, and review data to help drive instruction. ASCIs and deputy superintendents of teaching and learning should expect district curriculum specialists and campus coaches to circle up with the principal after classroom walk-throughs, or campus visits. A quick conference allows both these instructional leaders to discuss the quality of instruction taking place in the classroom and if the teachers are staying the course or in alignment with district initiatives.

Recommendations for higher education preparation programs.

Aspiring ASCIs or deputy superintendents of teaching and learning would gain a multitude of skills and knowledge having curriculum based course work in higher education programs. However, the curriculum coursework would not only be valuable for those aspiring to be those roles, but it would be advantageous for aspiring principals as well. Most principals in classifications of UIL 4A through UIL 6A school districts usually have an ASCI or an executive director of curriculum and instruction. If principals had a better understanding of the roles and responsibilities these roles, they

might be more inclined to work toward building a stronger relationship on their end knowing what a great partnership the teamwork can provide for their campus improvement efforts.

For those seeking a position of ASCI or deputy superintendent of teaching and learning, taking courses, which delve into how to write curriculum guides, creating curriculum based assessments, and comparing curriculum guides to the state standards side-by-side in order to understand the alignment process would provide an enhanced understanding of curriculum at the district level. Additional coursework ideas might include how to look at the data from curriculum based assessments and STAAR results in order to draw conclusion about how the curriculum throughout the year.

Also, determining if the district or campuses have the necessary resources to support the curriculum, a consideration of the budget. Decisions on whether district budgets or campus budgets should be responsible for the purchase certain resources, and as an ASCI or deputy superintendent of teaching and learning how do you present curriculum information, purchasing requests or reports, and student progress reports to the superintendent and the school board. Finally, some of the ASCIs in this study supervised more than curriculum. Some of these leaders preside over the organization of testing, gifted and talented, 504, and supervise directors. Examining how to manage these areas would be a notable course of study along with looking into the responsibility of evaluating district directors and ensuring their departments are running efficiently.

Recommendations for Further Study

Throughout the progression of the study, the researcher encountered some areas needing further research. The areas include: (a) additional research on districts challenging the high-stakes testing environment, (b) relationship between ASCIs and principals, (c) the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), (d) the A-F grading accountability system in Texas, (e) career path into the ASCI position, and (f) school policy related to the responsibilities and position of ASCI. This research could give those in the field of education added information and possible practices to support teachers in a high-stakes testing environment.

Standardized testing is not going away for now and districts, campuses, principals, and teachers are being held accountable. Additional research would allow districts to have more knowledge and ideas to think about when it comes to deciding on what practices they will employ in their districts and use with staff. Figlio and Ladd (2015) offered that accountability, derived from consequences and incentives are assigned based on student performance outcomes, which are monitored and calculated.

The first recommendation is a study on school districts that have decided to back off the usual standardized testing regimen and not consider state scores when evaluating teachers based on student scores. These are schools that have determined the high-stakes testing environment is too stressful for their teachers and students. It would be valuable information to know what criteria they use to evaluate a teacher's instructional quality, curriculum used to teach the students, and assessments used to measure student success and growth. Furthermore, examining districts that choose this path and whether or not

they compare student performance on the state STAAR or other state standardized assessment to their district assessments and what the results tell them.

The second recommendation is investigating the relationship between assistant superintendents of curriculum and instruction and district principals, especially, the collaboration or lack of collaboration concerning the implementation of new programs or initiatives. Central office leaders should require that principals are involved in the collaboration of goals, programs, or initiatives because principals are key in making sure everything is implemented (Marzano & Waters, 2009). District leaders and principals may not always agree when it relates to a program or initiative the district wants to implement. However, if they have a clear district vision, they should be able to meet in the middle. Having more insight as to how some districts worked through these types of issues is pertinent as it is a source of frustration for some ASCIs.

The third recommendation addresses the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). ESSA reviews preceding years and concentrates on progress. The progress measures include college and career ready, elevated academic standards, aims for equity with high needs and disadvantaged students, supports excellence in preschools, and maintains accountability (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). However, states are devising their own plans and those goals will either be approved or disapproved by the U. S. Department of Education. The goals are to be set and are considered effective beginning in 2017-2018 (Klein, 2016). Although states do not have to employ an inclusive number or an A-F grading scale, Texas has already released preliminary A-F

grading scales for districts and campuses. Described as a work in progress, the official A-F accountability ratings begin August of 2018 (Texas Education Agency, 2017).

A study to investigate how ESSA affects districts leaders, campus leaders, and teachers is crucial. Also, a good explanation of the formulas for the A-F grading system and the results from this accountability system will be equally beneficial not only for districts across Texas, but for other states as well.

A fourth recommendation is to examine current preparation programs, which would encompass course work for aspiring executive directors of curriculum and instruction or ASCIs. The study would include an in-depth analysis of the course work offered and whether these programs offer face-to-face course meetings or are they strictly online.

A fifth and final recommendation is an investigation into current school policy as it relates to the position and responsibilities of the assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction. Examine local policy on the role of the ASCI or deputy superintendent of teaching and learning in several districts and compare the similarities and differences. Also, providing some background information on the process the school board goes through when writing local policy would be helpful.

Final Reflections

Standardized testing has definitely changed the course of education in Texas. The pressure and stress teachers feel is palatable at times. When I visit classrooms, I am reminded of how hard and demanding it is to be a teacher. Many teachers feel they do not have time for an in-depth read of a great piece literature because they have to prepare

their students using passage after passage to build stamina for the standardized test coming at the end of the year.

I still see great teaching going on the in classrooms and while I do not agree with standardized testing, that is the charge from the state. Until teachers exercise their right to vote and send a powerful message to Austin that they want to do what is right for students, standardized testing and the high-stakes testing environment will continue. I do think assessments are important to ensure students are learning valuable skills and lessons that will enable them to become a productive member of a continually changing global society. In the meantime, I will do my best to support students, teachers, principals, central office administrators, and all other stakeholders because I love the district in which I work. It is a great district with phenomenal leaders, who I continue to learn from and collaborate with on a daily basis.

As I reflect over the research and all of my experiences since I began the study, I am very appreciative of the interviewees who decided to participate. Their candidness, wisdom, and educational experiences and opinions are invaluable. My hope is that a future researcher will select one of my recommendations for future studies to benefit educators and students for years to come.

In the future, I would like to acquire a position as a curriculum director or assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction. What I learned from this study will certainly help me in that endeavor. However, the reason I want to obtain one of these positions is to ultimately help others including, students, teachers, principals,

specialists, curriculum coaches, central office personnel and all colleagues in the field of education.

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APPENDIX A

Sample Letter to Assistant Superintendents of Curriculum and Instruction

3/27/17

Dear XXXX,

My name is Julie Madden, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Secondary Education and Educational Leadership at Stephen F. Austin State University. I would like to request your support in my qualitative multi case study on the role of the Assistant Superintendents of Curriculum and Instruction and best practices they use for school reform efforts, instructional improvement, and enhanced student achievement in a high-stakes testing environment.

My study will involve three interviews with you as the Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction, which will be at your convenience and should last no longer than an hour. All information collected during interviews will be treated with complete confidentiality. Pseudonyms will be used for the name of the school and or sites that participate and all interviewees will be able to review all transcriptions for accuracy.

If you choose to give your consent to participate, please sign below. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact The Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at 936-468-6606 and Dr. Pauline Sampson at sampsonp@sfasu.edu or Julie Madden at 936-635-0548 or by email at jmadden@lufkinisd.org

Sincerely,

Julie Madden

APPENDIX B

Participant Informed Consent

"I have read the letter and understand the purpose of this study. I understand that my participation is completely voluntary and that I may choose not to be a part of this study at any time. I understand that I am guaranteed that my name or my school district's name will not be named in the study and all responses will be kept confidential. All data will be held in a locked cabinet at the researcher's home. I have read the information and requirements and I agree to participate in this research".

Any concerns regarding this research may be addressed to The Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, Stephen F. Austin State University at 936.468.6606.

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Signature of the Researcher (Date) Signature of the Participant (Date)

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APPENDIX C

Three Tier Interview Protocol

Interview Questions:

The three tiers of interview questions are listed by levels and will be used for each participant.

Tier One Questions:

1. How would you describe becoming interested in the field of education?
2. What positions have you held in the field of education?
3. What inspired you to move into the position of Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction (ASCI) and many years of experience do you have as ASCI?
4. What, if any, challenges did you experience in your journey?
5. How did you overcome those challenges, if any?

Tier Two Questions:

1. How would you describe your role and responsibilities as an (ASCI)?
2. How do you view your work in the district concerning your relationships with directors, principals, and teachers?
3. How do you view your work in the district concerning your effectiveness with directors, principals, and teachers?
4. How do you go about implementing new programs or initiatives?
5. What educational programs or initiatives have you implemented to improve student achievement?

Tier Three Questions:

1. How do you work to sustain a program or initiative that you have implemented?
2. What challenges have your encountered working with teachers in a high-stakes testing environment?
3. What best practices do you use to support teachers in a high-stakes testing environment?

VITA

Julie Madden graduated from Nacogdoches High School in 1985. She attended Stephen F. Austin State University where she earned her Bachelor degree in Interdisciplinary Studies in 2001. She began her teaching career in the Kennard Independent School District where she taught for four years. In 2006, she accepted a teaching position in Lufkin Independent School District where she taught for seven years. Julie returned to Stephen F. Austin State University in 2012 to pursue her Master of Educational Leadership. Upon completion of her Master's degree, she obtained a Curriculum Instructional Coach position in Nacogdoches Independent School District. In the summer of 2014, she was accepted into the doctoral program at Stephen F. Austin State University and earned her Ed.D. in December 2017. She currently serves as a District Literacy Specialist in Lufkin Independent School District.

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