POLICY IMPLEMENTATION OF STATE GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS IN A RURAL HIGH SCHOOL

by

COLBERT LADEL LOVETT

(Under the Direction of Elizabeth H. DeBray)

ABSTRACT

"Policy Implementation of State Graduation Requirements in a Rural High School" is a case study of how state education policy reform on student achievement is perceived, understood and implemented in a high minority, high poverty, Title I high school in rural southeast Georgia. This case study examines the nexus between the promulgation of a major policy change by the Georgia Department of Education (DOE)—the revised Georgia High School Graduation rule and the Georgia Performance Standard (GPS) curriculum—and how that policy is altered or embraced by the culture and context of a rural school district in southeast Georgia. Fieldwork was conducted on site during the 2009–2010 school year. The case study site was purposefully selected via convenience sample. Interview subjects were identified via snowball sampling techniques (Patton, 2002). In-depth interviews of 23 study participants were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. In addition to interview data, data sources also included video and document analysis. Data were analyzed via the constant-comparative method of data analysis (Merriam, 2002). Primary findings revealed that teachers' perception of new state policies focused on raised academic achievement were shaped by a philosophy of "racialized" tracking and associated intangible contextual factors within the school and district.

INDEX WORDS: Educational accountability, Standards-based education reform, High-stakes testing, Educational policy implementation, Academic achievement, African Americans – Education, Track system (Education) United States, School integration – United States

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my beloved mother and father, Ruth and Clifford Lovett who championed education from the earliest days of my youth, and my late Aunt, Freddie Booker, who supported my collegiate aspirations. It is also dedicated to my family inner-circle: my beloved wife, Pat who endured the stresses of supporting me through the last three years of dissertation research; daughter, Lauren whose achievement and independence gave me the freedom to focus on academics at mid-life; stepson, Nigel whose career focus revitalized my quest for entrepreneurship; sister, Linda (Atiba) who always had an encouraging word and a warm meal to share at their house; brothers Dweldon (Darlene) and Edwin (Mae)—my rocks; and Ayana for sharing teacher war stories and inspiring theories.

I also dedicate this work to the generations of teachers in our family and their enduring legacy of achievement: To Cousin Sarah as she embarks upon her mission to South Africa ("Legacy check"); our Sisters Lois, Iradell, Mary, and Marion (all teachers); Cousin Jean, whose cards were the gentle reminders that kept me focused, and in honor of Grand Ethel Lovette, Cousin Doris Roberts McGee; Ms. Maudie Powell, Cousin Alberta Royal Warren and Sister Fields.

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CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Now is the time to finally meet our moral obligation to provide every child a world-class education, because it will take nothing less to compete in the global economy. Michelle and I are only here tonight because we were given a chance at an education. And I will not settle for an America where some kids don't have that chance. I'll invest in early childhood education. I'll recruit an army of new teachers, and pay them higher salaries and give them more support. And in exchange, I'll ask for higher standards and more accountability. And we will keep our promise to every young American - if you commit to serving your community or your country, we will make sure you can afford a college education.

U.S. Sen. Barrack Obama (2008)

There has been considerable public discourse about the need for raising standards in American education to ensure our children and future generations (the workers of tomorrow) remain competitive in the global labor marketplace. Various stakeholders have argued the merits of federal initiatives designed to correct social injustice or boost student achievement through greater accountability over teaching and learning. A considerable ground swell of support has emerged for school accountability reform, including that of business leaders, the Obama, Bush and Clinton administrations and many of the nation's governors. Still, several writers (Apple, 2001; Au, 2009; Carlson & Planty, 2012; McMillian, 2003; McNeil, Coppola, Radigan, & Vasquez Heilig, 2008; Meier & Wood, 2004; Nichols, Glass, & Berliner, 2006; Nichols & Berliner, 2006; Nichols, Glass, & Berliner, 2012; Nichols & Berliner, 2007; Rice & Roellke, 2009; Valenzuela, 2005) have expressed concern over the potential negative impact of increased

state-mandated high-stakes test-centered learning and graduation requirements on students in urban and suburban schools.

However, little is known about the impact of high-stakes accountability policies on rural school districts and schools, particularly in parts of rural South Georgia where over time a unique socioeconomic environment has arisen as the context within which most public schools are embedded (Roscigno & Crowley, 2001; Roscigno, Tomaskovic-Devey, & Crowley, 2006). This region's distinct demography networked with scattered patches of generational poverty, peppered with a rigid nucleus of inherited wealth and power, amid a checkered past of racial harmony punctuated by intolerance (or racial disharmony) makes for a unique cultural and social milieu that underpins daily life and public schooling. The response of rural school districts in this descriptive context to heightened state high school graduation policy initiatives has not been thoroughly documented nor investigated.

In recent years, Georgia has moved aggressively to revamp its K-12 Quality Core Curriculum to reflect new performance standards. During the period encompassed by this study the State sought to align the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) curriculum to state standardized test and the Georgia High School Graduation Test. Now it is in the process of upgrading to the Common Core of State Standards curriculum. For the State's educators, of late, their task is to meet an ever moving performance-based bureaucratic accountability target.

The establishment of state and national education standards appears now an irreversible reality (a fait accompli). Given the current climate of accountability reform, for education practitioners in schools and classrooms the question is no longer whether or not we should have broad-based educational standards or even what those standards should be, though culturally-based value judgments are inherent to curriculum choices. Indeed the central question posed by the standards-based education reform movement today in Georgia and across this country is how should school systems, schools, teachers and ultimately students be held accountable for performance (including high-stakes for high school students) (Apple, 2001; Au, 2009; Fuhrman, 2003; McDermott, 2011; Rice & Roellke, 2009; Siskin, 2003).

Statement of the Problem

Late in the first decade of the new millennium, in an effort to comply with federal school accountability directives under No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (United States Congress, House Committee on Education and the Workforce, 2002), the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, as well as to boost academic achievement statewide, the Georgia Department of Education began rolling out new curriculum standards called the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS). These new standards were part of a new graduation rule, 160-4-2-48 or IHF (6). Enacted by the Georgia State Board of Education on September 13, 2007(Cardoza, 2007a), IHF (6) also set new minimum graduation credit requirements for the high school diploma. IHF (6) became effective with the entering freshman high school class of the 2008-2009 academic year. Georgia's first cohort of 9th graders subject to these new standards comprised the recently graduating senior class of May, 2012.

From the time the class of 2012 entered high school their trajectory from the carefree, yet tentative, environs of middle school to the ranks of informed high school graduate would be closely monitored by their school's teachers and administrators as big changes lay ahead for the entire school community. The story of how their high school teachers and administrators responded to the policy implementation challenges encountered along the way lies at the center of this qualitative case study about how state education policy makes its way from the decisions of the State Board, meeting in Atlanta, to instructional delivery in the classrooms of a rural high school in Southeast Georgia.

The new graduation rule and its associated curriculum changes, the GPS, were designed to guarantee that Georgia's secondary students graduate from high school both prepared for college and "job-ready" with the necessary employability skills to enter the modern high-tech workforce. In the words of then State Superintendent of Schools Kathy Cox, "we are no longer setting high expectations for just some students. As a state, we are saying that ALL students can learn at a high level" (Tofig, 2007). The new graduation rule set higher state minimums in the number of credits (Carnegie units) required to earn a high school diploma (23 credits) and increased the number of math and science courses required to

four credits each. Of course, local boards of education were given the flexibility to exceed these minimums, if they so desire.

Since this study was undertaken, Georgia has embarked upon implementing the Common Core State Standards Initiative. Proposed by the National Governors Association (NGA) and Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), the Common Core officially ties Georgia's evolving K-12 education reforms to a national standard voluntarily endorsed by the states rather than one authoritatively set down by the federal government. NGA and CCSSO are leading this effort in partnership with Achieve, Inc., ACT and the College Board. Their strategy is to develop research and evidenced-based, internationally benchmarked standards in English language arts and mathematics for grades K-12 that support college and vocational entrance requirements. They reported that 49 states, Washington, D.C., and two U.S. territories had signed-on to the Common Core State Standards as of January, 2013 (NGA Center for Best Practices, 2013).

Of course each new round of reforms, regardless of origin, brings with it additional expectations and new implementation challenges for school districts, administrators, and teachers. Moreover, the local response to reform is both influenced and constrained by the socio economic, cultural, and political context in which the school operates. School leaders and faculty may feel pressed as they seek to reconcile the tension in two sometimes conflicting job responsibilities: 1) a duty to integrate the edicts of education reform(s) into traditional routines of classroom and school life; with 2) an expectation to uphold the mores of the local school community or institutional setting ("this is how we do things around here"). The strain of their dilemma may be further exaggerated by the weight of their personal convictions about which pedagogical methods best serve the interest of their students. Local factors (school size, intra-organizational relations, commitment, capacity, and institutional complexity) can shape reactions to policy and change reforms (McLaughlin, 1987; Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

Historically, control of America's public schools has resided with local communities. Since the 1970's funding for local schools has increasingly come from the states. Commensurate with that shift in funding has come the call for increased state accountability (Gordon, 2007; McDermott, 2007). Malen

(Malen, 2004; Malen, 2003) characterized the problem as our lack of clear understanding of the extent of impact of "state activism," on local school district praxis and the consequences thereof. That problem has been brought about by a gradual shift in the state-local power equilibrium toward a state centered education governance model. Consequently, Malen noted, the question of whether or not state activism bears a relatively strong or weak effect on local school district praxis warrants further study.

Sipple, Killeen and Monk (2004) employed an institutional framework to examine the impact of standards-based reform on local school district practice. Their New York state case study produced questions concerning which contextual elements impart form to local responses, and how equitable or inequitable statewide reforms may be given differential effects of socioeconomic, cultural, political and other factors that impinge upon opportunities and capabilities to respond at the local level. A cause for concern reported by Sipple et al. was the finding that school principals in four out of five districts routinely shift so called "at risk" students to GED programs to avoid reporting the student as a "drop out."

State activism results in either compliance or discrepancies at the local level with respect to the actions engendered by policies promulgated by state governing boards. From the vantage point of the school district and its' broader rural community, these discrepancies or conformities, as the case may be, will in all likelihood reflect the way the standards-based reform is interpreted and implemented at the local level. The reception of the state mandate which is moderated by the local school district context has not been thoroughly investigated. We are yet to explore those subtle, but significant, effects of local school context and culture that lead to differing interpretations of state policy mandates.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of my study is to understand the interpretation and implementation of externally mandated accountability policies at the district and school levels, with particular attention to the role of community and historical context in the shaping of interpretations and implementation. This study examines implementation within a single rural South Georgia high school under standards-based reform. The object of this case study is to understand how state education policy on school reform is moderated or diffracted at the local level. This study was guided by the following research questions:

1) How do people understand the policy?
2) How is that understanding shaped by their environment and their understanding of their environment?
3) What were the actions taken?

This study is not focused on outcomes, though such understandings can be illuminating when one attempts to assess the meanings and interpretations underlying metrics used to evaluate public schools in today's high-stakes (high-stress) test-driven learning environment. My objective is not to evaluate the impact of accountability on student achievement (the State is implementing measures to do that), but rather to understand how such policies change the normative structure within a rural high school and the impact thereof on the activities and understandings of teachers, school and district administrators (Gross & Supovitz, 2005).

Consistent with the prevailing scholarship on K-12 policy implementation reform (McLendon & Cohen-Vogel, 2008) my study analyzes state level education policy (state content and performance standards and the new graduation rule) in relation to the capacity needs of a rural school district. It assesses the capability of the State department of education to deliver assistance as needed to enable and sustain local implementation. In so doing, it weighs the capacity of the school and examines the compatibility (or lack thereof) that exists between the school's system of internal accountability and the external accountability pressure coming from the State's bureaucracy outside the school.

These challenges of implementation endure even as new graduation standards are promulgated by states to administrators and teachers for subsequent generations of students. Thus knowledge and understandings gained about the intricacies of rural-school and school-board to state interaction in the carrying out of state education policy directives remains relevant to the enduring educational policy debate. Such information will be of interest to school administrators, local school board officials, and state education leaders alike.

Significance and Implications of the Study

The Georgia State Department of Education's moves to embrace the new Common Core of State Standards and Georgia voters' sanctioning of charter schools in 2012 signaled a quickening of the pace of school reform. This case study exams but a single instance of implementation of one revised curriculum standard (graduation rule and GPS) in a series of school reforms in recent years that are bringing about sweeping change in Georgia's public education system. It seeks to better understand the impact of such policies on those charged with implementing them in the classroom.

As previously stated, in September, 2007, Georgia's State Board of Education unanimously approved a new and, at that time, more rigorous High School Graduation Rule, 16-4-2-.48, or IHF (6) (Tofig, 2007). This new rule required that students entering 9th grade for the first time in the fall 2008-2009 school year and subsequent years complete 4 units of math and 4 units of science, in addition to the 4 units of English and 3 units of social studies that had been required under the previous graduation rule. Corresponding with the increase in specific requirements within core subjects, students are required by the new rule to complete a career pathway from a menu of Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education (CTAE) course offerings, or a foreign language or music concentration.

The new grad rule also eliminated tiered diploma options that had existed in Georgia as tech-prep and college-prep diploma tracks under the old Quality Core Curriculum (QCC) established by the Quality Basic Education Act of 1985 (Mewborn, 2013), and replaced them with a single college-prep diploma under the new Georgia Performance Standard. There is now planned migration to the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards, adopted July 8, 2010 by the Georgia Department of Education. These new performance standards represent a significant curriculum change because they remove the legitimating force of law ascribed to dual tracks or tracking under the guise of academic curriculum differentiation, choice and merit, which has allowed a less than optimum (or in some cases mediocre) education to be meted out to some students since desegregation was outlawed by the federal courts in the 1960's and 70's (Oakes, 2005). However, as we shall see, an advanced placement or "AP" track still exists for gifted students as an option under the new curriculum.

IHF (6) marked a major step forward for public education in Georgia which had progressed through several developmental reforms in the years between formation of the Georgia Department of Education (DOE) in 1870 and integration of the schools during the civil rights era. The State's first major educational reform law, the Quality Basic Education Act of 1985 (QBE), attempted to equalize funding between poor rural and urban districts, raised standards for teacher certification and, among other things, for the first time set minimum competencies in core subjects for high school graduation (Grant, 2007). These new more rigorous standards ushered in by IHF (6) were in no small part initiated with a bit of coaxing from the federal government in as much as Georgia, like other states, is subject to the influence of the "No Child Left Behind (NCLB)" law (United States Congress, House Committee on Education and the Workforce, 2002), the 2002 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 (Congress of, 1965). NCLB mandates test-based performance accountability in the U.S. as a part of each state's accountability plan (Riddle, 2011). The plan, among other features, sets annual yearly progress targets and stakes for Title 1 schools that fail to meet AYP.

But even with the backdrop of federal mandates and inducements by means of programs stretching back over forty years (ESEA in 1965, and its "Title I" programs, Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) of 1994, Goals 2000, NCLB) to finally arrive at a point in time in which Georgia's chief public school official, for the first time in the State's history, would publicly acknowledge and articulate the State's obligation to provide "ALL" students with a high quality public education was a significant turning point (Cardoza, 2007b; Tofig, 2007).

Setting or Focus of Research

"Policy Implementation of State Graduation Requirements in a Rural High School" is a case study of how state policy reform on student achievement is perceived, understood and implemented in a high minority, high poverty, Title I high school in rural southeast Georgia. The 2010 U.S. Census (Groves, 2010) defines rural as "…all population, housing, and territory not included within an urban area" with the term "urban area" being reserved for those places having 50,000 or more residents

including both “urbanized areas” (50,000 plus inhabitants) and “urban clusters” (2,500 to less than 50,000 inhabitants).

Rurality within the context of this study is broadly defined as a nonurban school district whose geographic borders are the same as that of its host county, and whose economic, social, and cultural milieu is tied to a predominantly agrarian base. It has limited industry, most of which is situated within a centrally located small town, its county seat – an urban cluster, and a few incorporated villages dispersed within the county’s borders. With the exception of these concentrations of residents, the majority of the county’s or districts inhabitants of less than 15,000 are relatively thinly spread throughout its geography on Georgia’s inland coastal plain region.

The community has made modest efforts to transition to textiles and more industrial technology oriented business over the last fifty years with mixed success. While some residents are well to do business, farm and land owners, poverty still maintains a stringent hold over many local families. According to NCES data, 75% of local high school students were eligible for free or reduced price lunch program as of the 2011-2012 school year (National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), ies, 2012).

The district has one high school, one middle school, and one elementary school, all located within the county seat. As of the 2011-2012 school year, the racial makeup of the high school’s student population (grades 9-12) was evenly distributed between black or African American (384) students who represent 56.6% of the student body and white (360) students who represent 47.4% respectively. Hispanics (11) comprise 1.4% of the student population with the remaining 0.5% being Asian (1) or persons of two or more races (3).

Georgia State Board’s Theory of Action

Policy evaluators typically distinguish programs in terms of their ‘theories of action’, what the policy hopes to achieve in outcomes for the program (McDermott, 2011). In standards-based reform, student test score results have been chosen as the medium for measuring school district and school performance. Thus states have translated this focus on student achievement into policies that hold schools and school districts accountable for their student’s performance (J. O'Day, 2004).

Upon offering the new graduation rule before the State Board for a vote of passage on September 12, 2007, then Georgia State Superintendent of Schools, Cathy Cox, (Cardoza, 2007b) argued that all students need a "core knowledge set" whether they choose to pursue postsecondary education after high school or enter the workplace. She stressed that the existing tech-prep and college-prep curriculum distinctions (tracks) that had been in place in Georgia for several years represented an "artificial separation" that was dysfunctional and that it was clear "among all constituencies, including the students" that it was not working. She further acknowledged that the "perception is that the non-academic or non-college-prep diploma is of no real value." Thus a singular academically rigorous high school diploma curriculum standard should be put in place to correct this deficiency.

This new curriculum standard raised the floor so that, if implemented with fidelity at the local level, every Georgia child would now have the chance for a quality basic education regardless of family background, ethnicity or financial means. The question left unanswered was, to what extent could legislative intent, state board governance objectives and fidelity of implementation be assured as officials sought to install these new graduation requirements in each of Georgia's 181 public school districts?

The State's theory of action holds that a system of testing and accountability maintained through higher standards will encourage all stakeholders (students, parents, teachers and school officials) to focus on outcomes. The State's theory posits that all students will learn more and earn better grades when they take rigorous college preparatory courses because research and experience shows that students are more likely to succeed when they are expected to do so and more likely to fail when they are not. It is expressed in the ideal that if we set higher expectations, students will extend their reach to get a better education, irrespective of whether they choose to pursue postsecondary education, enter the workforce or the military after high school graduation (Georgia Department of Education, 2010).

However, my findings suggest the necessary cultural changes in relationships, school capacity, and motivation, given this high school's institutional context, are not occurring. Although *structural changes,* as a result of implementing the new policy, have enabled some short-term achievement gains, changes in beliefs and behaviors necessary for full realization of the State's theory of action are not being

fostered (Fullan, 2007). I maintain that the school's *capacity* (DeBray, Parson, & Avila, 2003; Sielke, 2011) to authentically implement state policy reform is constrained by, among other factors, internal alignment of responsibility, expectations, and internal accountability mechanisms (Elmore, 2004) inconsistent with the ideal of raised expectations of achievement for all students envisioned in the new graduation requirements. In other words, the school's internal accountability or capacity is not aligned with the external accountability articulated in the goals set forth in the State's theory of action.

Overview of the Research Procedures

This research seeks to understand how implementation occurs in a single rural Georgia high school and school district under State Board of Education (DOE) policies enacting standards-based educational reform, and how that is shaped by its environment, including the interpretation and enactment of policy at the district and school level. The district that was selected for this study resides in Georgia's First District Regional Education Service Area (First District RESA). First District RESA lies in the Southeastern quadrant of the State along the Savannah River and the Atlantic Ocean. However, the name of the school and district were masked and are not identified in the study.

In my study, I look at policy implementation in this single district under standards-based reform. I look at it within the context of the larger community. I describe the larger community context and its influence on the district and school environment, and in the end I connect those findings back to what was already known about the implementation of accountability standards at the school and district level. Thus, my investigation focuses on understanding the interpretation and implementation of externally mandated policies at the district and school levels, with particular attention to the role of community and historical context in the shaping of interpretations and implementation. The following research questions guided my study:

1) How do people understand the policy?
2) How is that understanding shaped by their environment and their understanding of their environment?
3) What were the actions taken?

This case study examines the nexus between the promulgation of a major policy change on the part of Georgia Department of Education (DOE) – the Georgia High School Graduation rule and the Georgia Performance Standard (GPS) curriculum – and how that policy is altered or embraced by the culture and context of a rural school district in southeast Georgia. Thus, the object of this case study is to understand how and in what ways state policy is moderated or diffracted at the local level. It focuses on the bridge between the enactment of policy at DOE in Atlanta and implementation at the local level that precedes and predisposes various outcomes. Which is to say, what could we expect in terms of potential outcomes and how does making sense of these policies at these different levels (local in relation to and as an extension of state policy) contribute toward outcomes? Although investigation of student academic outcomes is beyond the scope of this study, I focus on aspects of implementation that could impact whether students meet DOE goals.

I begin by first describing Georgia DOE's state high school minimum graduation credits requirement reform adopted in September of 2007. This description encapsulates the State's *theory of action* or prospective intent and model for implementation of the promulgated reforms. It reflects how local beliefs and actions should change as a result of this new performance accountability policy. Weick (1995) notes that as an act of "sensemaking" within organizations theories of action "filter and interpret signals from the environment and tie stimuli to responses" (p. 121). At its core, this is a study about sensemaking in educational organizations (high schools) in a climate of change brought on by standards-based reform. This study seeks to test the State's theory of action by examining the sensemaking that goes on among school and district leaders as well as school faculty as they seek to implement the State Board's directive. This study is situated within the education policy implementation literature (Weatherley & Lipsky, 1977). It draws upon a performance accountability framework characterized by an expanding press for ever higher levels of achievement in our nation's public schools, and the need to demonstrate competence through accountability systems rooted in student testing coupled to state content and performance standards (DeBray et al., 2003; Gross & Supovitz, 2005; Linn, 2004; McNeil et al., 2008; Siskin, 2003; Valenzuela, 2005)

The research subject was chosen via opportunity sampling. I gained access to the research sight through a close friend and family member who was employed in an administrative role with the subject school system. This individual did not participate in the study, however.

Participant observation strategies employed in this case study focused on interview strategies with review of relevant archival documents where available. Field work was conducted over a period of five months during the 2009 – 2010 school year within the subject school district and high school, with several additional interviews of community and state leaders conducted throughout the following year (2011). Research methods are more fully described in the methods chapter that follows (Wolcott, 2001).

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter 1 explained the purpose of the study and provided an overview of the research topic, research question, and plan of research. Chapter 2 provides a review of the relevant literature on standards-based reform. A range of educational accountability policy literature related to implementation of state graduation requirements in high schools was reviewed for this study. Together the selected literatures illuminate aspects of the standards-based reform policy implementation debate while situating the discussion within the context of national, state, and regional education policy and politics.

Chapter 3 describes the research methods employed. Chapter 4 provides an overview of Georgia's secondary education policy environment with particular attention to the interplay between state and local school finance issues. Chapter 5 situates the case study within the context of the local community in which the school district and high school reside. Findings are presented and discussed in Chapter 6. Chapter 7 presents a summation with conclusions and recommendations drawn from my research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

The purpose of my study is to understand the interpretation and implementation of externally mandated accountability policies at the district and school levels, with particular attention to the role of community and historical context in the shaping of interpretations and implementation. This study examines implementation within a single rural South Georgia high school under standards-based reform. The object of this case study is to understand how state education policy on school reform is moderated or diffracted at the local level. This study was guided by the following research questions:

1) How do people understand the policy?
2) How is that understanding shaped by their environment and their understanding of their environment?
3) What were the actions taken?

The study is informed by the education policy implementation literature which looks at the local realization of externally imposed change as an act of "sensemaking" (Cooper, Fusarelli, & Randall, 2004; Fullan, 2007; Madsen, 1994; Weatherley & Lipsky, 1977; Weick, 1995). Further explanatory power of how teachers and administrators respond to accountability pressures may be found in Weatherly & Lipsky's (1977) theory on *street-level bureaucrats*. These theories along with a working theory of school internal accountability (Abelman, Elmore, Even, Kenyon, & Marshall, 2004; DeBray et al., 2003) are subsumed under the outcomes-based bureaucratic accountability (Gross & Supovitz, 2005; J. O'Day, 2004) framework expounded upon in the Building a Conceptual Framework section of this chapter.

Keywords or search strings were devised to investigate underlying topics related to the research problem and purpose. These keywords or search strings were then employed to probe the related literatures via the relevant literature databases (Ebscohost, etc.). Together these literatures impinge upon education politics and policy surrounding implementation of state graduation requirements in rural high

schools. Among the search strings employed were: high-stakes testing; high school exit examinations; high school graduation tests; accountability; educational accountability; policy implementation, performance-based accountability, standards-based reform, educational reform; learning and change; state standards; instructional policy and standards-based reform; reform and teaching, state-mandated testing and teaching; rural schools and standards-based reform; No Child Left Behind; African American and Latina/o students and tracking; African American and Latina/o students and testing; Hispanic Americans – Education – Texas; educational accountability -- Texas

Background and Organization of the Literature

Since the early 1980's there has been considerable discussion in the literature about the attributes associated with, and potential repercussions from, raising standards in American K-12 public education. Research has mostly focused on the impact of such policies on urban and suburban schools and the challenges of implementation. The response of local rural school districts in the South to heightened state high school graduation policy initiatives has not been thoroughly documented or analyzed.

With each new reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 the implementation debate intensifies. Such was the case with Congress's passing of the Clinton era Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) of 1994, S.1513 (P.L. 103-382; 108 Stat. 3518) supported by the Goals 2000 Educate America Act (P.L. 103-227; 108 Stat. 125) also enacted in 1994, and continuing with the most recent ESEA reauthorization under the Bush administration by way of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. Various stakeholder groups have argued pro and con the merits of these and other federal and state policy initiatives designed to correct social injustice or boost student achievement. Political ideology notwithstanding, research into our experience with policy implementation over the last half century has revealed that any public policy legislation is only as good or effective as our ability to implement it (Birkland, 2011; McLaughlin, 1987; Pressman, Wildavsky, & Oakland Project, 1973; Weatherley & Lipsky, 1977)

Having extensively reviewed the literature on this subject, the following three questions encompass my synopsis of the central issues posed by the American educational standards reform debate.

These questions are unanswerable, of course, but thinking about them may help crystalize one's thinking about the issues involved:

1) How do we appropriately challenge and support our public schools to set uniformly high expectations for all students, as well as generate results (outcomes) competitive on a world stage? This by way of deductive reasoning dissects into debate about what should be the just goals and aims of federal and state education policy legislation; and how should state and local education agencies -- school systems and schools – administrators, teachers and ultimately students be held accountable for performance (including, in some cases, high-stakes for high school students) (Au, 2009; Fuhrman & Elmore, 2004; McDermott, 2011; Rice & Roellke, 2009; Siskin, 2003)?
2) Given that public (k-12) education in America is carried-out by fifty sovereign states with broad socioeconomic diversity within states, how does the nation ensure the necessary and equitable provision of resources (fiscal, social and cultural capital) in every locale of the country to bridge the gap between education policy objectives and conventional practice (Cohen, Moffitt, & Goldin, 2007)?
3) How can policy makers ensure consistent implementation of reforms in the face of local resource constraints and divergent expectations: about resource equity and adequacy, about acceptable standards of curriculum content, and about appropriate academic performance?

These three questions integral to the education reform debate confound and bedevil the American electorate and the policymakers. Tyack and Cuban (Tyack & Cuban, 1995) suggest education reform has become but the latest manifestation of the now century-old debate about the meaning and method of achieving equal educational opportunity in our society. How do we gain agreement on the meaning of equity in our time at each level of the public education system, including and most importantly in the classroom (McDermott, 2007; McDermott, 2011)?

McDermott (McDermott, 2011) illuminates that standards-based reform was an outgrowth of "effective schools" research done in the 1970's focused on identifying best practices in hope that these could be replicated even in the face of resistance to integration by conservative groups defending

neighborhood schools and attenuate resources available to schools in poor neighborhoods. Conservatives seized upon an opportunity to coopt effective schools research to their policy stream (Kingdon, 1995). A *Nation at Risk*, released in 1983 by the Reagan Administration, sought to change the equity debate from a focus on equality of access and inputs to a focus on outcomes and performance. It served to set up the political climate for an eventual redefinition of equity in schools based on merit, or standards-based reform, deflecting attention from the nation's wearying commitment toward school integration and busing which in some urban areas had begun to show signs of inertia since the zenith of the civil rights movement.

Though the equity debate has shifted under standards-based reform, issues surrounding equality of opportunity continue to frustrate succeeding generations of American parents and educators. Beneath the call for national goals and standards lies the belief that educational improvement must somehow be undergirded by demanding standards; that academic subjects must take precedence over all others; and that today's students must perform at significantly higher levels than their predecessors as measured on standardized test (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Equity has been redefined by the conservative elite, and access has been relegated to ancillary status as a national education priority. Still important, but not the overriding issue it once appeared to be.

In the following chapter, I provide some historic background on educational reform and place the discussion within the context of national and state education policy and politics. I then summarize the major theories underpinning the standards-based reform policy implementation debate, by this means constructing a platform upon which to build a framework for my research.

National Educational Accountability Policy Context

How did the push for standards come about? The American public-high-school progressed from the one room rural school house of the late 19th century to the large urban comprehensive high school of today. Concurrently, the story of secondary education in America has evolved over the last 100 years from an emphasis on liberal arts education for the elites to college-prep for the masses (Mirel, 2006; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Along the way there has been a continuing philosophical debate about what

should rightly be the aims and purposes of secondary education, thorough grounding in the liberal arts verses diversification (depth verses breadth).

What should be the content of the secondary curriculum? What knowledge and skill should a high school diploma impart? Should students receive intensive preparation in core subjects (mathematics, language arts, and sciences), akin to the college preparatory curriculum proposed by the National Education Association's (NEA) Committee of Ten in the 1890s; or should they receive broader exposure to generalized areas of interest, tantamount to the differentiated curriculum advanced by another NEA group, the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education in 1918 (Mirel, 2006).

According to Mirel (2006) the differentiated curriculum philosophy flourished for much of the 20th century, reaffirmed by James Conant in 1959 in his report, "The American High School Today" (p. 19) in which Conant defended differentiation as central to the American comprehensive high school's accomplishment of its democratic mission. This philosophy is still relied upon today by some as a tenant of public education. In its extreme, the differentiated curriculum idea eventually led to and was used to justify tracking (Mirel).

These opposing philosophical views continue to feed what has become a nationwide discourse focused on addressing the above questions with answers that work for students and schools in the digital age. States are developing new k-12 curriculum standards, including minimum graduation credit requirements, and requiring local school districts to conform to those standards. Until recently some argued that intensive preparation in what are called "STEM" subjects – science, technology, engineering and math – was only necessary for those who would go on to college. However, in the last few years there has been a move afoot to declare STEM essential to the preparation of those who would enter the workplace directly from high school as well. Such is the case in Georgia where a new high school graduation rule developed by the State Board of Education went into effect with the entering freshman class of fall 2008. I explore this further in my discussion of Georgia's education policy context in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

As previously stated, in the late 1800s the emphasis in American secondary education was on the liberal arts curriculum, though only the privileged few had the means to attend. But as access to high school expanded in the early twentieth century, at least in urban centers for those of European descent, the concept of individual course preference emerged. Between the Great Depression and World War II priorities shifted toward keeping young people in school so as to minimize the impact of their numbers on the workforce in a depressed economy. The curriculum became more differentiated and less challenging over time, a trend that would continue until the 1980s (Mirel, 2006; Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

Since the advent of President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society programs in the 1960s, national education policy has been of growing significance to the states. In the preceding decade, Russia's launching of Sputnik in October 1957 drew considerable attention to U.S. competiveness, spawned increased spending on scientific research and greater emphasis on math science education. The civil rights era of the 1960s would generate increased debate about access, and graduation from high school became the national metric for secondary education achievement. Given the United States' strong position as an economic and military world power, at that time, there was little national concern about the relative merit of a U.S. high school education in comparison to secondary education in other leading economies.

The Reagan Revolution

Upon the dawning of the Reagan era in 1980, a more conservative national climate began to take hold. A U.S. Department of Education sponsored research report, *A Nation at Risk (U.S. Department of Education, National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983),* by the Reagan administration appointed National Commission on Excellence in Education in 1983 brought focused attention to allegedly alarming shortcomings of American secondary education, as they related to waning American productivity and the declining US position among world economic powers (Kaestle & Lodewick, 2007). Americans were put on notice that our national preeminence in public education was in jeopardy. The commission claimed that America's system of public education had retreated from many of the gains made during the era of Sputnik, when the U.S. responded to the Soviet space race with a national push for

excellence in science and math education. Its authors alleged that the steady march of successive generations toward a better education was no longer the case, indeed that the trend had actually reversed.

Political leaders of the day called on states and school districts to renew their commitment to quality public education for the nation's youth. As Tyack and Cuban (1995) have noted, however, in their treatise on the history of American educational reform, "beliefs in progress or regress always convey a political message" (p 14). According to Kastle and Lodewick (2007), within 10 years of *A Nation at Risk* the "standards-based reform" (p. 4) movement was born. Advocates of standards-based reform maintained that schools could "raise academic achievement by aligning curriculum, classroom instruction, and assessment" (p. 4). It would be the responsibility of the states and the federal government to institute high academic standards and ensure a system of local accountability.

Reagan Administration claims that American public education was in decline marked the pivotal point at which educational reform ideology began to take hold in the modern era. Reagan was tremendously popular with the right. In their discourse subtitled "politics of progress and regress" Tyack and Cuban (1995) draw sharp contrast between what heretofore had been the dominant assumption in American public education that school performance was growing stronger with each succeeding generation, and the Reagan and Bush administrations' assertion that public education was in decline. What is more, the Reagan administration declared that the entire "nation was 'at risk' in international economic competition because of educational regress" (p. 33). They then cast their argument in military terms, suggesting that the country had been engaged in "educational disarmament" thus summoning cold war fears and appealing to the American electorate's emotional sense of urgency for educational change. Tyack and Cuban note that while *A Nation at Risk* is perhaps the best-known of these 1980's elite policy commissions declaring the ravages of declining schooling on economic competitiveness and the urgent necessity of improving academic achievement as evidenced by test scores, it was not the only one.

To be sure, while the smorgasbord approach to differentiated curriculum may have failed to encourage students' enthusiasm for academic course taking (Mirel, 2006) in the generalized curriculum proffered by the comprehensive high school, the evidence suggests that claims of declining educational

achievement were supported by, and the product of, political undercurrents. They represent, according to Tyack and Cuban (1995), "an ideological smokescreen" (p. 34) designed to distract the American public from the real problems underlying our declining state of international economic competitiveness, and blame the schools. Tyack and Cuban brand as faulty much of the statistics claiming a historical decline in U.S. public education. Using National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores they cite evidence of comparatively level student performance from 1970 to 1990 (p.34).

Standards-Based Reform Comes of Age

Goertz (2005) reports that the first federal legislation in support of standards-based reform was the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) of 1994 under the first Clinton Administration. Indeed it could be said that IASA was the precursor to No Child Left Behind. It included several similar provisions including: requiring states to develop "challenging content and performance standards, implement assessments that measure student performance against these standards, and hold schools and school systems accountable for the achievement of all students" (73). However, the law lacked the necessary teeth in terms of specificity of acceptable outcomes, setting goals and appropriate metrics for testing, and prescribing sanctions when adequate results were not achieved.

Clinton and Bush era federal education policy. A major piece of federal legislation designed to shore up the provision of services to the disadvantaged was Title I. Reporting on federal education policy during the Clinton and Bush Administrations, DeBray (2006) notes that Title I legislation passed in 1999 required a states' accountability system be built on disaggregated data at the school subgroup level. Representative George Miller (D-CA) proposed Title I because heretofore "state education officials could not identify the characteristics of the students who were failing to achieve proficiency on their state tests" (p. 47).

According to DeBray (2006), conservative groups gained influence in affirming the downfall of President Clinton's education proposals. The EXPECT coalition, including the Heritage Foundation, pushed for the transference of programs to the states. States pushed for block granting of funds. Republicans advocated for block grants, school choice and portability – "a back door to vouchers" (tying,

'program dollars to the backs of eligible children') (p. 53) – much as is done with federal financial aid dollars for college students. Democrats settled on "categorical programs" which represented a national commitment to specific populations of students (p. 58) (see also comments by Senator Wellstone, p. 72). What DeBray (2006) chronicles as the failure of the Clinton administration's proposal is also, at the same time, an illuminative trail of a Republican (GOP) led push for states' rights camouflaged as, for example, "*Straight A*, a measure that gave complete fiscal policy discretion to governors, and one that was inconsistent with their (Republican's) rhetorical support for local control (p. 58-59)?

An idea that would partially serve as a pre-cursor to the Obama Administration's Race to the Top program was a Bush Administration proposal to set up a $500 million fund for rewards for high performing school districts while low performing schools would face losing part of their federal funds" (DeBray, 2006, p. 64). Partisan lines were ultimately drawn and a battle over local control ensued. Democrats fought the Straight A's block grants, arguing that giving money to the governors to spend as they saw fit was not an act of support for *local control* as GOP rhetoric claimed, but an abandonment of federal responsibilities to ensure that the most underprivileged students were being adequately served (p. 77).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law. Amid this increasingly politicized and contentious discourse on schooling, the push for ever-higher levels of achievement in the form of tests and standards has been among the recurring themes on the conservative educational agenda, along with vouchers and today's darling of conservative idealism, charter schools. Prodded by the Bush Administration, the U.S. Congress passed legislation in 2001 to put in place national standards under the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). Public Law 107-110, the *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001 (United States Congress, House Committee on Education and the Workforce, 2002) was a Bush Administration led effort to bring flexibility and accountability to public schools, recruit and train high quality teachers and administrators, and promote parental choice, all while—at the same time—promoting academic achievement among disadvantaged students.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) was landmark legislation attempting to offer something for everyone, or so it would seem. In tandem with the nationwide rollout of NCLB, Georgia, as did other states, responded to the relentless push from the right with self-imposed standards and instituted various accountability measures, including high-stakes testing and minimum graduation requirements regulations. Prodded by business interests, states have upwardly revised minimum graduation requirements purportedly to foster a more competitive state of workforce readiness and to align curriculum with college readiness requirements.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and money. According to DeBray (2006) conservatives sought to have Title I dollars go to their constituents in the form of vouchers. The liberal wing of the Democratic Party, led by Senator Kennedy of Massachusetts maintained that Title I had since its inception been targeted on poverty rather than on individual students. Title I programs endeavored to attack the nucleus of poverty in poor school communities (p. 96).

Compromise was eventually reached regarding supplemental services funding – viewed by republicans as a "foot under the door for vouchers" (DeBray, 2006, p. 96). Their intent appears to have been that they would ultimately be able to show that certain public schools were not working properly, or serving students well, thus giving them the justification for vouchers or some other means of transferring public dollars to the school(s) of their choosing.

Accountability and NCLB. DeBray (2006) reports that the accountability system incorporated into NCLB included sanctions against low-performing schools–sub unit accountability of so-called failing schools would then give justification to supplemental services which might include taking public Title I money to private schools of third party providers. Advocates for accountability included the Education Trust. (p. 105). Republicans reversed their previous stance on national testing to which they had held strongly during the Clinton administration. The legislative success of testing contradicted the Republican's prior position. While the Clinton Administration had been attacked by congressional Republicans for proposing a national test, the Bush administration succeeded in winning support for making federal dollars contingent on mandatory testing for every American student. This was due in

large part to Bush's having been strongly influenced by the business community, while governor of Texas, of the need for accountability in education as in business. A precursor of the eventual Republican led bill, the Clinton Administration had proposed "state-based standards reform" as a condition of receiving federal education funds.

NCLB and national interest group politics. Examining national education policy from a historical perspective within the context of political interest group activities DeBray and McGuinn (2009) offer that educational interest groups have not had as much influence over federal education policy as has been assumed, and indeed may have less leverage in the future because the national education policy landscape has been transformed in recent years or at least since the passing of No Child Left Behind.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) was designed to supplement local and state funding of public education as an aide to equalizing educational opportunity in poor districts for disadvantaged students. DeBray and McGuinn (DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009) note that in the ensuing years from 1965 to 1994 ESEA generally received the support of liberals without the objection of conservatives because it provided federal dollars to states with limited controls or accountability. Each side got what they wanted. American economic resources were abundant. And no one questioned the outcomes for students. Thus, a seemingly healthy political stalemate was maintained. The first signs that there was discord in the ranks became evident on the national stage with the issuance of the Reagan administration appointed National Commission on Excellence in Education's report, *A Nation at Risk* (1983) in 1983.

As previously noted, *A Nation at Risk* (1983) declared, among other things, that the content of the American high school curriculum had declined during the roughly ten year period between the late 1960's and the late 1970's, primarily as a result of the free exercise of student choice in course selection given a smorgasbord of options from which to choose. It reported that the proportion of students opting for a general program of study over more demanding college preparatory or vocational tracks grew from 12 percent in 1964 to 43 % by 1979. Then and now, without a challenging standard of performance to guide them, human nature being what it is some students prefer to take the easier courses. The report also

concluded that the amount of time spent on academic task was in many of the nation's schools inadequate, and that the American public suffered from a malaise of low educational expectations. In the latter years of the 1980's and into the1990's the winds of change would unsettle the 1960's era liberal-conservative national education policy stalemate as new economic realities, advancing technologies and emerging economic shifts bought on by NAFTA (the North American Free Trade Agreement) (Dale & Robertson, 2002) and globalization would draw attention to the need for a better trained and more highly skilled American workforce.

After the release of the influential report, "A Nation at Risk" by the Reagan Administration, conservative advocates for a return to neighborhood schools as a means to end court ordered busing to achieve racial integration, as well as those seeking the expenditure of public funds for vouchers to support private school attendance gained a new ally in their war of words against the political left and the idea of centralized national education policy. Former House Speaker Gingrich (Republican, Georgia) even shepherded an effort to abolish the U.S. Department of Education in favor of "block grants to the states or support for school vouchers" (DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009). However, in the aftermath of the loss of the 1996 presidential election, and with an ear toward responding to public opinion supporting national school reform, the Republicans devised a strategy to co-opt the education policy stream and adapt it to their conservative purposes.

Lack of quality is a difficult argument to rebuff when offered as seemingly objective assessment of a product, service or customer experience. Irrespective of political persuasion, ethnicity, race, or socio-economic status, Americans desire quality education and the benefits to be derived therefrom for themselves and their children. Those expectations and interests make educational policy politically sensitive.

In this new educational policy "garbage can" (Kingdon, 1995) came together the interests of social conservatives pushing to end court ordered busing, religious conservatives petitioning for vouchers, business leaders and the nation's governors calling for higher standards in public education to prepare a better trained workforce. DeBray and McQuinn (2009) add that even civil rights groups joined forces with

the business community in calling for "nationally mandated standards, tests, and accountability measures" in anticipation that full disclosure would force recalcitrant school districts to document and take adequate measures to close racial achievement gaps. From this assimilation of varied political interest emerged the cry for national standards reform.

The fact that many apolitical Americans were also less than enthusiastic about the quality of their public schools, particularly in urban areas, at a time when our global competitiveness was waning has given the standards movement carte blanch to grow. No doubt, for many who support public education it was either join the standards movement, or be overtaken by it. Thus, as a nationwide response to an increasingly competitive world, the political stage was set for national education standards reform.

The rebuttal - what a decade of NCLB has wrought. Not everyone is convinced of the inevitable allure of standards and testing as cure-alls for America's educational ills, however. Several writers have presented evidenced based reports of undesirable or unintended shortcomings of NCLB (Au, 2011; Kober, Jennings, & Peltason, 2010; McNeil et al., 2008; Nichols & Berliner, 2006; Nichols et al., 2012; Valenzuela, 2005). More than a decade ago Apple (Apple, 2001) argued that many of the proposed educational "reforms" though they "may sound good in the abstract" (p.5), have the reverse rather than the intended effect in the classroom. He warned against the threat of "conservative modernization" which he described as a unique combination of forces that threaten the "vitality of our nation, our schools, our teachers, and our children…" (p.5). These forces seek to commercialize schooling as business by moving it into the "competitive market, restoring 'our' competitive traditional common culture and stress discipline and character" (p. 5), while returning God to the classroom as the arbiter of school discipline and conduct, and centralizing control at the state level through more demanding standards and tests.

More recently, Valenzuela (2005) (see discussion of status of state reform in Texas below) has ardently declared the failings of NCLB and standards-based reform in Texas. Drawing upon Apple's (2001) theory that a "powerful neoliberal, economic and political elite exists…" whose "goal is 'conservative modernization,'" (p. 264) of U.S. public education via top-down centralized reforms, Valenzuela argues that from the state house to the Governor's mansion educational accountability in

Texas is under the control of such an elite. She maintains that they are the reason Texas style accountability fails Latino youth, and that their ultimate goal is privatization of public education through vouchers and other means (charters, etc.).

The Status of State Educational Accountability Reform

Malen (2003) described the shift in the balance of power between state and local school authorities and its effect on the "purposes and practices of local schools" (p. 195). She noted that prior to 1980 states had been reticent to lead reform or to challenge the "tradition of local control" (p. 197) in public schools. The era of social activism in the 1960s and 1970s marked the beginning of a shift towards state centered governance characterized by outcome-based educational programs and accountability models. Concurrently, the American political landscape witnessed the rise of the conservative movement and state's rights advocacy, perhaps as a reaction to the social revolution that was taking place in the country.

Since the late seventies, local schools have witnessed a move from a "district centered governance model" to state oriented control. Malen (2003) weighs "low impact" verses "high impact" views of the relative influence of a state governance model on local school district practice. Competing theories of the level of influence waged by state mandated policies on local school district praxis hold that state oriented accountability systems have either a strong or weak effect on the day-to-day practices of public schools. The educational policy system governing state-local school district relationships is characterized by loose coupling tendencies similar to those described by Birnbaum (1988) in his discussion of the governance of higher education institutions.

Malen (2003) reviewed multiple studies and research findings on the issue of state influence on local school district accountability. She noted that states have used the illusion of enhanced autonomy and the reality of increased accountability to rein in public schools. The form and degree of state activism vary "across state contexts and issue areas and over time" (p. 197); but the trend toward greater centrality of control within states advances unabated. Following on Perna and Thomas's (2009) work, I contend that not only do the form and degree of state activism vary; but also the efficacy of state policy

implementation within local school districts varies depending upon the local context (culture, political environments, local economies, etc.) in which schools operate. As schools are products of their environment, they cannot be completely separated from them.

There are varying views as to the effect of state activism on local schools. The "low-impact" view suggests that those who implement policies on the local level have greater influence than state policy makers. Their close proximity to the classroom allows them the flexibility to manipulate, distort or resist the process of policy implementation. Furthermore, their knowledge of local organizational structures and cultures gives them room to maneuver. In a loosely jointed governance system, local administrators have considerable flexibility. Thus the status quo is maintained.

The "high impact" view argues that state activism, by restricting local autonomy, exerts greater influence on local school district practice. Malen (2003) argues that the "high-impact interpretation may be the more accurate" (p. 200). She notes that a small but growing body of evidence suggests that the state standards, curricular guides, testing requirements, and accountability policies may be influencing schools in numerous direct and indirect ways that may or may not be consistent with the stated aims of the policies.

First, the combination of curricular standards or frameworks and publicly disseminated test scores appears to precipitate changes (for better or worse) in the content of the curriculum. State tests are driving the curriculum as districts work to align local curriculum with state tests. More often than not teachers decide what material to teach and how it should be taught based on state tests rather than on mastering the content of the curriculum. Statewide textbook adoptions also influence curriculum. State standards and testing policies influence resource allocation within the schools and time-on-task. In Georgia, the role and responsibility of the school counselor versus that of the newly created position of graduation coach is illustrative. The coach serves in a student guidance capacity, an area once served by school counselors. However, the advent of increased accountability brought attention to the need for dedicated resource staff to address the issue of high school drop outs.

Malen (2003) also notes that teachers express concern about how the additional pressure of high stakes testing negatively impacts the school climate and detracts from the instructional environment. One wonders if Georgia's graduation test or planned course exit exams have or will have a similar effect. As the emphasis on graduation rate, SAT score, graduation test and other metrics increases, there is a tendency among administrators and teachers to substitute test scores as the most important outcome of schooling, the all-important ends rather than a means by which we monitor how well learning is taking place.

Thus, state centered accountability presupposes a preference for summative rather than formative evaluation. The delineation of authority vests with the state the moral high ground as the architect of standards, frameworks, and assessments while the local school district is held responsible (and accountable) for determining the strategies to be used and the resources to be employed to achieve the desired ends. To be sure, Malen (2003) believes, states are indeed exercising more control over local schools. Power is being centralized at the state level while the responsibility for school improvement remains distributed. An emphasis on accountability has fostered new instruments of control that reign in the loosely coupled educational policy system.

Malen (2003) concluded that the research on the impact of state activism on local school district practice was at that time inconclusive. She called for the development of longitudinal studies on the influence of state reform on local schools:

> Longitudinal studies of the implementation and impact of state education reforms on local schools must be completed before we can be more certain of the degree to which state education policies influence local school systems, the avenues through which that influence may be exercised, and the consequences of that influence on the prospects for educational improvements or the distribution of education benefits. (p. 210)

The Instruments of State Reform

As noted previously, states have sought to fortify the high school diploma in the wake of continuing concerns about international economic competitiveness, quality and value of the credential.

Advocates of higher standards believe they are the only way to ensure the curriculum is not watered down to the extent the diploma becomes a mere statement of attendance having little significance as a certification of workforce readiness or as an indicator of adequate preparation for college entry.

The main tools states have used to institute educational reform have been minimum graduation course credit requirements and high school exit exams, or high school graduation tests. State governing boards have long established minimum course credit requirements for the diploma specifying the unit of credit (typically Carnegie Unit), cumulative number of credits required, type and unique combination of courses that make up the approved curriculum (math, science, social studies, music, etc.) and minimum number of credits per discipline or content area. As states have sought to align high school curriculum with evolving standardized testing they have begun to replace over-all graduation test with a complement of end of course exams (course exit exams).

The efficacy of minimum graduation course credit requirements. Minimum graduation course credit requirements is not a new phenomenon. Over the last 80, years all U.S. States and the District of Columbia have instituted some form of minimum course credit requirement (Carlson & Planty, 2012). While there is variation in requirements, the majority of states require completion of at least two or three credits in math and science to earn the high school diploma. Since the publication of the Reagan administration report, *A Nation at Risk*, and the launch of the push for accountability reform, minimum course credit requirements have increased across the nation. Proponents argued that more stringent requirements would motivate students to take more challenging coursework, thus leading to increased student achievement (Carlson & Planty, 2012; Chaney, Burgdorf, & Atash, 1997; U.S. Department of Education, National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Research shows that graduation credit requirement reforms which have been widely implemented over the past 20 years have been relatively ineffective in boosting student achievement or reducing dropout rates (Carlson & Planty, 2012; Chaney et al., 1997; Clune & White, 1992; Hoffer, 1997; Porter, 1998; Teitelbaum, 2003).

Carlson and Planty (2012) conducted a transcript audit of student transcript data found in the NELS:88 and ELS:2002, subtracted the number of required math and science credits in Carnegie units

earned, and determined if there existed a credit gap. Further analysis led them to conclude that inconsistent implementation and enforcement at the local level are the primary reasons these policies fail to boost achievement or reduce dropout rates. Implementation has been inconsistent largely due to lack of capacity (p. 616) on the part of states, districts and schools to effectively administer these policies, coupled with conflicting goals placed upon schools (i.e. implement and enforce academic rigor to increase graduation rates while reducing dropout rates). Consequently, local street-level bureaucrats (school principals, counselors, and teachers) may attempt to work out an accommodation policy that, on its face, makes it necessary that students achieve all state-mandated requirements before graduation, but in reality may permit selected students to obtain a diploma even though they may have failed to meet every graduation requirement.

Efficacy of high school exit exams. In a recent article published in *Educational Policy Analysis Archives* entitled "Re-Examining Exit Exams: New Findings from the Education Longitudinal Study of 2002" Professor Kate Shuster (2012) of Claremont Graduate University presents an analysis of the research literature to date on high school exit exams revealing that longitudinal studies conducted over the last dozen years consistently show (particularly as tests have become more stringent) an association between "exit exams and lower rates of school completion, especially in poor states with high percentages of racial and ethnic minorities" (p. 5). A study by Dee and Jocob's (2006; Shuster, 2012) found exit exams enhanced the probability of dropping out of high school for low-ability students. Lilard and DeCicca (2001) in an analysis of economic cost of increased course graduation requirements (CGR) found increased state minimum course graduation requirements positively correlated with dropping out.

The primary argument in support of exit exams has been that they increase student achievement. There is research that affirms a link between exit exams and enhanced academic achievement among suburban middle-class students (Bishop, 1997; Bishop, Mane, Bishop, & Moriarty, 2001; Bishop, 2005; Shuster, 2012). There is also research that suggests the opposite (Grodsky, Warren, & Kalogrides, 2009; Jacob, 2001; Reardon, Arshan, Atteberry, & Kurlaender, 2010; Shuster, 2012), or no relationship between exit exams and greater achievement, irrespective of level of test difficulty. There is also some indication

(Reardon et al., 2010; Shuster, 2012) that among minority and low-achieving students exit exams may cause achievement to diminish.

As one might expect, end-of-course exams have been shown to bear a stronger relationship with student achievement than minimum competency graduation test (Bishop et al., 2001; Bishop, 2005; Shuster, 2012). Yet, another study has challenged that view asserting exit exams have no achievement effect when researchers have controlled for prior achievement and other externalities (e.g. socioeconomic status, ethnicity, state factors, etc.) (Grodsky et al., 2009; Shuster, 2012).

Shuster's (2012) research sought to address two questions: 1) "How do high school exit exams affect school completion?" 2) "How do high school exit exams affect student achievement" (p. 3)? Answers to these important questions may help to frame my research. In order to understand what happens in a rural high school when state policies are implemented under standards-based reform it is helpful to know if and in what ways state exit exams may influence student achievement and their potential impact on students' propensity to graduate.

Shuster (2012) employed "multivariate stepwise regression analysis to predict school completion and academic achievement while controlling" (p. 6) for a number of contextual factors in setting up her regression models. She found some correlation between the 'standards-based exam' independent variable and the 'students dropping out' dependent variable (B=0.038) when GED's were not coded as graduates; however, at the $p < .05$ level of significance the regression coefficient was considered inconsequential as compared to other predictors in the school completion model. When she coded GED's as graduates, the relationship between the standards-based exam variable and students dropping out disappeared from the results. Academic achievement models did not show the exam variable to be a significant predictor of math test score gains or twelfth grade GPA. Ninth grade GPA was the most significant variable in predicting both academic achievement and school completion consistently appearing in each of the regression models (p. 14).

Standards-Based Reform in New York State

As one of the largest states in the union and the first to institute minimum graduation course credit requirements for the high school diploma, New York provides an exemplary case from which to study the process of implementation of standards-based educational reforms. In the following sections, I summarize the results of two New York based case studies: one evaluating the impact of implementation at the school district level assesses how school districts responded to the imposition of externally imposed raised learning and graduation requirements; the second from a different paradigm evaluates the impact of implementation at the school building level and how various departments within a school organization responded to the state mandate both in terms of actions taken to implement the policy and the perceptions and understandings of the teachers and administrators involved.

N.Y. school districts respond to state imposed learning and graduation requirements. Research done by Sipple, Killeen, and Monk (2004) described the institutional patterns of behavior exhibited by public school districts in New York in response to the imposition of mandatory high school graduation requirements in that state. In a study conducted with a mix of rural and urban school districts in New York, Sipple, Killeen and Monk examined how school districts responded to a New York State policy directive that all students complete the college preparatory curriculum. Phase in of the new college preparatory diploma standard was to be completed by June 2005. The authors examined school districts through an organizational framework as they assessed various organizational responses to state policy changes. They sought to determine whether increased state activism manifested through heightened graduation standards and end of course exams had a strong or weak impact on local school system praxis.

Sipple et al. (2004) utilized an "embedded case study design" (p.148) to assess the "organizational responses of school districts to standards-based reforms" (p. 148). Collectively, these school districts' responses comprise the "case" (p. 148) of their study. Their "case" (p. 148) represented the sum total of the combined responses of six school districts to the new state graduation requirement. The primary unit of analysis was the school district organization with its leaders representing the secondary units of analyses. Patton's (2002) principles of criterion and stratification sampling were followed in selecting

districts exhibiting above average and below average criteria. Researchers employed interviews and document analysis techniques as data sources.

Sipple et al. (2004) first developed a descriptive trend analysis of statewide participation rates in the regents testing program as a means of establishing a context in which school districts were operating upon implementation of the new state standard. New York State's largest school districts (those in excess of 30,000 students) were intentionally excluded from the study. However, the selected districts, a mix of both rural and urban, were representative of a majority of NYS school districts. In addition to the initially selected leaders in each school district, a snowball sampling approach was used to expand the list of interview participants. A team of 7-9 researchers conducted semi-structured interviews in each of the five school districts. Open-ended interview questions were designed prior to the interview to facilitate "more naturalistic inquiry and response among … participants" (p. 149). Researchers interviewed "over 133 educators and community leaders in 95 interviews in five different communities. Interviewers tape recorded, transcribed, and coded interviews with the aid of QSR's N-Vivo software package.

As a quality control, the researchers triangulated claims between multiple interviews and district documents and used member checking to confirm their findings and interpretations. The authors noted that by expanding their list of interviewees to those recommended by school district leaders (snowball sampling) they "may have systematically missed marginalized personnel," (p. 149 - p.150) or those perceived as incompetent by school leaders. Of course this has implications of the impact of power and privilege on sample selection. Also, they point out that member checks were limited to the "distribution of case reports to the central district leader (the Superintendent)" (p. 150) which, while an effective check on reliability, may have reflected an institutional bias.

The research team studied the collective and individual reactions of school districts to a major modification of New York State's education policy, the raising of graduation requirements for all students including those who did not traditionally go on to college. They documented the social structural and programmatic changes districts made to implement the new standard. Based on the opinions expressed in the interviews, the new state standards for testing and curriculum were found to be the most important

issue of concern in the districts (ahead of fiscal, changing demographics, special education, facilities, crime and safety). They also found top management agreement with the statement "All Children Can Learn." However, agreement "varies greatly between the central office, school buildings and community" (Sipple et al., 2004, p 155). All superintendents supported the statement (as though it were a slogan), but building administrators were less resolute in their commitment to the ideal. Teachers and community leaders were even more ambivalent about whether or not all children could meet the new graduation requirements. Apparently, the statement "all children can learn" was an attempt on the part of the investigators to assess the strength of stakeholders' commitment to the new graduation standard.

Researchers identified "sources of influence on the educators in the participating districts" (Sipple et al., 2004, p. 156). Superintendents felt pressure from their school boards and the State to show improvement on their school report cards. Principals and their leadership teams felt pressure from the central office, teachers and parents. Teachers said that the pressure they felt was mostly self-imposed. Programmatic responses centered on Academic Intervention Services (AIS) in each district. While the implementation of AIS varied across districts, all employed this approach either by adding on instructional time in a given subject or by replacing a regular class with a substitute version. The latter application seemed the most questionable in light of "tracking" and other equity related concerns (i.e. "testing modifications" for special education students").

As noted previously, a cause for concern was the finding that principals in four out of five school districts routinely shift "at risk" (Sipple et al., 2004) students to GED programs to avoid reporting the student as a drop out. This allowed them to report the student as a "transfer" and, at the same time, relieve their testing pool of a potential failing student who was not expected to graduate, thus falsely elevating their school's performance on state and federal NCLB accountability metrics.

My study bears similarities to the research of Sipple, Killeen, and Monk (2004). I attempt to extend their work to a limited degree though the circumstances are by design somewhat different in this case. Unlike the New York case, this study focuses on a rural school district in the South. As with Sipple et al.'s work, this study is based upon a social constructivist paradigm (Creswell, 2003). Like their work,

the research strategy employed is the case study. The case study allows the researcher to explore a program (high school graduation requirement) in depth (Creswell). Thus, the chosen unit of analysis for my study is the case which I define as the broader rural school community that encompasses the selected high school.

Sipple, Killeen and Monk's (2004) study adds considerable legitimacy to my plan of research and situates that research in the educational policy literature. At the same time, it highlights the significance of issues surrounding treatment and support of students at the margins of dropping out of school and educational equity concerns emanating out of the current zeal to impose heightened high school performance and graduation standards. It clearly notes the "… new tension involved in the balance of serving all students in an era of public accountability" (p. 160); yet Sipple et al. failed to delve into the source of that tension and challenge its rationale. For example, Sipple et al. noted how recent dropouts were "called back" in one district to enroll in a GED program. The authors (Sipple et al.) let the districts off the hook by allowing: "We suspect the educators understood their community's negative connotations of a high dropout rate, but did not sense the negative ramifications of increasing the GED transfer rate" (p. 163). In their defense, Sipple, Killeen and Monk do raise the question, in the end, whether or not such practices serve to avoid the raised standards or provide a necessary and beneficial alternative for students who are otherwise not likely to graduate; but they leave to others the task of studying and debating that question.

Sipple, Killeen and Monk's (2004) qualitative case study focused on the implementation of state policy at the local level and the organizational response to that state policy. The evidence suggests that state policy changes had a strong impact on the school districts by focusing the discourse on the new curriculum and assessment standards. Cumulative change in local district outcomes occurred in response to the policy stimuli. The case illustrated how state policy reforms help to place in perspective the choices faced by educators whether or not to enthusiastically adopt or participate in program change. The extent of change, however, may be moderated by local community context and institutionalized demands at the district level. Professors Sipple, Killeen and Monk have authorized this researcher to extend their

study to a study of rural southeast Georgia school districts. In addition to researching a different demographic, my study seeks to address the gaps in our knowledge base identified above.

A comprehensive N.Y. high school's early implementation experience. DeBray (2005) writing in the High School Journal drew upon the field of policy implementation as a framework for her study of early school responses to state reforms in New York State, noting that "different groups understand, and resist or comply with, policies in various ways" (p. 20). DeBray cites as theoretical foundation the work of Bardach, (1977) in policy analysis, and Weatherly and Lipsky's (1977) classic example of street-level bureaucrats implementing special education reform.

DeBray (2005) focused on teacher's responses in English and mathematics departments to determine what actions were being taken to comply with the recently revised New York State requirement that all students take and pass regents examinations in order to obtain a high school diploma. Her research sought to ascertain: 1) how teachers and administrators understood the changes early on in the process of implementation, and how were they changing their practices accordingly; and 2) how did the affected math and English teachers, lead teachers and administrators portray their individual and shared response to the policy? DeBray's sample of interviewees consisted of "five math teachers and eight English teachers (including the two chairs); the Principal; and the Assistant Principal for Technology and Special Projects," or a total of 17 participants (p. 24). Teachers taught across all grades.

In the math department, DeBray (2005) found that the new State graduation requirement was layered on top of many pre-existing policies, most having to do with scheduling of courses or curriculum structure and the lack of availability of appropriate prerequisites, particularly for students attempting to transition to the Regents track. In essence, the school was experiencing the pains associated with de-tracking to put everyone on a path to the Regents Diploma.

In the English department, the reform had the effect of merging the curricular structure as higher and lower level tracts were consolidated. In both departments teachers talked about the policy in terms of its impact on students. Teachers in this high poverty school said that students lacked motivation to learn. They viewed students' primary limitation as their unwillingness to do the work. DeBray (2005) found

highly contrasting ideas about equity within the school. Teachers felt a low sense of efficacy about their ability to positively affect their students' chances of doing well on the Regents exam. Yet their description of their areas of accountability was consistent with the incentives put in place by the State. Teachers speak of policy in terms of practice. Teachers have different starting places in terms of their professional expertise and require different supports. If not careful, one can be overwhelmed by the basics. This research begs the question: should we hold teachers' accountable for student outcomes, or instead hold them accountable for instructional processes that facilitate outcomes? Both departments focused on supplementing time-on-task for students at greatest risk of failure, "rather than developing any larger-scale strategy of content-based professional development targeted toward changes in teaching" (p. 39).

DeBray (2005) characterized these two departments as exhibiting "'compliance without capacity' (DeBray, Parson, & Woodworth, 2001)" signifying that the "organizational norms and internal accountability which would be necessary to effect changes in teaching and learning are absent" (p. 40). Going further, she recommends that future studies be framed at the school level, rather than departmental, for three reasons: 1) "Teachers' attributions of their students' motivation and skills shaped how they viewed the policy (p. 40)." 2) It is important to understand the "'embedded contexts' (McLaughlin, Talbert, & Bascia, 1990, p. 6)" (p. 41) in which these teachers operated within the school and the strong role and influence of the principal in guiding the direction of reform. 3) Contextual information monitored at the school level is likely to be relevant to school-level statistics and performance, and capacity building resources if provided by the state will be targeted to the school, thus the school is the recommended unit of analysis for further research (p. 41). In the instant case I focus on the selected school and school community as the unit of analysis.

Today, educational leaders and parents in New York State are becoming more outspoken in opposition to standards-based reform. My assessment of recent blog post and newspaper articles suggest that movement may be growing as teacher performance accountability measures appear over burdensome

and heavy-handed. Teachers are questioning the legitimacy of a state imposed teacher evaluation system that holds them accountable for student learning outcomes that they cannot control.

Standards-Based Reform in Texas

Several of the ideas undergirding the No Child Left Behind Law (NCLB) originated from the experience of Bush Administration key figures from Texas. President Bush's first Secretary of Education, Rod Paige, was a proponent of several of NCLB's accountability policies he first put in place as Houston's superintendent of schools. What was little known or discussed at the time these ideas were incorporated into the NCLB law was that they were seriously flawed (some red herrings) or that many of their proclaimed benefits were in fact the result of manipulation of the data reported. The following discussion summarizes two comprehensive studies of the politics, processes and consequences of standards-based reform implementation in Texas.

"Texas-style" accountability: how high-stakes testing is dismantling public education in that state. Among the strongest research findings in opposition to standards-based reform has been the work of Dr. Angela Valenzuela (2005) and her colleagues at the University of Texas at Austin. Valenzuela conducted extensive research in large diverse high schools in major urban areas of the State and concluded that accountability in Texas fails Latina/o youth. She argues that accountability is a "business model" designed to push forward a privatization agenda whose intent is to implement the conservative political and economic elite's ultimate form of accountability – the market" (p. 263). That elite's fundamental plan is to privatize education in Texas through the use of vouchers and other mechanisms designed to divert public funding to their will:

> … As conveyed in President George W. Bush's oft-expressed view that accountability is for 'identifying failures,' accountability is more about the politics of control over education than it is about children learning. This focus then justifies a shift to a private schooling sector that not only lacks accountability but may also embody sectarian views that are contradictory to democracy (p. 275).

Valenzuela et al. (2005) ardently oppose high-stakes testing noting that no individual performance metric can serve as a valid gage of academic achievement and thus cannot be a creditable basis for judging the student, teacher, administrator, school or district's achievement. Most importantly, high-stakes testing contributes to a climate of "subtractive schooling" (p. 4) which devalues students' linguistic, cultural, and community-based identities and reduces their sense of worth to a mere test score. It is, she claims, an unethical practice that facilitates the psychic, emotional, and even physical withdrawal of students from the process of schooling. Consequently high-stakes testing will not adequately reduce the achievement gap between majority and minority children and youth.

High-stakes test-based accountability and the drop-out crisis in Texas. The team of McNeil, Coppola, Radigan and Heilig (2008) of Rice University and the University of Texas at Austin report that each year 135,000 students are lost from Texas' public schools prior to graduation. In an exhaustive mixed methods case study of collateral damage from high-stakes test-based accountability in which they analyzed data from 271,000 students in a large urban district over a 7 year period McNeal et al. concluded that 60 percent of African American students, 75 percent of Latino students and 80 percent of ESL students failed to graduate inside of five years. This study moved beyond school-level data to an analysis of longitudinal student-level data thus enabling investigation of the effects of the accountability system upon the students impacted. It revealed an overall graduation rate of just 33%, far below the numbers which had been reported by the State education agency. Thus McNeal et al document "a strong association between high-stakes test-based accountability and large-scale dropping out" (p. 37).

Their study reveals unethical 9th grade student retention practices on the part of school administrators designed to manipulate test scores, degradation of the curriculum into test drill and kill formats, rigid zero tolerance practices that shift youth into the criminal justice system, along with other practices make for a climate that encourages student departure from the system. "… A convergence of policies built into the accountability system exacerbates the pressure on youth and stacks the deck against persistence in school for many youth, particularly those who are poor, immigrant, English-language learning, African American, or Latino" (p. 37).

In as much as the high-stakes test accountability system in Texas served as a model for the nation's No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law, McNeil et al. (2008) scrutinized the theory of action underlying NCLB, that high-stakes accountability will automatically increase student achievement, and conclude that this is a faulty premise. On the contrary, McNeil et al.'s findings establish that "the accountability system itself is complicit in the very losses it claims to reverse" (p. 3) and they conclude these losses of students to the educational system are avoidable, but not while NCLB in its present form remains in place.

According to McNeil et al. (2008). The disaggregation of test scores by ethnic subgroups rather than enhancing equity, as claimed by supporters of NCLB, casts these groups as potential liabilities to a school or district's ratings. Thus motivating the wrong behavior on the part of administrators who are charged with encouraging students to stay in school and persevere towards completing their high school education. And, as my research will show, when tied to a system of teacher performance evaluation may draw resentment from teachers who perceive students' poor performance in the classroom as precursor to low standardized test scores which subsequently devalues the instructors job performance.

"Common Core of State Standards" Curriculum Reform in Georgia

In recent years, Georgia and most of the 50 states have embraced an effort sponsored by the National Governors Association to find a state solution to the call for national standards. McDermott (2011) notes that this push towards accumulating public sector accountability stems from the "new public management" ideal which stresses "the results of government activity" and which in public education "has taken the form of policies that hold schools and school districts accountable for their students' performance on standardized tests" (p. 11).

Georgia's Department of Education (GaDOE) and several other states have embarked upon implementing the "Common Core State Standards Initiative." Proposed by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) in partnership with the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), the Common Core team proclaims that it sought input from teachers, school administrators, and others knowledgeable about best practices in schools to develop a plan for what it

views as an understandable and reliable framework for preparing America's children for college and the workforce (retrieved online from http://www.corestandards.org/about-the-standards).

These Common Core State Standards represent an attempt by states to take control away from the federal government and have states lead the way on uniform K-12 education national standards. They could in effect be considered a *states' rights backlash* on federal government led school reform (such as NCLB). By setting a voluntary uniform standard, coordinated by the states, that is professedly higher than federal minimums, those who oppose the U.S. Department of Education's oversight of state sanctioned schooling can claim that there is no continuing need for what they view as federal government interference in state-sponsored local public schools. It marks yet another turn of events in the long and winding saga of American K-12 education reform.

In Georgia the Common Core is generally described by teachers as being slightly more rigorous than the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS). Many regard the GPS as having prepared them for making the transition to the Common Core. However, recently a political front has opened up challenging the Common Core's implementation in Georgia and, as one might expect, it has much to do with the issue of money, political power and authority.

"Rurality" and Standards-Based Education Reform:

A Rural Sociology Lens

This research is also informed by the rural sociology literature which looks at the role and significance of place dynamics in structuring opportunity and, therefore, resource availability, and the proclivity for educational investment within disparate communities. Recent sociological research (Roscigno et al., 2006) has advanced the theory that "…families and schools as distinct, although often overlapping institutional spheres, are embedded within and shaped by (the) places…" (p. 2124) where they reside. These places vary significantly in opportunity and, as a result, resources made available to education. The placed-based social stratification exhibited in rural and urban (inner-city) communities is mediated through proximate institutions of school and family. This theory recognizes both the "*spatial patterning of opportunity and the ways in which local opportunity permeates or mitigates inequality*

through more familiar and proximate institutional (i.e., family and school) channels"[italics supplied in original] (Roscigno et al., 2006, p. 2124).

Roscigno, Tomaskovi-Devey, and Crowley (2006) argue that conventional educational research, while emphasizing the importance of family and school-level processes, has not given adequate attention to "spatial inequalities in achievement and attainment" (p. 2138-2139). Further, current state and federal policies' focused on introducing a competitive business model to public education via increased testing and accountability with concomitant rewards and punishments is awkward, at best, to carryout given that there is much variation in educational opportunity across geographic space and its resultant deleterious effects on educational resources and investment.

"Rural schools have high concentrations of poor students and lower per-pupil expenditures" (Roscigno et al., 2006, p. 2139) which tends to explain much of their students' deficits in achievement and attainment. There is evidence that rural areas make lower investments in education for similar levels of resources, perhaps because they place a lower value on educational investments – possible "brain drain" fears or apprehension reflected in the investment and curriculum program decisions of local school authorities; familial differences in cultural road maps may limit propensity to invest in children's education. Family and school level resource disparities translate into inequalities in potentially influential investments: i.e., number of household educational items, cultural capital (of the kind recognized by the school), parental involvement, availability of AP classes in the school, level of teacher encouragement.

Building a Conceptual Framework:

Outcomes-Based Bureaucratic Accountability

This case study focuses on the bridge between the enactment of secondary education policy by the Georgia Department of Education (DOE) meeting in Atlanta, GA, and implementation in the high school classrooms of a rural southeast Georgia community that precedes and predisposes various student outcomes. Which is to say, what could we expect in terms of potential outcomes and how does making sense of these policies at these different levels contribute towards outcomes? This case investigation does not evaluate student outcomes per se, but instead looks at the effect of state policy changes on the

behaviors and aspirations of teachers and administrators (Gross & Supovitz, 2005), and as a consequence how the new state policy changes the normative structure inside the subject rural high school (J. O'Day, 2004). Thus this case assesses the influence of raised standards on teaching and learning at the level of the practitioner and the school organization.

A confluence of the educational reform literature supports a broad conceptual framework researchers have labeled the theory of *outcomes-based bureaucratic accountability* (Gross & Supovitz, 2005; J. O'Day, 2004) (see Figure 2.1). O'Day reports that outcomes-based bureaucratic accountability is a derivation of the term "*bureaucratic accountability* (Adams & Kirst, 1999; Darling-Hammond & Ascher, 1991)" (p. 22) or "*administrative accountability* (J. A. O'Day & Smith, 1993)" (p.22) which traditionally focused on "…educational *inputs* and *processes*" (p.22). Under outcomes-based bureaucratic accountability schools are held responsible administratively by district, state and federal education authorities above them–the public education bureaucracy. However, unlike prior to standards-based reform and NCLB, "schools and school personnel are held accountable not for delivering designated *inputs and processes* but for producing specific levels of improvements in student learning *outcomes*" (J. O'Day, 2004, p. 22) as measured on tests. Thus outcomes-based bureaucratic accountability is assessment-based, tying public accountability to student testing (Siskin, 2003).

Integral to outcomes-based bureaucratic accountability, standards are interpreted through local values and expectations (Gross & Supovitz, 2005; McLaughlin, 1987), what O'Day calls "socially constructed belief systems," (J. O'Day, 2004, p. 19). The school's response is influenced and fashioned by local community interests and constrained by its ability to make (or implement) change, referred to as its "capacity" (DeBray et al., 2003; F. M. Newmann, King, & Rigdon, 1996). Teachers and students will be inclined to make the desired change based upon their own beliefs and desires (Weatherley & Lipsky, 1977). Teachers functioning as street-level bureaucrats engage in instances of "sensemaking" (Weick, 1995) as they try to reconcile the proposed change with elements of their world. As schools interpret the state policy, they become motivated (or not) to implement the desired change.

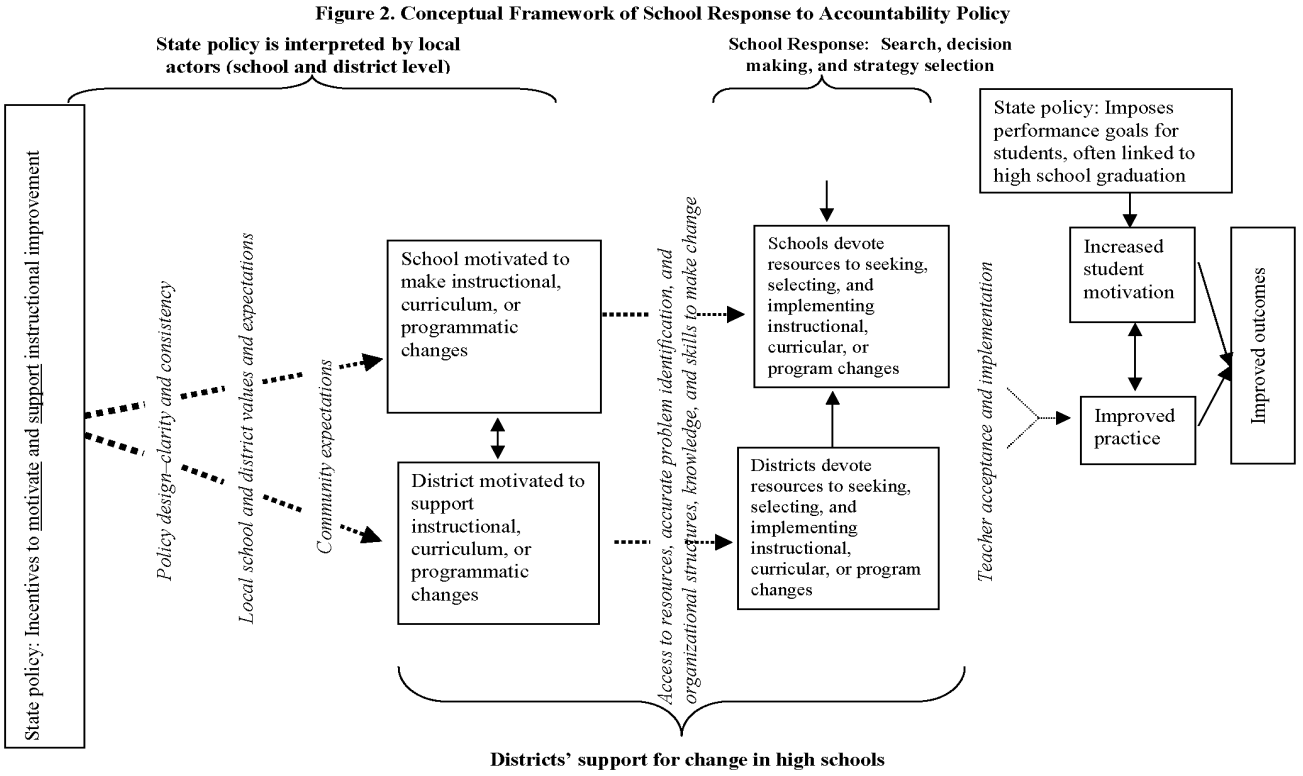

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Figure 2.1. Conceptual Framework of School Response to Accountability Policy. From Chapter 1, Introduction by B. Gross and J.A. Supovitz, 2005, in "Holding high hopes: How high schools respond to state accountability policies" by B. Gross and M.E. Goertz. CPRE Research Report Series RR-056 (pp. 1-16). University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education. Copyright 2005 by the Consortium for Policy Research in Education. Reprinted with permission.

According to O'Day (2004), their interpretation must be correct for the desired implementation objectives to be achieved. Interpretation is dependent on and constrained by prior learning. "Learning takes place through the interpretation of information," (p. 21) which we know is at least partly influenced by prevailing social and cultural mores. Such interpretation

through learning is captured in "a simple working theory of school internal accountability" (Siskin, 2003, p. 3) which is based upon the idea that schools already have notions of accountability embedded in the way school staffs conduct their daily activities, including: "teachers' and administrators' beliefs about teaching and learning, their shared conceptions of who their students are, the routines they develop for getting their work done, and the external expectations from parents, communities, and administrative agencies under which they work" (Abelman et al., 2004, p. 138). This theory of internal accountability in action suggests a healthy relationship between three factors: "1) individual conceptions of *responsibility*; 2) shared *expectations* among school participants and stakeholders; 3) and *internal* and *external accountability* mechanisms" (p. 138). DeBray and her colleagues (2003) note the importance of achieving alignment between the system of internal accountability and the external pressure imposed by new accountability systems.

Complexity and Implementation

Empirical research on policy implementation has shown that myriad and unexpected problems can unfold in the sequence of events that occur between the enactment of new legislation at our nation's capital or in the various state legislatures and what gets delivered to constituents as implemented in local communities (McLaughlin, 1987; Pressman et al., 1973) . Thus, fidelity of implementation method or procedure across geographies and among differing community context cannot be assured because regional and local circumstances differ. So other means must be devised to test effectiveness of policy implementation as the top-down approach alone fails to allow for regional and local adaptation.

Adding to the difficulty of analysis of implementation where secondary education policy is concerned, the American comprehensive high school is a complex institution (Weick, 1976) having evolved through more than a century of debate about its purposes and aims punctuated by numerous

efforts at reform (Mirel, 2006; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Yet in the face of mounting challenges the American high school remains a remarkably stable and consistent institution across diverse communities of a geographically vast nation.

Given the modern comprehensive high school's complexity, numerous resources and skills must be coordinated in order to accomplish its mission of delivering a quality educational experience to students. Understanding the institution of schooling is further complicated by multiple and overlapping levels of authority, regulation, funding and control (local, state, and federal). Consequently, to facilitate logical investigation it is advisable to view schools as loosely coupled systems (Weick, 1976) or processes whenever feasible, subdividing the institution into areas of focus for logical discussion and analysis (sensemaking).

Acknowledging that schools are complex adaptive systems, O'Day (2004) devised an analytic framework developed from the literature on complexity and organizational learning "for evaluating the potential impact of accountability-based interventions on school improvement" (p. 20). She determined that "accountability mechanisms" (p. 20) will make a positive difference in the operation of schools in so far as those interventions are able to:

- *Generate and focus attention on information relevant to teaching and learning* and to changes in that information as it is continually fed back into and through the system.
- *Motivate educators (and others) not only to attend to relevant information but to expend effort to augment or change strategies in response to this information.*
- *Develop the knowledge and skills to promote valid interpretation of information* (at both the individual and system levels).
- *Allocate resources where they are most needed* (p. 20).

When utilizing the above framework to analyze change invoked under a given educational reform and what it means for school improvement, one must not lose focus on the role of the individual. How does the change or proposed intervention impact the individual teacher in the classroom and that teacher's

ability to meet the needs of the students? O'Day notes that while school accountability is collective, action is individual. It is through the individual that information is interpreted and shared, and through professional development of individuals the organizational knowledge base is increased.

Sensemaking.

This study is framed by the education policy implementation literature that looks at the local realization of externally imposed change as an act of "sensemaking" (Cooper et al., 2004; Fullan, 2007; Madsen, 1994; Weatherley & Lipsky, 1977; Weick, 1995). At its core, this is a study about sensemaking in educational organizations (high schools) in a climate of change brought on by standards-based reform. The concept of sensemaking is the idea of making sense (Weick, p. 4). Weick maintains that throughout our lives we try to make sense of the world as we see and experience it. Only our actions are in the present. We perceive that which *has* occurred. In an effort to make sense of things we construct meaning as we interact with that which we are trying to make sense of. Therefore, Weick argues, reality is constructed. Consequently, all perception is biased to some degree and opposing positions may be equally valid. The question is whose perception, ideal, or story is most plausible given the accepted belief system within the organization.

Weick (1995) enumerates seven properties of sensemaking, which I paraphrase below:

1) Sensemaking is grounded in identity construction
    a. Individuals associate or disassociate with issues in order to preserve a positive organizational image or repair a negative one. Self-concept is wrapped-up in organizational image
    b. How we imagine others see us affects our self-concept. Self-concept arises from an individual's need to have a sense of identity. Failure to confirm one's self-concept triggers sensemaking.
    c. People simultaneously try to shape and react to environments, thus making sensemaking reciprocal. Sensemaking is also self-referential.

2) Sensemaking is retrospective—"To learn what I think I look back over what I said earlier" (p. 61). Sensemaking seeks "order, clarity and rationality" (p. 29).
3) Sensemaking is enactive of sensible environments—"I create the object to be seen and inspected when I say or do something" (p. 61). Enactment occurs as one receives stimuli from and acts upon his environment.
4) Sensemaking is social—socialization influences perception and resultant sensemaking.
5) Sensemaking is ongoing—when projects are interrupted sensemaking occurs until stability and continuity are resumed.
6) Sensemaking is focused on and by extracted cues—power dictates what cues will be observed to exercise control. Leadership instills confidence to act.
7) Sensemaking is driven by plausibility rather than accuracy—"Quick responses shape events…" (p. 58). "Accuracy is not the issue" (p.60), action is. "Sensemaking is about plausibility, coherence, and reasonableness" (p. 61).

Teachers and administrators will be engaged in sensemaking on a daily basis as they attempt to reconcile the interventions promulgated by the state mandate upon their teaching practice within the context of their school and community.

Loose Coupling.

One can find parallels between aspects of sensemaking as described by Weick (1995) and the workings of public schools as bureaucratic institutions. In his discussion of "a sensemaking perspective on organization" (p. 69) Weick references Scott's (2001) description of organizations as rational systems, natural systems, and open systems (p. 69-70). "These three definitions," he notes, "are ordered from less to more openness to the environment and from tighter to looser coupling among the elements that comprise the system. This means that organizations depicted as "open systems" (p. 70) should be the ones most concerned with sensemaking. As we transfer from rational through natural to open environs we simultaneously change from structures, processes and settings that are less unclear to those that are

more unclear (p. 70). This then depicts the environment of the educational institution in which teachers and administrators must provide structure and sensemaking.

Street-Level Bureaucrats

Further explanatory power of how individual public employees, i.e. teachers and administrators, make sense of accountability pressure while contemporaneously juggling overwhelming workloads and responding to the public's incessant demand for services may be found in Weatherly & Lipsky's (1977) theory on street-level bureaucrats. To carry out their work assignments, street-level bureaucrats find ways to adapt to the realities of their work situation. Weatherly and Lipsky found that policy implementation is tempered by low level, or front-line, bureaucrats who deliver services to an end-user constituency. These persons who serve the public recipients of governmental and education services make on the spot decisions as they interpret and apply regulations and guidelines to meet the circumstances of the client and the on-scène demands of the community and environment in which services are delivered. They are often overwhelmed as demand for services outstrips supply (their ability to deliver services because of limited staffing/manpower, limited equipment or resources, or other constraints). Therefore, they must develop procedures or routines to process their work which is by nature "inherently discretionary" (p.172). In so doing, they establish patterns of conducting business that become the face of the government's program to the public. Recognizing this, policy makers must not only trace the traditional line of authority through which a policy is articulated to discover the impact on the "context of street level decision making" (p. 172); but, "at the same time, one must study street-level bureaucrats within their specific work context to discover how their decision making about clients is modified, if at all, by the newly articulated policy" (p. 173). This suggests performing what is simultaneously a top-down and bottoms-up approach to studying implementation.

Traditionally, analysis of implementation studies have been viewed through either a "top down" or "bottom-up" lens. Birkland (2011) notes a top down approach would be appropriate if one were attempting to trace implementation of federal legislation from Washington to a state and ultimately to a local school district and school as might be done with NCLB. A top down point of view would

acknowledge Congress's desire that states and school districts deliver on the promise of NCLB by carrying out its mandate to the best of their ability. One might further assume that Georgia's new graduation requirements are consistently aligned with that aim.

On the other hand, a bottom-up approach, what Richard Elmore (1979) calls "backward mapping," might prove more suitable to ferreting out the unique mix of power, process, politics, culture, resources and the interplay between them impacting implementation in a given locale (Birkland, 2011). This is the domain of the "street-level bureaucrat" (Weatherley & Lipsky, 1977). To the student and parent, the teachers, staff and administrators they encounter in the classroom and school buildings are the policy makers. Teachers especially interact with students "in the course of their jobs and have substantial discretion in the execution of their work," (p. 172). Tracing the policy via the traditional view through various refractive stages helps one to see the ways in which the "policy affects the local context of street-level decision making" (p. 172).

Simultaneously, Weatherly and Lipsky (1977) maintain that it is necessary to study street-level bureaucrats within the context of their work environment to unearth how their decision making about student instruction and learning, in this case, is altered by their encounter with the new policy in their daily praxis. Thus, the true meaning of a new state or federal policy is worked-out or negotiated within the context of the local school and classroom as educators adapt the policy to local circumstances. Over time, the "grammar of schooling" (i.e. the traditional structure of age graded classes, Carnegie Units, differentiated course offerings and tracks) embedded within local community psyche regarding how schools should function assuages new reforms and makes them malleable to an altered implementation frame (DeBray, 2005; McLaughlin, 1987; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Consequently, implementation researchers have found that teachers and administrators routinely customize reforms to fit local community expectations and circumstances.

Integrating the Framework for Research

As noted earlier, this case study focuses on the bridge between the enactment of secondary education policy by the Georgia Department of Education in Atlanta, GA, and the outcomes that occur for students

in the high school classrooms of a rural community in southeast Georgia. The study is framed by the education policy implementation literature which looks at the local realization of externally imposed change as an act of sensemaking (Cooper et al., 2004; Fullan, 2007; Madsen, 1994; Weatherley & Lipsky, 1977; Weick, 1995) by local de facto policy makers (classroom faculty and school building staff).

School district's institutional response to externally imposed change. Michael Fullan (2007), a leading contemporary researcher in the field of organizational change and education, writes in *The New Meaning of Educational Change, fourth edition,* of the significance of institutions becoming learning organizations. Drawing upon the work of Senge (2000), Fullan describes how management is limited in its long-term planning horizon and that actions in the short-term should create an environment in which opposing interests mediate their differences in order to learn from one another for the common good and growth of the school system organization.

One objective of the investigation at hand was to determine the underlying philosophy about change to the graduation rule and the curriculum standard at Deer Lodge County High School and in the school district. Fullan ((2007) notes that "… the assumptions one makes about how to go about effective change," that is one's "theory of action" (p. 122) are reflected in planning and implementation. He points out that not only does context matter, but that if the thinking of those leading the change is incompatible with the ideals proposed, if they are philosophically opposed to the change, then the change will not be implemented successfully.

Fullan (2007) identifies ten essential truths for achieving effective educational change, which he casts in the form of "do's" and "do not," which I paraphrase below:

1) Do not assume that the change will be implemented in original idea form; but expect to engage others in a dialogue that meshes their reality with yours and thus transforms or develops original ideas into something better.
2) Do allow individual implementers time and flexibility to work out their own meaning since significant change will have associated with it some degree of ambiguity, ambivalence, and

uncertainty. Implementation involves "a process of clarification" (p. 123) which emerges through reflective practice (reflexology).

3) Understand that since people possess multiple realities, conflict and disagreement are necessary to achieve collective change of any real significance. "All successful efforts of significance, no matter how well planned, will experience an implementation dip in the early stages" (p. 123).
4) Though pressure motivates people to change (standards and accountability expectations), it is only effective if combined with "capacity-building and problem-solving opportunities" (p. 123).
5) Be aware that implementation occurs developmentally, thus effective change will take time—specific innovations take 2-3 years; institutional reforms 5-10 years.
6) Do not assume outright rejection as the reason for delayed or non-implementation. Potential reasons may include: "value rejection, inadequate resources to support implementation, poor capacity, insufficient time elapsed, and the possibility that resisters have some good points to make" (p. 124).
7) "Do not expect all or even most people or groups to change" (p. 124). Progress is often made in incremental steps.
8) "Evolutionary planning and problem-coping models based on knowledge of the change process are essential" (p. 124); therefore, plan based on the above and elements known to affect implementation.
9) Do not fail to act for lack of complete information or complete clarity. "Action decisions are a combination of valid knowledge, political considerations, on-the-spot decisions, and intuition" (p. 124).
10) "Assume that changing the culture of institutions is the real agenda, not implementing single innovations" (p. 124). For that we need to develop the capacity of the institution for "… selective change as a sustainable resource…" (p. 125).

As previously stated, Fullan (2007) affirms that "planning and implementation are about one's theory of action, or the assumptions one makes about how to go about effective change" (p. 122). In

contemporary educational history, externally imposed change has come about primarily by way of standards-based accountability reforms (Siskin, 2003). Under standards-based reform, the state's espoused theory of action seeks to compress all school districts toward a model of high academic standards and increased student achievement, predicated on statewide assessments or standardized test and increased graduation requirements.

Carnoy, Elmore, and Siskin (2003) devised what they referred to as a "working theory of school *internal accountability*" (p.3) that served as foundation for their study, and provides conceptual underpinnings for this research. They note that the way a school delivers education is considerably influenced by its idea of accountability, essentially what school leaders, faculty and staff think of themselves as being accountable for in their actions and behaviors.

DeBray, Parson and Avila's (2003) speaking more directly to the subject of a schools internal accountability note the following:

> Our study also suggests that, rather than state accountability goals driving alignment with policy … it is the internal accountability system, or the capacity, of the school that tends to drive alignment with (*external*) policy. Since target schools have less capacity to align themselves with standards, this tends to interfere with state goals to compress outcomes (*raise achievement to uniformly high levels statewide*) (p.59).

Elmore (2003) suggests that the issue of assessing the impact of state standards or "external accountability policies" on schools is not merely one of examining the stages of policy implementation or a series of administrative actions, though these elements may be included, but rather one of appropriately characterizing a school's initial conceptions of accountability and organizational capacity which together presage a holistic response to external policy mandates. He writes:

> In our framework, a school's response to external accountability policies is determined primarily by its prior status on a number of dimensions that we group together under the general heading of *capacity*. External accountability systems work not by exerting direction and control over schools, but by mobilizing and focusing the capacity of schools

in particular ways. The people who work in schools and the systems that surround them are not just active agents in determining the effects of accountability systems. Their knowledge, skill, values, and commitments, as well as the nature of the organizations in which they work, determine how their schools will respond (p. 196).

Schools have a variety of conceptions of accountability, and they vary considerably in their organizational capacity. So, not surprisingly, accountability policies provoke a range of responses that reflect the range of variability in these initial conditions (p. 196).

Elmore (2003) delineates the elements of capacity to include:

1) *Internal accountability*,
2) *Structure* of the school and the degree to which it is "conducive to producing a coherent response to external accountability pressure" (p. 202),
3) *Leadership* that is shared and distributed across teachers, departments chairs, and the principal (p. 203),
4) *Knowledge, skill,* and *resources* required to increase coherence around instructional practice necessary to meet new standards. This may require new curriculum content and staff development for teachers and administrators.

Since school capacity towers above policy in determining effects on student achievement (DeBray et al., 2003; Elmore, 2003), it stands to reason that policy makers should seek to bring about the necessary changes in capacity if they wish to enhance student achievement. Michael Fullan (2007) speaks to the significance of building internal coherence and school capacity for meaningful educational change. Referencing Newmann and his associates' (2000) work on professional development that addresses school capacity, Fullan points out that "school capacity consists of the collective effectiveness of the whole school staff working together to improve student learning for all" (p. 164). He enumerates five interrelated components of school capacity which seem to overlap with Elmore's:

1) Teachers knowledge, skills, and dispositions

2) Professional community

3) Program coherence

4) Technical resources

5) Principal leadership.

Fullan calls for collective learning to improve the culture of the school and "organization development because social or relationship resources are key to school improvement" (p. 164).

Cohen, Moffitt, and Goldin (2007) of the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) writing on the subject of education policy research offer a more complex hypothesis. They describe the interdependent nature of policy and practice and put forward the theory of "mutual dependence" to explain the relationship between them. Thus, educational policy implementation, in essence practice, "is dependent upon policymakers and others in the environment for resources to assist their work", and "policymakers depend on practice for success" (p. 68).

The main challenge of implementation, for policymakers and practitioners, is whether and how to build a connection between policy and practice. To accomplish that end requires mastery of four factors: 1) aims that policies set within reach of practitioner's grasp, 2) the capabilities that practitioners must have to implement them – this is comparable to what DeBray, Elmore, and Fullan refer to as "capacity", 3) instruments used to persuade change in practice, 4) the environment in which policy instruments and capabilities are formed and through which they must operate.

The Sate's policy implementation objectives may be viewed either through a fidelity of implementation lens or from the perspective of mutual adaptation. Fidelity theorists hold that policy implementation should be measured by how well local districts and schools align their practices with the intended purposes of the state's regulations. The theory of *mutual adaptation* recognizes that some diffraction inevitably occurs at the local district and school level as policies are implemented, and that its impact in-turn brings about reform of the state policy. The mutual adaptation framework has evolved to the idea of iterative refraction which as a practical matter better explains the change that occurs at the local level as complex changes may not be implemented instantly, but rather in stages over time.

States' theory of action. A state's "theory of action" describes how the various components of an education policy should work together to accomplish the intended goal (McDermott, 2011). DeBray (2005) hypothesizes that an assumption essential to an implementation framework is that school personnel's responses are analyzed relative to the state's theory of how change will occur as a result of the policy. The theory of action is the state's model for implementation of the promulgated policy. It reflects how local beliefs and actions should change as a result of the policy. Thus in applying the implementation framework to assess how and in what ways the local school district and school respond to new graduation course credit requirements (i.e., the Georgia Performance Standard – GPS), the researcher necessarily adopts some of the state's theory of change.

Weick (1995) notes that as an act of sensemaking within organizations theories of action "filter and interpret signals from the environment and tie stimuli to responses" (p. 121). Policy evaluators seek to uncover the assumptions behind the theory of action that "links interventions to results" (McDermott, 2011). McDermott defines "the theory of action of an accountability policy or program" as "the set of ideas that explains how the interaction between holders" (those who hold others accountable) "and holdees" (those who are held accountable) will lead to goal attainment (p.15). My research holds that the state's theory of action can be explained by the broad theory of outcomes-based bureaucratic accountability discussed above.

The challenge for state educational policy makers is to fashion workable policies that have a reasonable chance of accomplishing their goals at the local school building level, once having devolved through a multistage refractive process as the state's directive is interpreted through local values and expectations (Gross & Supovitz, 2005; McLaughlin, 1987). O'Day (2004) writing in Fuhrman and Elmore's text, *Redesigning Accountability Systems for Education*, refers to this layer of community influence through which external policies must filter as local "socially constructed belief systems" (p.19).

Given that some degree of alteration of policies set down from above can be expected, particularly in loosely coupled systems (Weick, 1976), how and in what ways will state policy be moderated or diffracted at the local level? Can these adaptations be anticipated? The extent to which

what gets implemented locally reflects at its core fidelity to the purpose, intent and goals of the state's policy (though local adaptation may look different from the state's model) can be seen as a test of the state's theory of action.

McDermott (McDermott, 2011) draws an illuminative distinction between primary and contextual goals and maintains that the essential aspect of performance-based accountability's theory of action is that "managers and front-line workers" or in the case of a school, principals and teachers, "should concentrate on the primary goals rather than becoming bogged down in the contextual ones" (p. 16). The primary goal of the classroom teacher is to increase student achievement. Contextual goals include such things as building students' self-esteem or improving socialization skills. These are important goals for child and adolescent development, but in a climate of standards-based high-stakes testing, not the ones on which the school's performance will be judged.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 2, Review of the Related Literature, provided a brief history of secondary education reform in the United States. It included an overview of standards-based education reform within the context of national education policy, including a synopsis of Congress and successive Administration's attempts to codify standards into revisions of Title I and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), most notably in 2001 under the Bush Administration's No Child Left Behind Act. This chapter also reviewed the status of educational accountability reform within the states with an analysis of the major tools used by states to impose standards, and a recap of implementation experience in New York and Texas. The Georgia context bears similarities to Texas which I discuss in Chapter 5 (for example Texas has the TAAS similar to Georgia's GHSGT, though Georgia announced a year ago it would discontinue its high-stakes graduation test in exchange for a series of end-of-course exams).

Chapter 2 also discussed the condition of Rurality as it relates to standards-based education reform. Finally, in the 'Building a Conceptual Framework' section I integrate the concepts learned through the literature bearing upon my analysis of the perceptions and reactions shared by teachers and administrators during field work. I utilize the theoretical framework of outcomes-based bureaucratic

accountability (Gross & Supovitz, 2005; J. O'Day, 2004) to explain how various stakeholders (teachers, school administrators, school district leaders, and community actors) contribute to the internal alignment (capacity and motivation) that drives school organizational response to external accountability policy.

Chapter 3, "Research Design and Methodology," follows this presentation with a discussion of design considerations for my research. Therein, I discuss the research procedures employed to carry-out my plan of research, sample selection and how I gained access to the sight.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of my study is to understand the interpretation and implementation of externally mandated accountability policies at the district and school levels, with particular attention to the role of community and historical context in the shaping of interpretations and implementation. This study examines implementation within a single rural South Georgia high school under standards-based reform. The object of this case study is to understand how state education policy on school reform is moderated or diffracted at the local level. This study was guided by the following research questions:

1) How do people understand the policy?
2) How is that understanding shaped by their environment and their understanding of their environment?
3) What were the actions taken?

The study is informed by the education policy implementation literature which looks at the local realization of externally imposed change as an act of "sensemaking" (Cooper et al., 2004; Fullan, 2007; Madsen, 1994; Weatherley & Lipsky, 1977; Weick, 1995). Further explanatory power of how teachers and administrators respond to accountability pressures may be found in Weatherly & Lipsky's (1977) theory on street-level bureaucrats. These theories along with a working theory of school internal accountability (Abelman et al., 2004; DeBray et al., 2003) are subsumed under the outcomes-based bureaucratic accountability (Gross & Supovitz, 2005; J. O'Day, 2004) framework expounded upon in the Building a Conceptual Framework section of Chapter 2 of the dissertation.

The following chapter describes the research design and discusses considerations supporting a case study approach. This chapter also addresses site and sample selection, data sources, data analysis, validity and reliability as applied to qualitative case study research.

Design of the Study

The research questions are designed to uncover how a rural school internalizes and implements performance-based accountability policies, or what the education community refers to as "standards-based reform" (McDermott, 2011). They seek to understand how the environmental realities and culture of a community and its school district explain said district's interpretation and implementation of a new State policy? As such the natural tool for seeking answers to these questions is qualitative inquiry. I selected the 'case study' both as an appropriate format for reporting (Wolcott, 2001) the results of my research and as the choice of what was to be studied (Creswell, 2007). In case study research the investigator explores a bounded system such as a program or entity.

This case study examines the nexus between the promulgation of a major policy change on the part of the Georgia Department of Education (DOE) – the Georgia High School Graduation Rule – and how that policy is altered or embraced by the culture and context of a local rural school district in southeast Georgia; herein referred to under the pseudonym 'Deer Lodge County Schools.' The goal of my study is to understand how rural schools as organizations within the institution of public schooling, embedded within rural communities in southeast Georgia, view and implement the State's new high school graduation requirement. To achieve this purpose, this qualitative case study documents, analyzes and describes organizational and community stakeholders' responses to the State's newly revised high school graduation requirement. In examining these responses my intent is to determine the significance of state education policy activism (Malen, 2003) to rural school and school district practice.

This is an appropriate question for qualitative inquiry because qualitative studies are designed to exhume the true meaning of a phenomenon as experienced by the persons involved (Merriam, 2002). According to Patton (Patton, 2002), qualitative studies are characterized by "naturalistic inquiry," "emergent design flexibility," and "purposeful sampling." This case study embraced all of these research design characteristics.

Qualitative inquiry holds that all knowledge is socially constructed. In natural settings, this study sought to determine how school teachers and administrators respond to externally imposed state policy

directives establishing raised high school learning and graduation requirements. No attempt was made to manipulate or control the environment surrounding the participants in the study (Patton, 2002). Fieldwork was done in schools, district central offices, or in other community settings with which the subjects were familiar and comfortable. The only new element in the setting was the presence of the interviewer / observer with his tape recorder and writing pad. This fostered naturalistic inquiry, open communication and a free flow of ideas from the person being interviewed.

Emergent design flexibility (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002) implies that the structure of the interviews and the nature of questions were subject to change, and in fact did evolve as fieldwork progressed. An interview guide containing structured interview questions was developed in advance of fieldwork. Permission was obtained to modify an interview guide developed for the New York case study by Sipple, Killeen & Monk (2004). Questions were designed to be open ended so that the researcher could build sufficient trust with the interview subject and elicit a free-flowing response. That way, informants could feel comfortable disclosing their feelings surrounding their perceptions and choices of action relative to implementing the new State standard. As I guided the interview, I was sensitive to nuances of communication that might indicate new paths of discovery I might investigate. I was aware that such communication hints might also reveal previously undisclosed feelings indicating trepidation about the decision choices the subject was facing or had made. As researcher, the integrity of data collection and data analysis were dependent upon my actions (Merriam, 2002); therefore, I attempted to remain flexible and encourage open communication so that data could freely emerge from the interview.

According to Merriam (2002), when our questions involve the meaning that others attribute to their lives or experiences, their understanding of phenomenon or the process by which they engage in activities or work the best method to use is a qualitative research design. Qualitative research designs allow the participants to interpret their own experience and to convey, in their own words, the meaning the experience, phenomenon or process has for them. Thus qualitative research is interpretive. In this study, the research questions were investigated from the perspective of board members, the school superintendent, school administrators, counselors, and teachers. I sought to capture the *emic* perspective

of each, which is to understand from each the meaning and significance the experience held for them – their view from inside the culture of the community and the school (Patton, 2002).

Qualitative research yields rich, thick description of data (Merriam, 2002). I conducted several interviews of various case participants. Rich, thick descriptions of their perceptions and feelings add to understandings garnered from analysis of interview data. Also, since qualitative data analysis is inductive, inferences derived from richly descriptive data in the informant's own voice is useful in building themes, categories, or theories about the research questions posed in the case.

Lastly, qualitative inquiry lends itself to questions about the interplay between social and political forces and their impact on reality. In this way, we are able to see how individuals construct reality within a defined set of contextual factors (Merriam, 2002). To illustrate and as noted previously, I am also interested in knowing how power, privilege, and oppression interrelate (Merriam, 2002) in the school context. Whose interests are being served by the responses posed by the school district to state high-school graduation reform? Is it the students or someone else's? When viewed through a social constructivist paradigm (Creswell, 2007), what does the data tell us about the implications of our findings for students and the environmental realities of public schooling in rural South Georgia?

Therefore, for all of these reasons – naturalistic design, emergent design flexibility, purposeful sampling, interpretive, *emic* perspective of the participants, inductive process, researchers as primary instrument, and "emerging procedures shaped by the researcher's experience in collecting and analyzing the data," (Creswell, 2007) – I chose a qualitative case study design as research method for conducting my study.

Site and Sample Selection Strategy

The case study site was purposefully selected. Criteria for site selection were the rural nature of the site, population of the community, number of high schools in the district, and first and perhaps foremost, accessibility of the school and district. The site selected resulted from a convenience sample. I was able to gain entry to the site through a personal contact employed by the district that served as a conduit to my gaining access to the Superintendent of Deer Lodge County Schools to request permission

to conduct research within his school system. He graciously approved my plan of research and authorized me to conduct interviews with his teachers, administrators and district staff. He, his staff, school leaders and faculty were very accessible and supportive of my research. Administrators, teachers and staff participating in the study all consented to be interviewed when requested to do so and none declined, even though they were informed of their right to decline under the research protocol. Since the site for this study is the singular high school in a small (in number of students, but geographically dispersed) rural school district, my promise of confidentiality to interview subjects necessitates my masking the site and precludes my providing the identity of those assisting in gaining access to the site (Merriam, 2002).

Interviews began with district and school leadership and, thereafter, employed snowball sampling (Patton, 2002) techniques to identify other key leadership staff within the high school and district. Although my plan of research encompassed interviewing members of the local business community, they were not as forthcoming in assisting with my research. The community is a small rural community and people tend to be apprehensive about talking on the record about sensitive subjects like the schools, even with the promise of anonymity. The leadership of the local chamber of commerce and the county's largest manufacturer were both asked to participate in the study, but declined. However, two local business owners did consent to interviews.

A purposeful sample consists of information rich cases selected intentionally because of their representative characteristics, common attributes, or other relevant factors (Patton, 2002). I purposely selected a school district in the First District Regional Education Service Agency (RESA) service area in rural southeast Georgia in the Black Belt Region that is representative of that regions' rural demographic and socioeconomic characteristics.

The primary unit of analyses was the rural high school and school district community as a "case". A case is "a specific and bounded (in time and place) instance of a phenomenon selected for study" (Schwandt, 2001). The phenomenon of interest may be a person, process, event, activity, group, or organization which the researcher explores in-depth. In a case study a researcher explores a program in-

depth. Creswell (2007) notes that "case study research involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system (i.e., a setting, a context)."

Yin (2014) explains that case study is an "empirical" investigation that looks at current "phenomenon (the 'case') in depth and within its real-world context" (p.16). He notes that the lines of separation between "phenomenon and context" (p. 16) may be blurred. Because of this blurring of distinction between the phenomenon studied and the setting (background) in which it exists other "methodological characteristics" come to be pertinent features of a case study:

A case study inquiry

- copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result
- relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result
- benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis (p.17).

As stated above, this was a purposeful sampling of school and district leadership and other purposefully chosen participants. Since I was interested in gaining an in-depth understanding of how participants perceived the new graduation requirement and choose to respond to it as subsets of the larger case, I looked for interview candidates who offered opportunities for richly descriptive cases. I used the snowball sampling technique as described by Patton (2002) which includes identifying initial participants and obtaining referrals from them which in-turn lead to other cases for potential interviews and so on.

Data Sources: Informants, Video and Document Analysis

The following sections discuss the conduct of fieldwork and the sources of evidence used in this study including interviews, field observations, review of video evidence and document analysis.

Interviews

My sampling objective was to ensure that not all interview candidates came from school referrals so as not to unduly influence the findings and to ensure that I had broad coverage of the case from multiple sources and multiple points of view that would yield detailed, in-depth data collection (Creswell, 2007). Therefore, I obtained a roster of faculty and staff for the high school and judgmentally selected department heads for the various academic disciplines and key members of the school and district leadership team for interviews. A total of twenty-three (23) persons were interviewed for this study (see Figure 3.1).

An interview is an affiant's in-depth firsthand account of a life experience, phenomenon, or witnessing of an event as perceived by them, the subject (interviewee), and reported to the researcher. Patton (2002) notes that "the purpose of interviewing is to capture how those being interviewed view their world, to learn *their* terminology and judgments, and to capture the complexities of *their* individual perceptions and experiences" (p. 348).

Interviewing involves various techniques for producing data from structured, group, and semi-structured interviews developed within the context of a dialogue between interviewer and interviewee. This demands the utmost care and confidentiality thus reflecting an ethical standard of conduct on the part of the researcher (Schwandt, 2001). An interviewer may conduct an informal conversational interview, use an interview guide, conduct a standardized open-ended interview or use a combination of these three approaches (Patton, 2002). I used a combination approach while asking open-ended questions. My objective was to offer singular and clear questions. Open-ended questions allow subjects to respond in their own words and express what Patton (2002) calls "*their own* understandings" (p. 348) without imposing "predetermined responses" (p. 353) on them.

I sought to establish rapport with the subject while maintaining neutrality. Rapport means I focused my attention on the subject because I wanted her/him to know that I cared about her/his thoughts and feelings about the information she/he was sharing with me (deMarrais, 2004). However, at the same time I endeavored to maintain a posture of neutrality which meant I could not, and would not, allow what

Sample Selections Interviewed

13 High school faculty and administrators:

- English language arts chair
- Mathematics chair
- Science chair
- Social studies chair
- Foreign language chair – German teacher
- Music/band instructor
- Two high school counselors
- Graduation/academic coach (also a certified counselor)
- High school instructional coach – and special education teacher
- Two high school assistant principals (instruction and discipline/AD)
- High school principal

2 Middle school administrators

- Middle school assistant principal
- Middle school principal

4 School district administrators

- District director career, technical, & agricultural education (CTAE)
- District director school improvement services
- District assistant superintendent/director for curriculum and instruction (testing coordinator)
- District superintendent of schools

School District Board of Education

- One school board member

Georgia Department of Education

- Georgia state associate superintendent for standards-based learning

Community leaders

- Two business owners – one of whom was an elected official

Figure 3.1. Sample Selections Interviewed

my informant told me to influence my thoughts about him/her. (Patton, 2002). I was not there to judge and did not think more or less of them because of what they said to me in the interview. I could not become surprised or disheartened by their answers to my questions nor did I display such emotions.

Interviews were approximately 45 minutes to an hour in length. I tape recorded the interviews and used an external microphone. I developed interview questions for the interview guide before going to the interview. Questions were focused on the following areas: 1.) State high school graduation policy, 2) local policy and priorities, 3) the school and community culture, and 4) participant's perceptions of the interaction between relevant factors. As fieldwork progressed interview questions were refined as new information was gathered about the nature of subject responses to questions.

In addition to the recorded interview, I also took written notes of key thoughts, points, concepts or ideas shared by the subject during the interview. These notes were useful for writing up field notes at the end of the day and illuminating data transcription during data analysis (Patton, 2002). Interviews were transcribed verbatim and reviewed and compared to the audio tape by the interviewer for accuracy and completeness.

Field Observations

My typical interview day began with my arriving early to campus, a slightly remote site on the outskirts of town resembling a somewhat suburban area with manicured lawns and selectively placed green shrubbery. I entered the red brick facility through the glass doors at the main wing and walked into the principal's office whereupon I was greeted by his staff of two administrative assistants. After signing-in I was asked with whom I was meeting and that person would either be summoned to the principal's office conference room or I was directed to their classroom on one of three wings protruding out as spokes from the hub adjoining the principal's office across from the lunchroom/auditorium.

Participants were observed in the school setting. However my opportunities for observation of instruction were limited and only incidental to campus field work, as my permission to access the school did not include classroom observation. I was permitted to observe administrators and teachers interacting with students in the hallways as they changed classes in the normal course of the school day. This enabled me to note how they related to other administrators, teachers, students, etc. and the general environment of the school. While it would have been my preference to observe teachers instructing to see how they interact with students in the classroom and take field notes, given that this was not a

longitudinal study and I did not have the luxury of spending extended hours in the field such observations were not feasible.

I conducted most of the high school administrator interviews in the high school conference room conveniently located in the back of the administrative suite of offices. I sat opposite the subject across the conference table with the microphones positioned between us. Four faculty interviews were conducted in the instructors' classrooms during planning time between classes. Usually the instructor and I seated ourselves at student desk. All interviews were by appointment, usually facilitated by my liaison at the superintendent's office. School district administrators were interviewed in their offices at the district office building, usually seated at their desk or a small table. Middle school administrators were interviewed in their offices at the middle school located on a separate site on the opposite side of town.

Fieldwork began and ended with interviews of approximately 45 minutes to an hour's duration with members of the high school and districts' leadership team. After introductions, I reviewed the informed consent agreement with each participant whereupon we both signed an original and each retained a copy. As we seated ourselves at the conference table, or in our classroom desk, I advised each participant that she/he could discontinue the interview at any time. All selectees chose to see the process through and each participant answered all of my questions.

While traversing the high school campus to and from interview appointments, I was allowed freedom of movement which enabled me to observe the physical plant along the way. The grounds and modern red brick buildings were clean and in good physical condition. Inside campus buildings were hallways with tile floors that were clean and polished. Walls made of cinder block were clean and recently painted (off-white in color, no graffiti). In general the facilities were what one would expect for a normal middle class environment. Students appeared appropriately groomed and decently (modestly) dressed. I was struck by the apparent absence of disorderly conduct. Everyone appeared reasonably well behaved; perhaps because school officials were around and the hallways are monitored with video cameras.

Documents

Documents can be a rich source of evidence in a qualitative study. They support triangulation which is a method of increasing validity and reliability of data (Merriam, 2002). Documents can provide independent evidence of a phenomenon thus corroborating the story in an affiant's interview, or clarifying and adding weight to observations. In this study, documents were also useful to help formulate a picture of the environment of the school and thereby enhance the richness of the case analyses presented.

Documents reviewed included school board policies and procedures, school improvement plans, school district budget data, a synopsis of school board meeting minutes (Deer Lodge County School Board, August 2011), published local newspaper articles reporting school board proceedings, the AdvancED Regional Accrediting Agency Report (Wohlers, 2012) on reaccreditation, and other non-confidential papers. The school website was monitored for useful information. Also, National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) school directory information (National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), ies, 2012) and Governor's Report Card (Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2010) school performance accountability data were reviewed for the school and district prior to contacting school officials to arrange interviews to gain insight into graduation rates of students and drop-out rates, both collectively and by ethnic/racial subgroup classification. No confidential documents were reviewed for this study. Early in the research process I viewed, took notes from, and transcribed portions of videotaped records of Georgia Department of Education (DOE) (Cardoza, 2007b) board meetings containing public hearings and discussions leading up to the taking of a vote on approval of the new graduation rule (GPS and minimum graduation course credit requirement). Taken as a whole, these documents combined with the transcripts from 23 interviews and other observations provided a rich storehouse of data from which to construct the case.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using the constant-comparative method (Merriam, 2002). The constant-comparative method of data analyses involves reading through the interview transcript identifying themes as they emerge from the data. These themes were labeled using terms sensitive to the data (reflecting the

meaning thereof), then grouped together into categories. As I moved back and forth between the data comparing categories, primary categories and subordinate themes were identified. Finally, major categories were developed. From this work, concepts, ideas or theories emerged consistent with the inductive nature of qualitative research (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Creswell, 2003). These ideas, concepts and theories were then tested against the data narratives for appropriate representation of the interviewee's perspective.

My report was written-up presenting the findings from the data analysis phase. Data was analyzed within the perspective of the social constructionist paradigm defined in the problem statement above. I endeavored to view the informants' experiences and the school's practices within the wider context of social structures within the community in an attempt to get beneath surface appearances to better understand how the underlying issues of power and privilege, reproduction and hegemony comport with the need to comply with a new State performance accountability directive. Does high-stakes test-based accountability reform actually change the embedded practices (tracking, etc.), perceptions and understandings that serve to enable the reproduction of chronic gaps in academic performance between identifiable subgroups of students (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Oakes, 2005)?

Validity and Reliability

Trustworthiness in qualitative research involves assuring that the researcher's presentation of the data genuinely reflects the subject's stated views and intent without distortion. The methods we use to provide such assurances are referred to collectively as validity and reliability. The primary tools for assuring validity and reliability in qualitative research are *rich, thick-description, audit trail, triangulation,* and *member checks* (Merriam, 2002).

Janesick (2000) notes that validity in qualitative research relates to "description and explanation and whether or not the explanation fits the description" (p. 393). According to Merriam (2002), "Internal validity asks the question, how congruent are one's findings with reality?" (p. 25). I have sought to provide rich, thick descriptive accounts from interview data and, wherever feasible, attempted to disclose the subject's perspective in his/her own words while being careful to maintain their anonymity.

Unlike quantitative research, which uses statistical techniques as data gathering instruments, qualitative research identifies the researcher as the instrument. It is he who, through objective observation and inquiry, ensures the integrity of the data gathering process. As the research instrument, I maintained internal validity by approaching this work objectively, utilizing open-ended questions, documenting my interviews and findings, maintaining an audit trail, and conducting member checks of data. Documentation of interviews has already been discussed above. In addition, I maintained an audit trail and archived the transcript record in accordance with IRB guidelines. Member checks involve going back to interviewees after the data analysis phase and asking them whether or not our codes and implied theories are credible (Merriam, 2002). That is, do they fairly represent the informant's perspective?

Triangulation is a method of assuring internal validity of a study through incorporation of the collective judgment of third party (outside or independent) sources (Merriam, 2002). Given the number of interviews conducted (23), a large data set for a qualitative study, interview transcripts could be cross compared on various themes that emerged to assess consistency and corroboration of affiants' stories. The incorporation of multiple sources of data from different interview subjects helped to confirm validity. The use of multiple methods of data collection (interviews, observations, and documents) further enhanced the internal validity of this research as documents, newspaper articles, minutes of meetings, etc. could be compared against affiants' statements in interviews confirming trustworthiness of his/her account.

Consultation with doctoral student colleagues, committee members and other professional associates proved the rationale of my data collection and analysis protocol providing further assurance of internal validity. Whereas the ontological framework for this study employs a composite of theories (outcomes-based bureaucratic accountability: capacity – internal alignment with the external method, loose coupling, sensemaking, street-level bureaucrats) as lens through which to view the data from multiple perspectives, the realism of themes and conclusions drawn from the data will be further supported.

Reliability in qualitative research denotes the extent to which the data support the results derived from them. That is, the results are consistent with the data and dependable (Merriam, 2002). The notion of dependability implies that others would agree that the results of the study are reasonable given the data collected (Merriam, 2002). Documented evidence of interviews and findings have been maintained to show data collection and data reduction methods. This evidence from richly descriptive data serves as an audit trail thus providing other researchers with a means of verifying or substantiating how I arrived at my findings.

Limitations of the Study

External validity or generalizability is a statistical term borrowed from quantitative research that reflects positivist views (Merriam, 2002). This qualitative case study did not employ statistical sampling techniques from which inferences may be drawn via some statistical method to larger populations. The nature of qualitative research with its focus on understanding cases in-depth and its use of purposeful sampling is inconsistent with the concept of generalizability of sample data. However, what Merriam (2002) terms "reader or user generalizability" (p. 28) can be achieved through the provision of "*rich, thick description*" [italics in original] (p. 29) of data. As noted above, I have thoroughly documented interviews and findings and incorporated direct quotations in the subject's own voice from interview transcripts into the analysis and presentation of the data thus enhancing the richness of the presentation to the reader. Given a wealth of descriptive information, the informed reader will be able to determine for himself whether or not the findings may be generalized to his particular situation.

Anticipated Ethical Issues – Researcher Bias and Assumptions

It is customary to provide a discussion of reflexivity in qualitative research. To engage in reflexivity is for the investigator, the instrument of qualitative research, to critically self-examine and disclose his/her views in relation to the study (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). What follows is an attempt to reveal to the reader my own identity and epistemological (Schwandt, 2001) stance in relation to the research topic.

How one views the world as an adult is undeniably influenced by the experiences of one's youth. After all, it has been said that we are the sum total of our experiences. Having grown up in Georgia in the 1950's and 60's, I witnessed the early transition from segregated water fountains to integrated schools. The reaction of many of those in power at that time was to stir up excitement and fear about the perils of the coming integrated society and "race mixing." Eventually the hysteria subsided as the nation's focus turned increasingly toward an all-consuming war effort in Viet Nam.

Years later I would return to the rural community of my youth to begin a teaching career. Now approaching middle-age, I was to begin a new career, teaching middle school, in the same building structure where I had begun my formal education as a six year old child years before. It was at once a moving and awakening experience for I could reflect upon my life and that from which I had come, and at the same time survey the reality that lay before me. An integral component of that reality was the student composition of the classes I and my colleagues were assigned to teach. I noticed early on that certain classes seemed dominated by certain types of students. Intellectual groupings became noticeable. Behavior issues tended to crop up within some classes more so than others. And among these groupings of children, either black or white racial color lines would noticeably predominate. Later I would reflect upon that experience and find myself asking why. What was going on here?

Sociologist W. E. B. DuBois (1903/1990) observed that "THE PROBLEM [small caps in original] of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line …" (p. 16). Now that we have entered the early 21st Century it would seem that preoccupation with economics and survival have taken center stage. Who in America would dare question the motives of authorities surrounding race and ethnicity amid the post 911 climate of concern for national security and defense? Did not we all feel the pain and anguish brought on by the horrific acts of September 11th? Were the terrorist actions not directed at "Americans," all "Americans"? Have not we all felt the pinch of a declining economy, tight budgets, lay-offs and rising fuel bills in recent years, not to mention wariness from protracted wars in Iraq and Afghanistan? Should not patriotism and the push toward globalization take priority over civil rights?

But people must and do respond to their fears and all too often in the experience of humankind that response has been to project suffering onto other less fortunate souls instead of managing fear and directing it toward constructive action that solves problems. As an African-American who has spent many years in the "old" and the "new south," I have witnessed the fallout from misguided fear. My apprehension is that America will not learn from her past. As a nation, we have gained most when we have diligently worked to expand opportunity and equality for all (Bowen & Bok, 1998). Those with power and wealth fear having to share it. My suspicion is that there is inequity in our schools with regard to race and class and that the system of public schooling at various levels perpetuates (either consciously or subconsciously) and maintains the economic and political status quo within southern society (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Oakes, 2005). As a researcher, my challenge has been to set aside, to *bracket*, that suspicion and approach my research without bias. I attempted to do so with a clear vision of the epistemic importance of my research accepting my obligation as researcher to approach it with a degree of detached empathy. My commitment to conduct a valid and reliable scientific inquiry into the nature of this phenomenon, setting aside my own presuppositions and prejudices, necessarily held primacy over my own fear.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 3 provided a descriptive overview of my plan of research and the methods employed to accomplish it. After restating the research objective, I outlined the research design and shared considerations supporting a case study approach. The chapter discussed site and sample selection, data sources, data analysis, validity and reliability as applied to qualitative case study research. Limitations of the study with regard to its generalizability and anticipated ethical issues were also discussed.

CHAPTER 4

GEORGIA'S SECONDARY EDUCATION POLICY ENVIRONMENT

The purpose of my study is to understand the interpretation and implementation of externally mandated accountability policies at the district and school levels, with particular attention to the role of community and historical context in the shaping of interpretations and implementation. This study examines implementation within a single rural South Georgia high school under standards-based reform. The object of this case study is to understand how State education policy on school reform is moderated or diffracted at the local level. This study was guided by the following research questions:

1) How do people understand the policy?
2) How is that understanding shaped by their environment and their understanding of their environment?
3) What were the actions taken?

The study is informed by the education policy implementation literature which looks at the local realization of externally imposed change as an act of "sensemaking" (Cooper et al., 2004; Fullan, 2007; Madsen, 1994; Weatherley & Lipsky, 1977; Weick, 1995). Further explanatory power of how teachers and administrators respond to accountability pressures may be found in Weatherly & Lipsky's (1977) theory on street-level bureaucrats. These theories along with a working theory of school internal accountability (Abelman et al., 2004; DeBray et al., 2003) are subsumed under the outcomes-based bureaucratic accountability (Gross & Supovitz, 2005; J. O'Day, 2004) framework expounded upon in the 'Building a Conceptual Framework' section of Chapter 2 of the dissertation.

The following chapter reviews the evolution of a system of public education within Georgia and its experience with standards-based reform. The State's theory of action relative to the proposed changes in State education policy is discussed and the new policies are outlined. Anticipated changes in stakes for

students as a result of these policy changes are assessed. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the context of school finance in Georgia specific to the Deer Lodge County School District (pseudonym).

Evolution of Georgia's Education Policy Environment

According to Mewborn (2013) of the University of Georgia writing in the New Georgia Encyclopedia on the history of k-12 public education in the State (Mewborn, 2013), Georgia's constitution has obligated support of public education since 1777 and its first government supported high school for white youth began operations in Augusta, GA in 1783. However, a state sanctioned system of public education was not enacted until the post-Civil War (1861-1865) Reconstruction era.

Born out of the aftermath of slavery and federal government oversight, a state sponsored system of public education was among reforms proposed by an alliance of Reconstruction era legislators and Freedmen that ultimately withstood conservative's re-capture of the State's political apparatus in 1872; though not in its originally proposed non-segregated form. Under the conservative backlash of the post-Reconstruction era, a system of racially separate public schools was implemented and protected for the next 82 years until the U.S. Supreme Court rendered its historic *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* decision in 1954 ending "de jure" segregation in public schools. The *Brown* decision overturned *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the U.S. Supreme Court's 1896 opinion that endorsed the doctrine of "separate but equal" public facilities. The court's decision in *Plessy* effectively nullified protections granted African-Americans after the civil war under the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (Mewborn, 2013).

Georgia's governor at the time, Herman Talmadge, is purported to have remarked of the court's opinion that *Brown* made the U.S. "Constitution as worthless as a 'scrap of paper'" (Maruca, 2004). After *Brown* a state's-rights strategy of defiance known as "massive resistance" to forced integration ensued among southern states. Almost two decades would pass before Georgia's state sponsored system of school segregation would finally be dismantled. Although school segregation was deemed officially over in the 1970's, many communities established and continue to operate private academies designed to skirt the court's ruling, that separate schools are inherently unequal (Mewborn, 2013).

Georgia's public education system was instantiated from the outset as an institution divided by race as dictated by the State's segregated political, social and economic systems of the late nineteenth and much of the twentieth century (Mewborn, 2013). Subsequently the State and its system of public education evolved through the tumult of massive resistance in segregations waning years, counteracted by civil disobedience, ultimately leading to affirmative steps toward school integration, followed by economic modernization and eventual technological innovation in its most affluent communities and schools.

While the above is not an exhaustive treatment of the evolution of a system of public education in Georgia it illuminates the social, political, and economic context within which the State's education system has grown up and the range of perspectives which influence every aspect of its being – from curriculum to budgets to the preparation and hiring of teachers. It is within this broad context that several reforms emerged over time leading to the State's present education policy environment. What remains is a system still grappling with vestiges of its old nemesis (at least in some locales) as it attempts to put new mechanisms in place ostensibly to facilitate global competitiveness in the digital age (Mewborn, 2013).

Standards-Based Education Reform in Georgia

The following section provides a brief chronology of educational reform in Georgia followed by introduction of the newly implemented reforms that are the focus of this study: the revised minimum graduation course credit requirement and the Georgia Performance Standard (GPS) curriculum.

Historical Background

Georgia's K-12 education system is run by an elected State Superintendent who reports directly to the Governor. The State Superintendent serves as the administrative head of the Georgia Department of Education (DOE) and as the chief executive officer for the State Board of Education. The State Board of Education is comprised of 13 members, one representing each of Georgia's 13 federal congressional districts. The DOE is organized into five operating divisions: Curriculum and instruction; Finance and Business Operations; Instructional Technology and Media; Policy and External Affairs; and Teacher and Student Support (Mewborn, 2013).

At the outset Georgia's foray into state sponsored public education may have necessarily been measured, given the meager resources available to the State treasury after the Civil War (Mewborn, 2013). For most of Georgia's history, education has been a local function with the bulk of funding coming from local taxpayers. In time, the empire state of the south would prosper and with prosperity would come the resources necessary for the State to finance upgrades to public education, provided the vision for educational improvement was shared by a majority of voters and taxpayers. In the latter part of the twentieth century, led by astute political leaders like former Governors Roy Barnes, Joe Frank Harris, and Zell Miller, Georgia made significant strides in modernizing its system of p-16 education. With prosperity and increased state funding has come more state control of public schools, however. McDermott (2011) notes that educational reforms tend to accumulate over time. A chart chronicling education reform in Georgia (see Figure 4.1) since Reconstruction appears in this section (Jennings, 2012; Mewborn, 2013).

Revised Graduation Rule and GPS Introduced

In the fall of 2007, the Georgia Department of Education (DOE) (Cardoza, 2007a; Cardoza, 2007b; Tofig, 2007) announced plans to enhance the rigor of the State's high school graduation requirement beginning with the entering 9th grade class in the 2008-2009 school year[1] (Georgia Department of Education, 2010). The new standard was designed to align the units required for graduation in core subjects and the Georgia High School Graduation Test (GHSGT) with the then newly revised Georgia Performance Standard (GPS) curriculum. A Georgia Department of Education website (Georgia Department of Education, 2012b) provides the rationale for the revised Georgia Performance Standard. Under the Quality Basic Education Act of 1985 (QBE) the State is required to maintain a curriculum that stipulates what students are expected to know in each graded subject. Moreover, Georgia's standardized tests, "the Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) for grades 1-8 and the Georgia High School Graduation Test (GHSGT) for Grade 11" are required to be aligned with that

[1] Draft regulation available on line at http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/pea_policy.aspx?PageReq=GradRules1

DATE	Chronology of Education Reform in Georgia
1916	Georgia General Assembly enacted compulsory school attendance law for children (ages 8-14).
1937	A layperson Sate Board established.
1949	Minimum Foundation Program legislation mandated a minimum 9-month school term/year (prior to this some schools operated for as little as 4 months out of a year)
1954	*Brown v Board of Education* U.S. Supreme Court decision
1950's – 1960's	Concerted attempt by State officials to resist court mandated integration
1964	U.S. Civil Rights Act of 1964 passed by U.S. Congress made law of the land
1965	The Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965 passed by U.S. Congress; Title I programs initiated to improve education of children from low-income families.
1960's – 1970's	Private segregation academies emerge in Georgia
1970's	Racial integration in public schools comes about with court ordered busing in some large districts (i.e. DeKalb County)… education component of State budget garners legislative concern…
1980's	Concern for "quality" in public education emerges… home school movement emerges
1985	The State's first "major educational reform" was the Quality Basic Education Act (QBE) introduced in the Senate by Roy Barnes (later became Governor), passed by the legislature and signed by democratic governor Joe Frank Harris. QBE focused on funding equalization between wealthier suburban school districts and rural districts. "QBE introduced the 'student full-time equivalent' (FTE) standard in funding" (Grant, 2007). Funding based upon the # of hours students spent in the classroom each day; poor schools were incentivized to increase support for programs deemed deficient; minimum salary set for teachers; raised standards for teacher certification; student teacher ratios could now be set by State Board; Head Start and kindergarten programs incentivized; graduation rule set minimum competencies in core subjects and health; Georgia history course made mandatory for eighth grade; established Quality Core Curriculum (QCC) providing guidelines for what should be taught at each grade level within a given course content area.
1993	Governor Zell Miller led public campaign and legislative push to enact a state lottery to fund merit-based (B avg.) college scholarships, pre-k and Head Start programs, also fund physical and technological improvements in K12 and postsecondary institutions.
2000	A Plus Educational Reform Act initiated by Governor Roy Barnes established separate office of accountability to develop testing standards, issue report cards on school performance, lowered age for compulsory school attendance from eight to six; eliminated teacher tenure; teacher certification could now be revoked for receiving unsatisfactory ratings for two years within a five year span. Georgia's A Plus Act coincided with federal Goals 2000 legislation.
2002	QCC audit by Phi Delta kappa is precursor to Georgia Performance Standards (GPS).
2005	GPS initiated to align Georgia school curriculum with national standards (Grant, 2007)

Figure 4.1 Chronology of education reform in Georgia. Adapted from "Education reform," by C. Grant, 2007, The New Georgia Encyclopedia. "Reflections on a half-century of school reform: Why have we fallen short and where do we go from here*?"* by J. Jennings, 2012, Center on Education Policy. "Public education (pre K-12)," by D. S. Mewborn, 2013, The New Georgia Encyclopedia

curriculum. A January 2002, Phi Delta Kappa audit determined that the Quality Core curriculum (QCC) in place at that time lacked sufficient depth and was too broad. It also did not measure up to national standards. (Georgia Department of Education, 2012b)

Jack Jennings (1995), Director of the Center on Education Policy (CEP), in a treatise on school reform described the disconnect that existed between the general high school curriculum in the United States and most standardized assessments, arguing "…is it any wonder high school students are not motivated to learn?" "They don't see the relevance of what they are taught, since that's not what they are held accountable for" (p. 1). He noted the need for curriculum alignment between secondary and post-secondary education and shared a bit of insight as to why instruction and assessment had become disconnected, explaining that states while creating the pressure to improve also contributed to the confusion by their failure to link test-based accountability systems to the curriculum when they set them up. As a result, by 1994 of the 45 states with testing programs only about 10 had established such linkages with the required curriculum that give teachers and students an indication of that for which they will be held accountable. Jennings reports the reason for lack of alignment between test and the curriculum may be found in the separation of duties and responsibilities as accountability has been moved to the state level, while the decisions on what will be taught remain at the local level.

Jennings (1995) maintains that politicians at the state level responded to pressure from constituents displeased with public schools by putting in place new tests ostensibly to get better results from schools. However, few policymakers first sought to determine what results should be expected on the tests. He cites as rationale for this our nation's experience with local control founded upon the Constitution and the concept of limited government powers, which holds that government functions best the closer it is to the people. Extrapolated to education, this is taken to mean that while states have authority over schools, decisions about what should be taught and how it should be taught have traditionally been relegated to local school boards. In a nationwide system of education encompassing more than 14,000 schools this approach has led to inconsistencies in curriculum and instruction (Jennings, 1995).

According to the Georgia Department of Education (DOE) (Georgia Department of Education, 2012b), by providing a more fully developed standard, the GPS was expected to resolve the above described deficiencies of the old content standards under the previously existing Quality Core Curriculum (QCC). GPS goes into greater depth by incorporating the content standard and expanding upon it to include "suggested tasks, sample student work, and teacher commentary on that work." Clear expectations are provided in performance standards for assessment, instruction and student learning activities:

> They define the level of work that demonstrates achievement of the standards, enabling a teacher to know 'how good is good enough.' The performance standards isolate and identify the skills needed to use the knowledge and skills to problem-solve, reason, communicate, and make connections with other information. Performance standards also tell the teacher how to assess the extent to which the student knows the material or can manipulate and apply the information (Georgia Department of Education, 2012b) .

Georgia House Bill 1187 (2001) provides that High School Graduation Tests will be eliminated when end-of-course tests for core subject areas are developed and put in place. Amendments to State Board of Education rule in April 2011 ratified End of Course Test (ECOT) as replacements for the GHSGT (Georgia Department of Education, 2013)

Coinciding with Georgia Department of Education's (DOE) (Georgia Department of Education, 2012b) initiation of the January 2002 audit leading to proposed revision of the content standards of the old QCC was a move by DOE officials to position the State to comply with the impending provisions of the federal 'No Child Left Behind Act of 2001,'(United States Congress, House Committee on Education and the Workforce, 2002) whose statement of purpose is as follows:

> The purpose of this title is to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging State academic achievement standards and State academic assessments.

DOE maintained that the proposed graduation requirements were analogous to modern-day college-preparatory and work-ready requirements; however, the threshold necessary to pass the GHSGT and earn a high school diploma was, at that time, still below the standard set by NCLB.

The above notwithstanding, DOE claimed that the new standard was developed in collaboration with representatives of the Georgia Board of Regents which governs the State's university system, and representatives of the Technical College System of Georgia which supervises the State's technical colleges. This joint effort established a state educational policy environment that for the first time asserted an aligned "p-16" system of education in Georgia.

Georgia Department of Education's Theory of Action

The Georgia Department of Education (DOE) adopted the theory that a system of testing and accountability will motivate people (administrators, teachers, students and parents) to focus on outcomes. The State's theory of action, as previously noted, posits that all students will learn more and earn better grades when they take rigorous college preparatory courses because research and experience show that students are more likely to succeed when they are expected to do so and more likely to fail when they are not. It is an example of the 'self-fulfilling prophecy' at work. It is expressed in the ideal that if we set higher expectations for students they will extend their reach to get a better education, irrespective of whether they choose to pursue postsecondary education or enter the workforce after high school graduation (Georgia Department of Education, 2010). And, by extension, if we challenge and support students in tougher academic courses the boredom factor will decline as students become more engaged, therefore dropout rates will decrease.

Upon offering the new graduation rule before the State Board for a vote of passage on September 12, 2007, then Georgia State Superintendent of Schools, Cathy Cox, (Cardoza, 2007b) acknowledged shortcomings of the existing dual track system of high school diploma seals, while encouraging support for a new direction founded upon academic excellence:

> This will set Georgia out as a leader… there is a core knowledge set that every student in Georgia must achieve. The standard is the same for all students regardless of where they

> intend to take their career. The artificial separation that has been put in place in Georgia for several years between college bound and non-college bound is not working in our State. It is clear that it is not working among all constituencies, including the students.
>
> The perception is that the non-academic or non-college prep diploma is of no real value. The standard will correct that with one standard that all students will be expected to meet to say that they are a high school graduate. And yet students will have some choices over the elective courses that they will take… flexibility to take rigorous academics and at the same time take a CTAE course, etc. We think the 4th science requirement will help to build a bridge between CTAE and traditional academics.
>
> We want to eliminate the artificial separation between tech-prep and college-prep. We will recommend in the future two years of foreign language for all students as soon as we can build the capacity to do that within the system…

To be sure, Georgia is not the only state to put forward such an ambitious educational policy change in recent years. The State's governor at the time, Sonny Perdue, played a leading role in the National Governor's Association's advocacy through Achieve, Inc. to develop the Common Core of State Standards, a voluntary curriculum standard developed by the states, which Georgia adopted as an extension of the Georgia Performance Standards in 2010 (Georgia Department of Education, 2012a). This new curriculum standard raised the floor so that, if implemented with fidelity at the local level, every Georgia child would now have the chance for a quality basic education regardless of family background or financial means. The question left unanswered was, to what extent could legislative intent, State Board governance objectives and fidelity of implementation be assured as officials sought to install these new graduation requirements in each of Georgia's 180 public school districts?

Achieving the State's implementation objective would require that school districts, building administrators, and teachers change their instructional methods and practices so that students experience learning more effectively in the classroom. It's all about people and how you get them to do something differently (Fullan, 2007). How and in what ways would local actors interpret the State policy change and

act upon it? Would they proceed to put it in place? How would implementation be carried out? The answers to these questions, of course, would largely be addressed for the subject rural school district once my research questions were answered.

Changes in State Level Education Policy

The following subsections discuss recent developments in state level education policy: new graduation rule, GPS curriculum, the anticipated transition to the Common Core of State Standards (CCGPS) curriculum, charter schools legislation in Georgia, and the State's evolving struggle with objective reporting of high school graduation rates.

New Grad Rule

In September, 2007, Georgia's State Board of Education unanimously approved a new High School Graduation Rule, 16-4-2-.48, or IHF (6). This rule required that students entering 9th grade for the first time in the fall 2008-2009 school year (FY 2009), and subsequent years, complete 4 units of math and 4 units of science in addition to the 4 units of English and 3 units of social studies that had previously been required under the QCC grad rule. In addition to the increase in specific requirements within core subjects, students are required by the new rule to complete a career pathway from CTAE (Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education) course offerings, foreign language or music concentrations. The new rule also eliminated the tiered diploma options that had existed in Georgia as 'tech-prep' and 'college-prep' diploma tracks under the old Quality Core Curriculum (QCC), and replaced them with a single College Prep diploma under the new Georgia Performance Standard (GPS).

GPS Curriculum

With the installation of the new graduation rule and accompanying Georgia Performance Standard (GPS) there were several changes in curriculum that high schools were required to adhere to. First, as noted above the tiered diploma option was eliminated; therefore the core courses previously associated with the tech-prep career track (low level or applied, math, science and English) were withdrawn from the list of approved high school credit courses (or subsumed by a change in course title under the college-prep (CP) curriculum).

Concurrent with this change in course offerings, the mathematics curriculum under the GPS was completely redesigned. The principal of the subject high school in this case study referred to the new math as a "spiral curriculum" as opposed to a traditional linear one. Traditional course titles like algebra I and II, geometry, trigonometry and calculus were replaced with group designators – Math 1, Math II, Math III, and Math IV with an interdisciplinary focus on application of concepts and development of understanding so that as mental connections are made communications is enhanced and real world problems may be solved (Georgia Department of Education, 2012b):

- Mathematics I: Algebra, geometry, and statistics. A series of "process standards" are associated with each content standard.
- Math II: Geometry, algebra II, and statistics.
- Math III: Advanced algebra / statistics.
- Math IV: Pre-calculus – trigonometry/statistics is a course in pre-calculus and statistics, designed to prepare students to enter college at the calculus level.
- Accelerated versions of these interdisciplinary courses are available to advanced students.

Unique to this new sequence of mathematics courses is the requirement that courses must be taken sequentially and a student may not take the next higher level course in the sequence before passing all preceding courses. Thus each course is a prerequisite for the next course in the sequence. This has caused teachers and administrators in the high schools some concern.

Georgia's Transition from GPS to

Common Core of State Standards Curriculum

In recent years, Georgia has moved aggressively to revamp its Quality Core Curriculum to reflect new performance standards under the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS). During the period encompassed by this study, the State sought to align the Georgia Performance curriculum to state standardized test and the Georgia High School Graduation Test (GHSGT). Georgia is now in the process of upgrading to the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards (CCGPS) (Georgia Department of

Education, 2012a). Proposed by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) (NGA Center for Best Practices, 2013) in partnership with the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), the Common Core developed as a universal framework for preparing America's youth for college and the workforce (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), 2013). Georgia has partnered with 44 states, the District of Columbia (D.C.), and the Department of Defense Education Activity by agreeing to a set of core standards that span preschool through 12th grade in "English language arts, mathematics, and grades 6-12 literacy in science, history/social studies, and technical subjects…"(Georgia Department of Education, 2012a)

These Common Core State Standards (CCSS) (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), 2013) are voluntary uniform standards coordinated by the states that are purportedly higher than the federal minimums. As such, states are not required to enact them. CCSS provide a set of goals and expectations for what knowledge and skills students need, at each grade level by subject, in English language arts and mathematics, with additional emphasis on reading, writing and research in all subjects including social studies and the physical sciences. In mathematics, special attention is given to developing conceptual understanding that goes beyond procedural skill so that real world application and relevance is understood both as foundation for the next level of instruction and for college and career readiness. Participating states must develop curriculum to implement the standards. Thus states can direct how standards are operationalized in their state (Georgia Department of Education, 2012a; NGA Center for Best Practices, 2013; Southern Regional Education Board, 2013a).

The Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), an interstate compact for education based in Atlanta, Georgia, has been awarded a grant from the Bill and Malinda Gates Foundation to assess implementation of CCSS in 15 states during the FY2013 and FY2014 school years (Southern Regional Education Board, 2013a). SREB says it supports the Common Core for three reasons: 1) It raises expectations about what students need to know and be able to do on grade level to become college and

career ready at graduation, 2) The standards framework provides clear and consistent goals for college and career readiness, and 3) Cooperating in standards development frees up state resources for implementation and building capacity to ensure student academic success. It should be noted that since 1981 SREB (Southern Regional Education Board, 2013b), led by a board comprised of governors from member states, has championed education reform through statewide academic standards and testing, as well as encouraged closer ties between secondary schools and colleges.

Recently, a conservative group of Georgia Republicans spoke out in opposition to the state's participation in the Common Core of States Standards that, as previously noted, evolved out of the Republican led National Governors Association several years ago. Their reason for opposing the CCGPS appears to simply be that the Obama Administration has endorsed the Common Core, therefore, this group feels it must stand against it. Former Republican Governor, Sonny Purdue, has challenged their thinking on this.

Charter Schools Legislation

In November of 2012, Georgia's electorate approved a ballot initiative, Georgia House Resolution 1162 ("HR1162"), which creates state chartered public schools that will be funded at two and a half times the rate at which the State funds traditional public schools. This measure garnered much public opposition from citizens and educators alike. Many contend that it was passed cloaked in misinformation designed to confuse and mislead an uninformed electorate. Court challenges have been initiated. It is likely to be a contentious budget issue as it proceeds into the implementation phase.

This is Georgia's second attempt at implementing charters as the first charter law was struck down by the state's Supreme Court because it interfered with the right then reserved to school districts alone under the State constitution to authorize the creation of public schools (Grove, Lord, & Gaines, 2012; Southern Regional Education Board, 2013a). The question of whether or not charters perform any better than public schools remains an unresolved debate both in Georgia and throughout the nation.

Controversial High School Graduation Rates

Graduation rates have been a contested statistic nationwide, depending upon whose numbers and method of calculation one uses. According to an analysis completed by the Schott Foundation (Holzman, 2006) based on NCES (National Center for Educational Statistics) data, Georgia's state-wide estimated high school graduation rate in 2006 was only 39% for black males and 54% for white males. The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University reported the graduation rate at 52% for Blacks and 62% overall for the State based upon 2002 data (Orfield, 2004). The Georgia Department of Education reported the States graduation rate at 72.3% in 2007 and 74.4% in 2008 respectively under the old method of defining the cohort based upon 12th grade outcomes.

As of 2011, states are required by the U.S. Department of Education to calculate an adjusted cohort graduation rate based upon when a student first becomes a freshman. The cohort rate reflects the number of students who actually graduate within four years of the date when their cohort started and is adjusted for student transfers. Thus, actual started and completed numbers are used and those who do not complete with their class, whether or not they remain in the school system, serve to reduce the rate. It is a more accurate reflection of yield or performance. According to the Georgia Department of Education (Cardoza, 2013) , Georgia's reported 2011 cohort adjusted graduation rate was 67.4% and the 2012 rate was 69.7%.

Changes in Stakes for Students

This section discusses the potential impact of the proposed changes on students and the challenges they face in achieving their goals for a high school diploma. In this section I explore the changes in math and science core credits required for graduation, the challenge of negotiating the new mathematics curriculum, the elimination of the easier tech-prep curriculum and its implications for students. I also discuss potential implications of these changes for students beyond their high school years.

Math & Science Core Credits Required

Increasing the number of math and science courses required to graduate to 4 per subject, under DOE's revised minimum graduation course credit requirement rule, has raised the stakes for students and will make it more difficult for some students to graduate. Given the incidence of high school drop-out and poverty, particularly in rural and urban Georgia, there exists the potential at least that students on the margin of failure and facing a steeper climb to complete the required number of math and science courses for graduation will give up and leave school.

A necessary component of my case analysis entailed a review of school and district practices relative to the treatment of students who may be experiencing difficulty or disenchantment with school and thus inclined to leave school before graduation. In their analysis of the New York case, Sipple, Killeen, and Monk (Sipple et al., 2004) offered that a pressure release was needed on the system to address this issue. They noted that current practices left issues of equity, equality (and ethics) unsettled. They questioned whether or not students who were considered "at-risk" of failing were being pushed out so as to manipulate standardized test results and graduation rates.

Researchers have documented the correlation between state high school exit exams, high rates of poverty, racially/ethnically diverse populations, and high incidence of school leavers. The majority of states where these relevant conditions are found tend to be located in the South and Southeast (Perna & Thomas, 2009).

Challenging Mathematics Curriculum

Unique to this new sequence of mathematics courses under the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS), the courses must be taken sequentially and a student may not take the next higher level course in the sequence before he has passed all preceding courses. Thus each course is a prerequisite for the next course in the sequence. This has caused teachers and administrators in the high schools great concern. Unfortunately, it means that if a student fails a course and gets behind in the math sequence in his freshman or sophomore year, he could be setting himself up for a five year high school career. Of course, school districts are wary of this because it means that even if a student does not drop out, yet takes five

years to graduate, the school does not receive AYP credit after the 4th year, and in fact the student counts as a negative against the school's performance if they have not graduated by the end of the 4th year under the new adjusted graduation rate formula.

The "spiral mathematics curriculum" (Anonymous, personal communication, December 4, 2009) coupled with limited hours in the seven-period (six-period at some schools) school day meant limited options for students who failed a course to remediate, get back on track, and graduate within four years. A high school freshman who fails math I and repeats his sophomore year may be destined to a fifth year in high school if he is not able to recover through a program of computer lab based credit recovery or summer school. This in turn leads to additional frustration for the administration because schools are not incentivized to graduate students beyond four years under current AYP guidelines and may incur a penalty for failing to graduate them on time. With their peer group having graduated the spring before, returning fifth year high school seniors are likely to feel unwelcomed and out of place.

Elimination of Tech-Prep

Elimination of the low level track made school more challenging for some students who were not previously on the academic track. The new performance standards represent a significant departure from the status quo because they remove the legitimating force of law ascribed to dual tracks or tracking under the guise of academic curriculum differentiation, choice and merit, which has allowed a less than optimum (or in some cases mediocre) education to be meted out to some students since desegregation was outlawed by the federal courts in the 1960's and 70's (Oakes, 2005). However, as we shall see, an advanced placement or "AP" track still exists for gifted students as an option under the new curriculum and is being oversubscribed by some parents for students who may not be adequately prepared for the rigor of advanced or accelerated courses, yet undersubscribed by other students identified as capable of doing the work but not encouraged or motivated to attempt advanced courses.

Post-High School Implications for College Access and Workplace Success

Today, the adequate preparation of high school graduates for postsecondary education is of major concern to the broad spectrum of higher education institutions nationwide (both two-year and four-year

colleges and universities). In 2007, in a move unprecedented in the history of the State, the heads of Georgia's two postsecondary education institutional governing boards collaborated with the leadership of DOE (the k-12 sector) to develop an aligned high school graduation standard. The University System of Georgia, which controls the State's liberal arts colleges and universities, and the Technical College System of Georgia, which governs the State's technical career colleges, worked in partnership with the Georgia Department of Education (DOE), which governs the K-12 system, to develop a high school graduation rule that is aligned with the admission requirements of both systems of post-secondary education in the State (with the exception of foreign language requirement for the university system).

This action represented a major break with the past as the State DOE had for years endorsed separate curriculum tracks for technical career graduates (commonly called "tech–prep") and those seeking a college preparatory diploma. This move also comes with the acknowledgement that in today's high-tech oriented, globally competitive workplace the appropriate work ready credential should necessarily encompass the same knowledge, skills and abilities as the college preparatory diploma. In the case under study is it (or was it at the time of the interviews) foreseeable that this DOE goal will be realized, given the perceptions and responses of teachers and administrators in the subject rural high school to the State mandated reforms in the new grad rule?

Georgia's State and Local School Finance Mechanisms

In most of the United States funding of public education has traditionally been a local matter shared by the State through approximately equal funding of 90 percent of the cost of operating the public schools, with the remaining ten percent coming from the federal government in the form of grants and formula funding. Under Georgia's Quality Basic Education (QBE) foundation funding formula the State is supposed to provide 80% of a school districts operating budget while the district provides the remaining 20% from local property tax revenue. QBE sets a minimum five mill local contribution (match) from property taxes. The following sections discuss the impact of Georgia's school finance mechanisms on the context of school funding in the Deer Lodge County School System.

Adequacy of State Funding

In addition to decade long budget cuts (discussed below) to K-12 education, Georgia's QBE Equalization program has not been fully funded since 2009. Over the last thirty years the equity verses adequacy debate has been at the center of deliberations about public education funding in America. Full discussion of adequacy in education finance is beyond the scope of this research, however a brief synopsis is germane to our analysis of the budget short-fall in QBE's Equalization program.

Following on the rationale of the Supreme Court's ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* citizens across the country brought legal challenges to states concerning the unequal funding of public schools based on access. Plaintiffs argued that consistent with *Brown* children attending public schools based in poor districts with fewer resources due to a lower property tax base, the traditional way of funding public schools in most U.S. states, were being systematically short changed. However, the equity argument began to run into difficulty in the courts when considering such issues as whether or not funds should be withheld from wealthier districts in order to provide resources for poorer districts; or the court's refusal to bus students across district lines to achieve racial balance and equal access to quality schools.

The concept of adequacy emerged as an alternative argument with which to justify additional state spending on behalf of poor districts to off-set their property tax revenue disadvantages. Under the adequacy rationale, state appellate courts have held that states are obligated under their constitutions to provide at least an "adequate" education up to some minimum level. There are alternative methods in the literature for determining what "adequate" means in a given case (Sjoquist & Khan, 2006).

Perhaps in response to this nationwide trend in the success of adequacy litigation, and as a preemptive measure in view of the merits of a recent Georgia court case, McDaniel *v* Thomas, 248 Ga. 632, 285 S.E.2d 156 (Ga. 1981) that, while unsuccessful, moved the adequacy argument forward, the State legislature included an equalization provision in QBE. However, as noted above, with the recent recession it has cut funding under this program, and substituted new legislation effective with the 2013 budget cycle (House Bill 824) narrowing eligibility for equalization funding to the most economically distressed school districts while cutting in half the funds available for this purpose (Sielke, 2011).

State Budget Cuts

In recent years state budget cuts have put enormous pressure on Georgia's rural public schools – like the one in this study. Schools must either make up the shortfall from additional property taxes, provided that option is politically viable for the school board, or reduce the funding of capacity building resources in the schools. The Georgia Budget and Policy Institute (GBPI) reports that over 5,400 classroom teachers have been lost to k-12 education in Georgia since 2008 as a result of recessionary budget cuts (Suggs, 2013, February). Fewer teachers directly equates to larger class sizes, less planning time and collaborative effort, and less time for individualized instruction or remediation all of which have been shown to have deleterious effects on student achievement.

Over the last decade, in the wake of economic recession and the rising popularity of political conservatives' marketization ideologies, a combination of "austerity cuts" or "amended formula adjustments" to state education budgets plus a shrinking local tax base has created the perfect storm for public education in Georgia. State revenues have been down considerably since 2007 and are just now returning to their pre- recessionary level with the FY 2014 general fund budget of $18.8 billion (Suggs, 2013, February).

Sielke (2011) reports Georgia legislators cut more than $4.3 billion from the State budget for education between FY2003 and FY2011. The Obama Administration's American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) designed to deflect the impact of economic recession restored $900 million of those cuts in FY2009, 2010 and 2011 resulting in net cuts of $3.4 billion to public schools over this 9 year period. FY2012, QBE was unfunded by an additional $1 billion bringing the total net cuts to over $4.4 billion over this ten year span.

Local School Finance pre-policy implementation

The subsections of this heading discuss the context of local school finance leading up to the time when these new state policy reforms were to be put into place. Issues addressed in this subsection of my study include: Declining enrollment FTE revenue; Recessionary state budget cuts versus local tax

revenue; Local budget constraints: staff and administrators views; Budget constraints – pre-policy: teacher impact; and Federal funds – pre-policy.

Declining enrollment FTE (Full-Time Equivalent) revenue – pre-policy. Declining student enrollment, or FTE (Full Time Equivalent), has a direct negative revenue impact on the budget, thus it becomes necessary to discuss enrollment decline in budgetary terms. Declining enrollment has meant reductions in the FTE (full time equivalent) funding formula dollars provided by the State at the same time state funding was being cut due to severe economic recession. Deer Lodge County School District had been battling the effects of declining enrollment for a dozen years and had anticipated the belt tightening necessary to accommodate FTE reductions on budgets system wide (Dr. B. T. Briggs (pseudonym) personal communication, May 21, 2010) The superintendent remarked that when he began his tenure the system had approximately 3,300 students whereas enrollment was now down to 2,600 students which, of course, made it more difficult to maintain some programs in the schools (B. T. Briggs, personal communication, May 21, 2010).

School district leaders knew that the enrollment numbers were skewing downward as they were seeing declines of 70 to 100 students lost from the rolls each year. What they could not have anticipated was a severe economic recession precipitating sizeable state budget cuts at the same time as they were due to see large reductions in enrollment revenue over a decade. The local school superintendent, Dr. Briggs (pseudonym) used the phrase "double whammy" to express his sense of being overwhelmed by first losing money because of enrollment decline and then having more money taken away because of the state budget cuts. Over the next school year, the enrollment numbers continued their downward trend. By the time the 2011-2012 school year began, the district's enrollment had dropped to 2,363 students on the first day of school (Deer Lodge County School Board, August 2011).

The principal of Deer Lodge County High School, Mr. R. C. Wohlers (pseudonym), as we sat down in his office for an interview, echoed Dr. Briggs' concerns about the school district's budget. He noted the budget affects everything from athletics to the number of textbooks that they are able to buy. (R. C. Wohlers, personal communication, December 4, 2010).

Recessionary state budget cuts vs. local tax revenue – pre-policy. Part of the impetus for budget cuts was the declining trend in the local economy. A local economic downturn in jobs and sales had been going on for several years, even before the Great Recession began. Local real estate valuations had soften somewhat in recent years and the effect on the tax digest had by now been absorbed for the most part. However, local economic conditions were no doubt made more delicate by the state and national economic slowdown compounding the effect. I return to the local analysis further into the discussion in this section, after a closer examination of state funding.

Georgia legislature cuts funding: QBE unfulfilled. The second source of local school system budget woes was the statewide recession and declining sales and income tax revenues that had been squeezing state general fund coffers (Sielke, 2011; Suggs, 2013, September) Additional analyses of the school finance crisis in Georgia has recently been made available by the Georgia Budget and Policy Institute (GBPI). In her report entitled, "The Schoolhouse Squeeze: State Cuts, Plunging Property Values Pinch School Districts," Claire Suggs (2013, September), Senior Education Policy Analyst at GBPI, chronicles the facts and figures delineating 12 years of state cuts to QBE's formula. Since 2010 the annual shortfall has exceeded a billion dollars a year.

Suggs (2013, September) goes further than previous reports by calculating the reduction in FTE per student ascribed to cuts to QBE in each school district as well as providing detailed data on millage rates, and changes in tax digest. Information in Tables 4.1 and 4.2 for Deer Lodge County Schools was extracted from her report. They show the magnitude of state vs. local sources of funding for Deer Lodge County public schools (see Tables 4.1 and 4.2).

Local, State, Federal budget mix: Tradeoffs and LOST. As for how much of the district's budget distress was attributable to local revenue constraints vs. state funding cuts, during our interview back in May of 2010 I inquired of the superintendent as to a breakdown by funding source (i.e. state funds, vs. local funds, vs. federal funds) contributing to the makeup of the school budget. He informed me that the "local property tax situation typically remains somewhat constant" (Dr. Briggs, personal communication, May 21, 2010), though they did have a modest property tax increase a couple of years

prior. Suggs' (2013, September) recent data confirms the property tax increase was a little less than a half mill (see Table 4.2) which tended to offset the decline in the digest (-4.4% per Table 4.1). According to Dr. Briggs, the Deer Lodge County School System currently levied about 13 mills (13.42 per Table 4.2) which, based upon a 90% collection rate, yields around four and a half million dollars in local property tax revenue. He expected to receive roughly $14 million in state funds in the coming year, barring further cuts. Add to the above nine million dollars in projected federal funds for a total anticipated budget of $27.5 million. In addition to grants, much of the federal funds are conditioned upon the demographics of the community (Title I dollars, etc.) All of Deer Lodge's students qualify for free and reduced price lunch which enhances the school system's opportunity for securing need-based federal assistance. Suggs's report corroborated the interview data from the superintendent.

The superintendent estimated that they had incurred almost a 20% reduction in state funds over the last couple of years. He judged that over two million dollars in state funds was being withheld from his district due to state budget cuts. As a consequence, the State's budget cut was now larger than their local five mill share of QBE program funding. They were now spending the equivalent of 83% of local property tax dollars to help fund the state mandated instructional program and this was having the effect of "putting school systems in a real bind" (B.T. Briggs, personal communication, May 21, 2010).

Asked if he felt this was an equitably shared burden across the state, Dr. Briggs allowed that it depends on how one views the situation. He noted that some school systems have a more robust tax digest than others, with the presence of corporate headquarters of large commercial entities, etc. Others have the option of levying an additional one percent local option sales tax (LOST) to support school construction. We discussed the fact that a neighboring school system, Beta County (pseudonym), had recently opened a new high school in its county seat, another at its southeast Beta County location, had a third under construction and had two new elementary schools under construction. As he explained, Beta County Schools was able to finance such a magnificent school expansion from the extra penny of LOST revenue they levy; something his school system cannot do because Deer Lodge County and local municipal governments share the second penny of LOST revenue instead.

Dr. Briggs suggested the above factors have to be weighed in the equation when determining fairness. Anecdotally, he noted that some large school systems in metropolitan areas had previously enjoyed abundant resources financed by high millage rates approaching the state maximum (state caps at 20 mills). Some of these were now experiencing drastic declines in their tax digest as a result of high mortgage foreclosures brought on by economic recession. Those systems, he said, are facing the prospect of their tax digest declining by as much as "15 to 20% and they can't do anything about those lost dollars because they're already maxed-out on the millage rate" (B. T. Briggs, personal communication, May 21, 2010).

Shouldering the property tax burden locally. Because of the rural nature of his district, noted Dr. Briggs, the lack of growth and the absence of a concentration of business interest makes it more difficult to increase tax revenue without raising taxes on homeowners, which was not a popular idea in conservative Deer Lodge County. All things considered, he saw the economic downturn as perhaps placing poor school systems on a more even footing with prosperous systems around the state. Districts that had once enjoyed an abundance of resources now had to tighten their belts the way poor districts were accustom to doing.

Budget constraints – pre-policy: Corroboration from staff and administrators. Asked whether or not fiscal resources had been constrained by demographic or economic influences in the last five years, members of the superintendent's staff confirmed that demographic shifts had not occurred, but negative economic influences had definitely been a factor in the district's budget woes. They cited declining population, over ten years of declining enrollment in the school system, waning interest in agriculture and agribusiness – the county's main industry, manufacturing plant closings, and textile plant closings as indicators of a sharp economic decline going back a decade with the previous year being the most severe. The one bright spot in their recent sources of funding was the presence of federal funding via stimulus dollars.

Table 4.1 Deer Lodge County Schools Funding Sources: State Government vs. Local School District--Part I

	Full-Time Enrollment FY2014	Percent Economically Disadvantaged FY 2013	Change in % Economically Disadvantaged FY2003-2013	QBE Cut FY2014
State Funding	2,317	79.00%	0.8	$ (1,600, 353)
				% Change in Tax
Local			Tax Digest 2012	Digest 2008-2012
Funding	2,317	79.00%	$382,592,110	-4.4%

Note. Adapted from "The schoolhouse squeeze: State cuts, plunging property values pinch school districts." by C. Suggs, 2013, September. (Policy Report). Atlanta, GA: Georgia Budget & Policy Institute. Retrieved from http://gbpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Schoolhouse-Squeeze-Report-09232013.pdf

Table 4.2 Deer Lodge County Schools Funding Sources: State Government vs. Local School District--Part II

	QBE Cut Per FTE: FY2014	Cumulative QBE Cut FY2003 - FY2014	% Change in State Funds per FTE 2002 - 2014 Inflation adjusted
State Funding	($691)	$ (13, 837,080.00)	-25.8%

Local Funding	Tax Digest Per FTE 2008-2012	% Change Tax Digest Per FTE 2008-2012	Millage Rate 2012	Change in Millage Rate 2003-2012	% Change Local Revenues per FTE 2002-2012 Inflation-adjusted
DLCS	$155,779.00	9.4%	13.42	0.472	64.1%

Note. Adapted from "The schoolhouse squeeze: State cuts, plunging property values pinch school districts." by C. Suggs, 2013, September. (Policy Report). Atlanta, GA: Georgia Budget & Policy Institute. Retrieved from http://gbpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Schoolhouse-Squeeze-Report-09232013.pdf

Interviews with other staff corroborated the administration's assertions regarding budgetary constraints and impacts. The responsibility of making sure budget cuts were equitable within the system fell to the superintendent and within the high school to the principal. Based upon the CTAE Director's comments, it was clear that some areas of the high school were more severely impacted by budget cuts than others. Again, the way state funds (FTE) are allocated to various types of activities as well as availability of Perkins federal dollars for vocational education may have had some impact here as well, but it appeared that CTAE had not experienced as severe cuts with its FTE count remaining stable in recent years.

Beyond the issue of staffing, the high school principal addressed the question of budget shortfalls on an operational level in terms of how he was requiring his teachers to work within budgetary constraints. He noted that he had rationed copier paper and if they needed more they would have to purchase it themselves, yet his teachers still could get what they needed as far as classroom supplies were concerned (R.C. Wohlers, personal communication, December 4, 2010).

Budget constraints – pre-policy: teacher impact. Interviews with lead teachers from all four core subjects (math, science, English language arts, and social studies) highlighted concerns about budget restrictions. The loss of planning periods as a result of budget induced layoffs was a big source of job dissatisfaction that negatively impacted teachers' ability to collaborate and improve their skills. Among teachers, the social studies department head's response was indicative of their uneasiness about constrained resources, and the negative impact of the budget shortfall on their ability to do their jobs. He shared that "budget, budget, budget" is the constant word you hear, and that everything else pales in comparison to its importance. He explained its impact on operations, including recent reductions in force (RIF) resulting in larger class sizes for the teachers that remain, fewer administrators to handle discipline resulting in more discipline problems, inability to hire substitute teachers affects morale, which in turn affects teaching. "When we lose teachers we [teachers that remain] suffer." (Anonymous, personal communication, December 16, 2009).

Federal funds - pre-policy. As indicated in the discussion of CTAE above, federal dollars play a major role in balancing the budget at Deer Lodge County Schools. The federal programs coordinator noted that federal funding had remained relatively unchanged or had risen over the last decade and this had permitted the district to do some innovative things with technology. Their Performance Learning Center (PLC or alternative school), now incorporated into the Technology Assistance Program (TAP) on the main campus, and the technology that was being used there was just one example of the major impact federal grant funding was having on boosting student achievement.

Principal Wohlers shared that because the high school did not make AYP for two consecutive years (though they did make it in the year preceding my study) they qualified for "a lot of federal money: stimulus money, Title I money, Title V money" (R. C. Wohlers, personal communication, December 4, 2009). He added that a school gets the money that enables it to start new programs, have tutoring and mentoring, and address other student support needs, "but if you make AYP, you don't get it [the] next year." "So it is a catch 22" (R.C. Wohlers, personal communication, December 4, 2009).

Mr. Wohlers' statement about the sudden availability of federal funds highlights what the school principals see as their continuing quandary. While they are grateful to have access to additional federal dollars, they are sometimes confounded by what they feel are too many strings attached. The middle school principal shared his concern about the tradeoffs between funding sources and how those tradeoffs, with their associated constraints, complicate decision making. He cited as an example the regulations surrounding Title I funding which preclude school districts supplanting the property tax with federal funds. He felt this ties local schools up a lot and makes them spend money in ways that are not the most cost effective.

Part of the concept about which he expressed concern is embedded in our system of budgeting and administering targeted public funds through various federal and state government programs. It is a system long established, and he understood that. But as I probed more deeply, he explained his real concern was their seeming inability to identify a need at the ground level and have the need (and the teachers who would eventually own implementation) drive the process from beginning to end so that he

had teacher "buy-in" after implementation was completed. That way, he thought, teachers would hence be committed to making the newly acquired resource or technology work effectively for students, and accordingly be able to demonstrate results achieved.

However, because of the way the money comes to them, the uncertainty associated with grants, federal and state budget cycles, timing issues and so on; these conditions do not allow them, in his view, to be "very strategic" in their planning and results in "haphazard spending." (Middle school principal, personal communication, May 19, 2010). He went on to say that the district had a very able and experienced staff handling the grant application process, and a great deal of work goes into strategic planning. However, he finds the system frustrating because he does not feel in control of the funding cycle, noting that when he hears that they have got to spend money or lose it, it is at that point in time that he loses all ability to plan ahead or have any foresight. His preference would be to have a scenario whereby, as he related, "… a need is seen" at the ground level, and "an end is seen" and "we work toward it" (Middle school principal, personal communication, May 19, 2010).

School Finance Post-policy

Above, I discussed the context of school finance occurring before and existing at the time of implementation of these new state performance accountability policies. I now turn my attention to the recessionary budget crisis that continued to exist after implementation of the State's new standards-based reforms. It is perhaps fair to say that school finance within the Deer Lodge County School District was at this time in a state of flux. There were multiple things going on at the same time in this case. The changing context of school finance in the most recent years leading up to and including the time of my research, and immediately thereafter made for a challenging situation for local school leaders.

Recessionary budget crisis – post policy. Massive state funding cuts could not be made up from local revenues thus cuts had to be made in the budget. According to the Superintendent it became necessary to make drastic changes in the way they conducted their business, including: cutting staff, reduced in the coming school year (2010 – 2011) by 10 days. They also cut some salaries (all with the intent of reducing the budget). (B.T. Briggs, personal communication, May 21, 2010).

At the time of these interviews the school system was already operating on a reduced 180 day calendar. Before the next school year could arrive, in fact before the present school year was completed, it became necessary for the system to institute even deeper austerity cuts. In March of 2010, the Superintendent announced that both he and two senior members of his central office staff would retire at the end of the current school year and return as 49% employees the next school year in their same or similar capacities (as a cost savings to the school district). In addition, all staff and 11 and 12 month employees would lose ten days in the upcoming budget (*source* article local newspaper -- name not given to protect anonymity of research site).

To smooth out disruptions in cash flow from the State Department of Education and accelerate anticipated funds from various federal grants and entitlements, the Deer Lodge County School Board secured a temporary line of credit with a local bank. This was, according to the local newspaper, a practice heretofore unheard of as a way of conducting the school system's business in this conservative community.

The feeling of school leaders and the elected school board was that local tax payers were not amenable to additional property tax increases. By July 2011 the school board had set the millage rate at 13.146 mills and, as the superintendent noted, was not inclined to raise it higher. As previously observed, this community is politically conservative and frowns upon its representatives spending local tax dollars too liberally.

School Finance Summary

The above discourse on the context of school finance disclosed economic and financial conditions present before and after (pre and post policy) institution of Georgia's new state policy reforms at Deer Lodge County High School. These conditions, which bear on the resource capacity of the district and high school, set the stage, the backdrop if you will, for implementation of these new Georgia DOE standards. The dual budget axe of declining enrollment FTE revenue and recessionary state budget cuts had what the superintendent called a "triple whammy" effect on the school system's budget for the

subject year under study, FY 2009 – 2010, compounded by the cumulative effect of budget cuts over several years leading up to that point.

My review of district and school finance included a discussion of the relationship between state funds, local funds and federal funds in the school system's annual budget. Recessionary budget cuts had severed 20% or about $2 million in state funding from the district in the school year under study. Suggs (Suggs, 2013, September) reports that the Georgia DOE has withheld almost $14 million in QBE funding from this rural school district over the last 12 years (FY2003 – FY2014) due to legislative budget cuts, a 26% reduction in annual FTE revenue. This was causing severe hardship to the district in as much as it now required spending 83% of local school tax dollars to fund the existing state required QBE instructional program. I also reviewed the local option sales tax (LOST) alternative taxing structure employed by a neighboring school district to fund capital improvements.

The above section also explored the significant role of Title I formula funding and federal grant funding in the district's budget. In addition to feeding poor children, federal dollars provide opportunity for acquisition of state-of-the-art technologies for the district in the form of new and innovative resources for instructional support and improvement.

Chapter Summary

In addition to an overview of the context of school finance in Georgia, with specific application to the Deer Lodge County School District, this chapter reviewed the evolution of a system of public education within the state and its experience with standards-based reform. The State's theory of action relative to the proposed changes in educational accountability policy was discussed and the new policies were outlined. Anticipated changes in stakes for students as a result of these policy changes were also evaluated.

As has been shown, the recent gutting of state funding for public education under the guise of austerity cuts, while demanding higher quality, is counterintuitive and portends a serious reversal of fortune for rural schools and communities below the "Fall Line". The state legislature in cooperation with the executive branch of state government have been reviewing the funding formula in various

forums since 2005, with an eye toward revision along adequacy lines. But little progress seems to have been made. Meanwhile, in rural communities like Deer Lodge County still feeling the sting of austerity cuts educational and civic leaders are beginning to question whether the State has retreated from its obligation to seek a balanced approach that includes the qualities of equity and adequacy in funding Georgia's public schools (Sielke, 2011).

CHAPTER 5

CASE SETTING: REGIONAL, COMMUNITY AND SCHOOL DISTRICT CONTEXT FOR SECONDARY EDUCATION

The purpose of my study is to understand the interpretation and implementation of externally mandated accountability policies at the district and school levels, with particular attention to the role of community and historical context in the shaping of interpretations and implementation. This study examines implementation within a single rural South Georgia high school under standards-based reform. The object of this case study is to understand how state education policy on school reform is moderated or diffracted at the local level. This study was guided by the following research questions:

1) How do people understand the policy?
2) How is that understanding shaped by their environment and their understanding of their environment?
3) What were the actions taken?

The study is informed by the education policy implementation literature which looks at the local realization of externally imposed change as an act of "sensemaking" (Cooper et al., 2004; Fullan, 2007; Madsen, 1994; Weatherley & Lipsky, 1977; Weick, 1995). Further explanatory power of how teachers and administrators respond to accountability pressures may be found in Weatherly & Lipsky's (1977) theory on street-level bureaucrats. These theories along with a working theory of school internal accountability (Abelman et al., 2004; DeBray et al., 2003) are subsumed under the outcomes-based bureaucratic accountability (Gross & Supovitz, 2005; J. O'Day, 2004) framework expounded upon in the Building a Conceptual Framework section of Chapter 2 of the dissertation. Chapter 5 describes the context for public education unique to this region of South Georgia and the Deer Lodge County (pseudonym) community and school district.

South Georgia Regional Context

In 2002 researchers at the Carl Vinson Institute of Government at the University of Georgia identified a Southeast Region of persistent poverty stretching across 11 southern states referred to as the Black Belt Region (Carl Vinson Institute of Government, 2002). The moniker, "Black Belt," was first used by Booker T. Washington in 1901, to describe the color of the rich black soil that once made cotton king in the region under the dehumanizing system of wealth building perpetuated by slavery.

In Black Belt counties the African American population exceeds the national average, and generational poverty ensnares many of the regions' people. This region of the rural south is historically distinct for its high rates of poverty, low education levels, poor economic conditions, and limited access to healthcare resulting, in general, in poor quality of life for a disproportionate segment of its people across the life span (Carl Vinson Institute of Government, 2002).

Geographically the Black Belt land mass stretches in a broad swath from the Mississippi Gulf Coast across southern Alabama, Middle and South Georgia and the Florida panhandle, before turning northeast along middle and coastal South Carolina, eastern North Carolina, and ending in southern Virginia (Carl Vinson Institute of Government, 2002). Ninety one (91) Black Belt counties lay in rural South Georgia below the Fall Line stretching from Columbus, Georgia on the western border with Alabama east to Augusta on the Savannah River.

The prevalence of persistent poverty in the Black Belt south, a natural outgrowth of a history of reliance on subsistence agricultural practices that depleted the soil, racial segregation with its attendant economic disparity, and social injustice in the region has long made availability and access to adequate educational resources problematic for its people. The 1965 Voting Rights Act brought plurality to elected office in the South as thousands of disenfranchised black citizens were allowed to participate in their local and state governments for the first time since reconstruction. They in coalition with progressive political leaders of the day ushered in the dawning of the 'new South'. In Georgia, in the attendant decades of the 1970's and 1980's, this coalition was able to enact legislation pumping new investment into public education as the States' economy grew (Cook, 1993; Cook, 2013).

Deer Lodge County Community Setting

Today, below the Fall Line Georgia's Central Savannah River, Coastal Empire, and Magnolia Midlands areas represent an agrarian region now in transition to a mixed light industrial and service economy. The region's Black Belt counties exhibit a diverse demographic, cultural and historical profile. It is characterized by pockets of poverty and unemployment mixed-in among large-scale automated farms interspersed with oasis of high tech manufacturing. Most of the textile industry left years ago, replaced within recent decades by a few technology based industries bringing much coveted jobs to those workers who have the necessary skills to access them.

Deer Lodge County (pseudonym) enjoys a landmass of 655.7 square miles making it the 10th largest county in Georgia in terms of geography (Boatright & Bachtel, 2013). It is a predominantly rural farming community with limited industry. Like most rural places, folks here tend to be independent by nature, friendly, but mostly conservative. The county contains, within its geographic boundaries, four municipalities; the largest, its county seat – Pineville, Georgia (pseudonym), is the geographic hub of the county. With a population of 2,956 Pineville is the most urbanized community in the county, and it is where the public elementary, middle, and high schools are located. Buses transport students to Pineville from all corners of the County. Beloved for its Azalea and Dogwood lined streets in spring time (Brown, 2013), the town of Pineville takes pride in its civic-minded residents; most of whom know each other's families, if not each other personally (Lightsey, 2008).

Demographics

Dear Lodge County had a population of 14,593, as of the 2010 decennial census (Census, 2011); a decrease from the 2000 Census count of 15,374. Furthermore, 2010 number declined by 2.7% to an estimated 14,202 by 2012, while the State's population had increased 2.4% during the same period. Consequently Deer Lodge County is not trending with the State's population growth. Among Georgia's 159 counties it ranks 111th in population size. The County's population is fairly evenly divided along racial lines with 7,965 White residents (54.6%) and 6,318 Black or African American residents (43.3%).

Native Americans, Asians, and persons descended from two or more races constitute the remaining 2.1% of the county's population.

Over time Dear Lodge County has lost population. In 1930, its population density was 31.6 persons per square mile (Kriesel, 2012). In 2007, it was just 23.2 persons per square mile. And over the last 83 years there has been a significant demographic shift from a majority minority population, albeit without political power, to a white majority. In 1930, the county had an African American population of 11,621 or 56.68% of its residents (Georgia statistics system: County demographic profiles.). Beginning with the Great Migration in the 1940's the county witnessed steady population decline until the early 1980's when net outward migration ceased and the population stabilized around 15,000 residents. As noted above in the last decade Deer Lodge County's population has begun to contract once again and local leaders want to stem further decline.

Postsecondary Educational Attainment

Only a small percentage of local citizens have attained education beyond high school. With regard to postsecondary educational opportunity, a small satellite facility of the area's technical college is located in Pineville, providing GED and other adult education services. In addition, in an adjacent county just southwest of Deer Lodge County, a regional state university and a new satellite campus of a community college are within twenty-five miles of the Deer Lodge county seat. Residents in the north and south ends of Deer Lodge County may also commute to technical college campuses in adjacent neighboring counties. Additional postsecondary educational institutions are an hour away in Augusta, Georgia to the north and Savannah, Georgia to the south providing an array of higher education services to those who have the ability and resources to access them.

Economics

The County has neither the income per capita nor the diversity of industrial base enjoyed by its urbanizing neighbors. According to the U.S. Census Bureau per capita income was $16,647 in the most recent period reported (2011 dollars) (Census, 2011). For the state, at large, that number was $25,383. Of concern is the fact that income per capita appears to have declined in real economic terms in recent

years. Local manufacturing employment reached a peak of 2,094 workers in 1994 (Kriesel, 2012) and has been on a gradual but continuing downhill slide since then. From 2000 to 2011 manufacturing employment declined by 24% (from 1,156 manufacturing jobs down to 878). Employment in the trade, transportation, and utilities sector fell by a like percentage. Total employment dropped from 4,560 in 1995 to 3,311 in 2011, for a net loss of 1,249 jobs or 27% of the workforce. Net farm income, though strong in 1973, fell off in subsequent years, but has begun to recover since the turn of the century. The U.S. Census (Census, 2011) reports median household income was $31,963 in 2011, the average was $44,406. However, 40.4% of households have a yearly income of less than $25,000. Median earnings for workers (part and full-time) was $24,399. Most recent data available from the U.S. Census Bureau (Census, 2011) reports unemployment for the County at 16.3%. According to the Georgia Department of Labor (Georgia Department of Labor, 2013) employment in the region is currently at 9.5%.

The *Georgia County Guide* reports the median value of owner occupied homes was $76,800 during the 2006-2010 timeframe (Boatright & Bachtel, 2013). However, almost 28% of residents live in rental housing, up from 22% ten years ago (University of Georgia, Vice President for Public Service and Outreach, 2000). Much of it is substandard, and the county has been identified as one of Georgia's housing stressed counties (Tinsley, 2005) indicating that 30% or more of occupied housing units have four or more physical and financial conditions. The county is rated as "lagging rural" among persistently poor counties in Georgia (Carl Vinson Institute of Government, 2003), with fiscal capacity at only 61% to 75%.

From an economic growth standpoint, the County enjoyed its heyday in the 1950's when U.S. highway 301 traversing the length of the county brought in tourist dollars to local roadside motels and restaurants (Lightsey, 2008). With the development of the interstate highway system (I-95) in the late 1960's to early 1970's most of the tourist traffic disappeared. Suddenly Deer Lodge County became 'off the beaten path' for most northerners traveling to Florida for summer vacation.

Today, Deer Lodge County has a small general aviation airport (Hudson, 2013) near its industrial park, ample water and electric utilities, and has managed to keep open the local hospital amid difficult

financial and economic times for small rural hospitals. The county recently became a Georgia Certified Work Ready Community. The two largest employers are a high tech bearings manufacturer and the County's school system with approximately 350 employees. The county also boasts recently constructed athletic ball fields and an abundance of game and wildlife for hunting and fishing enthusiasts. With the new Savannah River Parkway recently completed, city and county leaders (Lightsey, 2008) are hoping to get the broader business community beyond its borders and a new generation of Georgia travelers interested in Deer Lodge County once again.

Public Health

A pattern of persistently poor health (Fertig, Bachtel, Okundaye, & Dahal, 2009) outcomes is prevalent in Deer Lodge County, Georgia. The County's vital statistics exceed the averages for Georgia counties, in the negative, in a number of categories: Low weight birth rate per 100 live births, 12.2; Unwed live birth rate per 100 live births, 59.7; Teen pregnancy rate per 1,000 females age 10-19, 49.5; Mortality – death rate per 100,000 (from all causes) 1,123.8 as opposed to 923.5 for the average county in Georgia (Boatright & Bachtel, 2013).

There are indications that the number of single parent households is increasing. The University of Georgia's Initiative on Poverty and the Economy (University of Georgia, Vice President for Public Service and Outreach, 2000) reported the number of families headed by single females at 991 or 24% (based upon 2000 census data). While the average number of persons per household is only 2.53 today, compared with 3.90 in 1960 (Kriesel, 2012), the number of births to unwed mothers per 100 births has steadily increased since 1990 (59.73 in 2010; 61.4 in 2009; 62.55 in 2008; 56.48 in 2007, yet only 44.72 in 1990) even though the number of teen pregnancies per 1000 girls has remained relatively constant during that time.

The percentage of the population living at or within 50% of the poverty rate in Deer Lodge County exceeds 30%. In three of its neighboring four counties, that statistic was at or near 40% in 2000 (University of Georgia, Vice President for Public Service and Outreach, 2000). The child poverty rate for Deer Lodge County as well as neighboring Black Belt counties (with the exception of one) was even

higher than the adult poverty rate. Taken as a whole, these public health factors negatively impact income per capita and per household figures.

Culture and Race Relations

Deer Lodge County is best described as rural and quite. The main town and county seat's residents enjoy the charm of small town living, and throughout the county people are friendly. Downtown Pineville's masonry buildings reflect the small-town architecture of the American south in the 1920s and 1930s (Brown, 2013).

The City of Pineville redesigned the town square a few years ago ostensibly to make it more attractive to tourist and chose a Confederate artillery theme with cannons reminiscent of the civil war. Supporters contend the two Civil War (1861-65) antique bronze twelve-pound Napoleon guns (Brown, 2013) serve as a reminder of the conflict between north and south. Apparently the cannons were settled upon as a compromise after a proposal to return a Civil War Confederate soldier's statue (Lowery, 1996) that once stood downtown from the local whites' only cemetery where it had rested for several decades drew sharp rebuke from the local African American community. Proponents said they were just trying to recapture the charm of a "quaint southern town", while opponents described the proposal as insensitive and deceptive. Speculation on the historical or political motives of its preservationist notwithstanding, Pineville could otherwise be considered a typical southern town where people like the simple things in life. Values of hard work, church and charity are emphasized.

As with other communities, cultural differences are reflected in the various arts and crafts, customs and in the different musical taste of residents, black and white. The local radio station used to only play country music, with the exception of Sunday mornings. Now there are two local stations. The old one list its musical genre as 'oldies' and the new station plays 'Christian Contemporary.' Most local African American adults tend to favor gospel music, though 'old school' soul sounds are enjoyed by some. Hip-hop is favored by African American youth, and even among some white teens.

Gospel music is a tradition here ingrained into religious services in the black church. For the most part, like most rural South Georgia communities, church and religious services are still separated by

race. The black and white United Methodist congregations, at a couple of local churches, have held some services together. And I have heard that at least one local nondenominational church has an integrated congregation. The local high school does not have a baccalaureate service. Baccalaureate and prom were discontinued after the public schools were integrated in the 1970's.

The Martin Luther King Day Holiday is recognized with a parade primarily put on by local African American community organizations. The annual county livestock festival is a time of celebration and pride that has become a local tradition. It garners publicity and attention for the agribusiness and farming community. For the most part, however, the majority participation tends to come from whites who own the farms and agribusinesses within the community. Very few African Americans still own and operate farms in the county today, though prior to the 1970's their numbers were substantial.

Politics and Racial Intolerance

County leaders (Lightsey, 2008) describe their government as small, but point out that services are efficiently run (low debt) while taxes are kept low. Over the last half century, Deer Lodge County has come into the modern technological era of cell phones, computers, the internet, GPS guided farm tractors, and modern highways, and has undergone significant social and political change – racial integration of public accommodations and schools, racial diversity among its public officials, and so forth.

Yet social mores and attitudes change here ever so slowly. Tuck (2001) writes of the significance of visits from federal registrars to Black Belt Georgia counties to the success of local voter registration efforts during the months following passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. With the aide of that attention, local voter registration efforts yielded "30.7 percent" (p. 214) registered voters among eligible African American voters in the county by the summer of 1967. Even though local black leaders were engaged in voting rights efforts during the civil rights movement, a local community activist noted as recently as 1994 that Deer Lodge County (pseudonym) is a rural area that seemed to have evaded many of the reforms of the 1960's civil rights era (Epstein, 1994).

According to Epstein (1994), in 1990 a group of local activist, the Positive Action Committee (PAC), sued the county board of commissioners to force it to redraw voting districts to allow for black

majorities, and won a favorable court decision. "Federal Judge Dudley Bowen suspended county elections until the Board of Commissioners complied in 1992" (p. 7A). Meanwhile, black citizen's complaint about a lack of black-poll workers went unheeded until the U.S. Department of Justice intervened. And their 1993 complaint about the long-standing practice of discriminatory tracking of African-American children in the public schools rose to the attention of the U.S. Department of Education's Civil Rights Division before the school district would acquiesce and change its practices (Epstein, 1994; Martin, 2002; Torian, 1999).

The complaint of tracking was, at that time, the latest in a series of protests about disparate treatment of African American students and faculty by the school system extending back over the years to include: unfair administration of discipline; a reported incident of a high school melee between black and white students ended with white students being sent home, and blacks retained after school whereupon law enforcement was summoned and allegedly excessive discipline (beatings) was meted out; unfair treatment and dismissal of black faculty; lack of recruitment and hiring of African American teachers; etc. (Anonymous, personal communication, 2013) (Torian, 1999). The string of grievances reportedly stretched as far back as the early years of school integration, which finally came to pass only after the school district had been taken to federal court by the U.S. Justice Department for its 'freedom of choice plan' (Put teeth in school ruling -- high court urged: Brown moulders while dixie delays.1968). The so-called 'freedom of choice plan' effectively delayed compliance with court directives to desegregate the public schools.

Over two decades later a local community activist (Epstein, 1994; Martin, 2002; Torian, 1999) described the tension that existed in 1992 when black citizens found themselves still confronted with a white political power structure that was seemingly intransigent in its resistance to change. Blacks were not employed by the local city and county governments in professional or public safety positions: "The only positions that blacks held in local government were sanitation"… "Not even one policeman" (Epstein, 1994; Martin, 2002; Torian, 1999). Elected officials including county commissioners and school board members were all white. Practically all teachers and all but a handful of administrators in the

public schools were white. This lack of equitable minority representation in leadership occurred in a public school system where the majority of children served were African American and being tracked or ability grouped into lower level academic courses. PAC collected evidence of discrimination and reported it to the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights, and the courts (Torian, 1999, p. 13), which mandated change.

The social and political change that has come about in Deer Lodge County (pseudonym) was won through the persistence and sacrifice of local concerned citizens who refused to settle for the status quo ideology of white supremacy built upon continued deprivation of black civil rights, physical abuse, and assured economic dependence (Anonymous, personal communication, 2013). They, with the assistance of favorable federal court rulings and federal authorities, armed with new civil rights legislation and regulations (S. Tuck, 2013), changed the course of history in Deer Lodge County. In time, local black citizens, with at times behind the scenes support from some white citizens, prevailed against entrenched forces that sought to maintain the status quo, as was true in many places throughout Georgia (Roche, 1998). They laid the groundwork for the Deer Lodge County of today where, though some issues still remain, a quality public secondary education is feasible for most of its children.

As previously noted, Deer Lodge County is a conservative community. This is a place where female school teachers are still expected to wear dresses well below the knee. Students answer their teachers and other adults in authority with 'yes-mam' and 'yes-sir'. Nonconformity is looked upon with a bit of disdain. It's a place where, until recently, one in four adults (25 years of age and older) had not finished high school. With the implementation of increased accountability in the public schools and a rising high school graduation rate, that statistic may be about to change.

Deer Lodge County School District Context

The Deer Lodge County School District serves the entire county, therefore the demographic, economic, public health, and cultural environment described above for the county also serves as the socioeconomic and political context of public schooling. It has a single high school – Deer Lodge County

High, a middle school, and an elementary school. At the time of fieldwork, a previously operated alternative school had been recently closed for budgetary reasons and folded into the high school.

A Legacy of Noncompliance

Prior to forced integration by the federal courts, all of Georgia's 180 public school districts were racially segregated. According to the United States Commission on Civil Rights (2007) 109 of those districts had been litigated against in federal court, as of 2007, to gain compliance. Deer Lodge County has been operating under federal court desegregation order since 1969.

Author Jeff Roche (1998) recounts a Deer Lodge County white community leaders' testimony before the Sibley Commission hearings on the impending choice facing the State; whether to choose a strategy of continued massive resistance or integration of the public schools. It is illustrative of the attitude and temperament of many whites in the local community in the late 1950's and early 1960's at the dawn of school integration. Roche notes that of the 214 people who testified before the Commission on the day it heard testimony in Pineville, Georgia (pseudonym) 150 made known their preference for continued segregation. The sentiments shared by local Judge Henry Howard, representing the Deer Lodge County (pseudonym) bar association were indicative of the majority view:

> We prefer to hold on to segregated schools, but if we lose them, we'll make our own arrangements. There has been no agitation among the colored people or the white people over here for integration. We don't have a race problem (p. 136).

It is likely that such attitudes, on the part of some local whites at least, have assuaged in the ensuing years. Time has allowed room for moderate voices to emerge. That notwithstanding, Deer Lodge County School District has historically been rather remiss in regard to its commitment to equal educational opportunity for its African American children. Mover, since forced integration, it has operated under a veneer of suspicion where compliance with civil rights law is concerned. For the purposes of this research it is important to note that the proposed new learning and graduation requirements were not simply being layered upon an existing pristine environment, heretofore, untouched by social class conflict, or racial tension.

Current Context of District Operations

Today the seven-member school board includes three African Americans. Until recently the board's staff included an African American assistant superintendent, principal, and director of Title I programs. Recent retirements and reassignments in the wake of budgetary contractions has shifted staffing and the level of professional positions held by blacks in the system (already less than proportional) may have yet again declined. At the time of my interviews, the white superintendent, Dr. Briggs (pseudonym), who had guided the system for the last 11 years was transitioning to retirement as were both the black assistant superintendent and the director of Title I programs. Dr. Briggs, with 31 years' experience in the system, is well respected among his peers and guided the school board with a strong and able hand through a difficult financial period.

Deer Lodge County High School (DLCHS) Environment

The following section provides background on how the local high school came into being. Its stated mission and focus as well as a general description of its make-up are also discussed providing additional contextual support for the study.

Background of the High School

According to the *New Georgia Encyclopedia* (Brown, 2013) a succinct history of public school facilities in Deer Lodge County follows in this manner: "A two-story wooden public school … opened in Pineville for white students in 1903. A school for African American children was built in 1919." Over the ensuing years since, there were three name changes of the school for black children. Finally (without explanation) the black and white schools were integrated in the 1970s. Not mentioned was the fact that the black high school was folded into the white Deer Lodge County High School. Alumni and school accomplishments, athletic records, etc. were forgotten. Most of the existing black teachers' contracts, particularly if they were not local residents, were not renewed. This was the typical scenario for school integration in rural Georgia counties.

Purpose and Focus

Today, the modern Deer Lodge County High School is the pride of its community. Though it is classified as a Title I school that primarily serves students from a poor rural community (79% receive free or reduced price meals) (Wohlers, 2012), it adheres to traditional middle class values and engages in school practices consistent with a dominant cultural paradigm. The school's stated mission is to graduate positive, productive citizens. School leadership emphasizes student safety as their paramount concern.

The community, school board, and school leaders ensure that an abundance of extra-curricular activities are available to enable every child's positive involvement in an area of interest such as athletics, band, or an aspect of career technical agriculture education (CTAE). The school system is very proud of the fact that their students compete favorably at regional and state levels and excel. Excellent facilities rivaling those of larger communities reflect local commitment to the school system and its programs. Many of the parents and teachers attended high school here and there is a sense of connectedness and identification with the system, particular among whites. School administrators believe that students involved in extra-curricular activities are more likely to stay in school and graduate (Wohlers, 2012).

Description of the High School

In the 2009-2010 school year when this study was undertaken Deer Lodge County High School's enrollment was 930 students in the 9th through 12th grades. Minority (mostly African American) student enrollment was 54.8%. White student enrollment was 44.8%. Four-tenths of a percent (0.4%) was unidentified in the above reported figures. There was no Hispanic enrollment at that time. Deer Lodge County High School had 701 students enrolled in the most recent school year (2012-2013) (Wohlers, 2012). The year prior (2011-2012) enrollment was 684 students, an all-time low.

System leadership described the student population distribution system-wide as averaging 200 students per grade level. In recent years there were several large classes of 250 or more going through the high school that contributed to a temporary enrollment bubble and skewed the high school graduation numbers slightly upward. This would have had the effect of skewing high school course enrollments toward upper classmen as larger classes move through the system. The high school was projected to lose

some enrollment over the next two or three years as large graduating classes were replaced by smaller incoming freshmen classes. One might expect this distribution to have had at least some impact on the mix of courses, upper level verses freshmen or sophomore core, teachers would be expected to instruct.

Staff numbers in 2012-2013 consisted of 46 teachers, 4 paraprofessionals, a part time school nurse, a media specialist, two school counselors, 1 graduation coach/transition coordinator, 2 assistant principals and 1 principal. Teacher turnover rate over the past 5 years is reported as less than 5%; however, in the school year immediately prior to my fieldwork, the school had experienced lay-offs due to looming budget cuts. All certificated teachers in the system meet highly qualified designation required for No Child Left Behind in Title I schools.(Wohlers, 2012).

Even with the above reductions in staff, the school's leadership team "remains committed to providing all students with a quality education" (Wohlers, 2012, p. 3). The administration is particularly sensitive to the economic condition of poverty being pervasive in the community and its impact on the wellbeing of students. Consequently, it has, with federal funding assistance, put in place programs to help shield students from some of the negative impacts of poverty upon their ability to learn. These include free breakfast and lunch programs and access to additional tutoring and technology resources. Unfortunately, the wide geographic dispersal of students across a large rural county can mean a distance of 20 miles to a student's home or place of residence. For high school students, if the family does not have available transportation, that distance can make for a transportation impediment to the student's ability to take advantage of supplemental education services available afterschool or to participate in extracurricular activities.

Chapter Summary

In summary, there are many dimensions to the community or neighborhood setting in which the school district exists. This chapter reviewed the regional and local demographic, economic, public health, cultural and socio-political factors embedded in the Deer Lodge County (pseudonym) community and school district setting, the context for public schooling. It also provided an overview of the high school's student body make-up and staffing. These elements, taken together, paint for the reader a mosaic of the

local school and community milieu for public education. It is within this context that Deer Lodge County High School must perform its vital mission. This mosaic should serve as a backdrop for the reader when weighing the findings presented in Chapter 6. Collectively this context influences the school's capacity and how effectively (or ineffectively) education policy reforms are implemented.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The purpose of my study is to understand the interpretation and implementation of externally mandated accountability policies at the district and school levels, with particular attention to the role of community and historical context in the shaping of interpretations and implementation. This study examines implementation within a single rural South Georgia high school under standards-based reform. The object of this case study is to understand how state education policy on school reform is moderated or diffracted at the local level. This study was guided by the following research questions:

1) How do people understand the policy?
2) How is that understanding shaped by their environment and their understanding of their environment?
3) What were the actions taken?

The study is informed by the education policy implementation literature which looks at the local realization of externally imposed change as an act of "sensemaking" (Cooper et al., 2004; Fullan, 2007; Madsen, 1994; Weatherley & Lipsky, 1977; Weick, 1995). Further explanatory power of how teachers and administrators respond to accountability pressures may be found in Weatherly & Lipsky's (1977) theory on street-level bureaucrats. These theories along with a working theory of school internal accountability (Abelman et al., 2004; DeBray et al., 2003) are subsumed under the outcomes-based bureaucratic accountability (Gross & Supovitz, 2005; J. O'Day, 2004) framework expounded upon in the 'Building a Conceptual Framework' section of Chapter 2 of the dissertation.

Presentation of Findings

This chapter presents significant findings from 23 structured interviews, video and document analysis. Three main findings emerged from this study:

1) A majority of teachers understood the policy as state intrusion into the management of their classrooms and usurpation of their autonomy to select appropriate instructional methods.
2) An overwhelming commitment to "racialized" tracking (Tyson, 2011) as essential to the schools mission, coupled with community pressure from parents objecting to their child being in an "all-inclusive" class, the need to service larger course enrollments due to staffing shortages, workplace stress and resistance to change collectively fostered negative opinions of the new state policies.
3) The school's response was to adapt to the new policies (to satisfice) while working out accommodations with stakeholders (parents, students, teachers, etc.).

Finding 1: Faculty Perception and Interpretation

A majority of teachers understood the policy as state intrusion into the management of their classrooms, and as usurpation of their autonomy to select appropriate instructional methods. Merriam-Webster's dictionary defines perception as "the way we think about or understand someone or something." The first research question asked: How do people understand the policy? In other words, what is their perception of it? In their interview responses teachers tended to describe the reforms in relation to the policy's impact on their daily activities in carrying out their instructional duties in the classroom first and foremost.

Six out of seven experienced teachers interviewed for this study indicated less than favorable perceptions of the new one diploma policy which merges tech-prep and college-prep curriculum tracks into a singular college-prep track for the awarding of a singular diploma. Two teachers said it would tend to reduce the quality of the college-prep curriculum and used descriptors such as "water down" or "dumb down" to describe their perception of how the change had already negatively impacted the quality of the college-prep curriculum. Three teachers felt the policy was either unworkable for faculty or unworkable for students, at least in some of its aspects. One teacher cited its negative impact on scheduling students for noncore subjects. Only one teacher perceived it to be a better policy. As a result of these attitudes, the organizational culture became antagonistic toward the new state policy.

Reduce Quality or Water down the College-Prep Curriculum

Typifying the opposition to the new one diploma policy merging tech-prep with college-prep was the outspoken science department head, Ms. Autumn (pseudonym), a respected and long standing member of the faculty. Ms. Autumn is an accomplished teacher who assumed her teaching position upon the retirement of her mother, also a science teacher. A 1979 graduate of the University of Georgia, she has been teaching in this department since the age of 21. She holds Master of Science for Teachers (MST) and Ed. Specialist degrees from Georgia Southern University. She has very strong opinions about teaching and learning.

Ms. Autumn felt the one diploma idea was misleading and would lead to a watered-down or "mediocre" curriculum. She felt that to teach a college preparatory curriculum to the general population of students at their school would result in an intolerable level of failures. This sentiment was also expressed by the social studies teacher who spoke of the pressure to pass students. He, as did she, felt the level of preparation required to differentiate instruction made overwhelming demands on teacher's time and the result would be that teachers would be inclined to teach to the middle of the class instead.

Perceived as unworkable for faculty

The need to address varying levels in a mixed ability group of students was considered too overwhelming by some teachers. The State's proposed pedagogical solution was for teachers to learn to differentiate instruction. This was set out in the state teacher implementation training guide. Several teachers at Deer Lodge County High School felt this was an unworkable method for them. One teacher explained that instead of preparing one lesson plan for a class, to properly prepare to differentiate instruction to the varying levels of ability within a class, the teacher might need to prepare the equivalent of three lesson plans for the material she intended to cover that day. This amounted to quite a lot of work and would require the use of personal time since their planning time had been reduced to one period as a result of budget cuts. Ms. Autumn felt that younger teachers, with families, would be less inclined to put in the time required to appropriately plan lessons for student success. Given that many were already

stressed-out as a result of extra duties and reduced planning time due to staffing cuts and the reduction in force, such a response from teachers was increasingly likely.

Teachers were required to implement the standards-based classroom model at the same time they were busy implementing the new GPS curriculum standard. The GPS standard entailed new curriculum for math instructors and new instructional methods. As an example of teachers' perspective on this issue, the mathematics chair shared how one of her teachers had tried diligently to implement the math instructional procedures and the tasks were not being sufficiently accomplished by students. She observed "high levels of frustration" among instructors who attempted to implement the GPS math instructional methods. She also questioned whether or not "all teachers should be forced to teach the same way" which is what she felt they were being told to do through the new standard.

According to Ms. Autumn, the part of the new state policy increasing the number of units of science for graduation to four would necessitate that the high school hire another science teacher just to cover the extra classes that would be required to get every student through 4 years (4 credits) of science.

Perceived as unworkable for students

As Ms. Autumn said, the perception of teachers was that the new policy was unworkable for students. They thought many slower or academically challenged students could not succeed under a more demanding curriculum. Instead of a rising tide raising all boats, they anticipated the slower students dissuading the more capable ones from being on task and attentive in class.

Counselors saw it as unworkable as far as opportunities for students who may have failed a course to catch-up and get back on track. Fortunately, the school was able to institute the TAPs program which allowed students to remediate with the use of computer-based technology. Otherwise, for a student who fails a class that meets for a school year and is prerequisite for all other courses in the math curriculum, it is very unlikely that he will be successful a second year with two math courses. This also interferes with scheduling a student's noncore subjects when he must repeat a class during the time he would otherwise have been free to attend the extracurricular course (i.e., music band or body building for athletes).

Lack of buy-in to the state's theory

Teachers resisted the premise of the new model of post high school success; that every high school graduate needs at least 2 years of college, or that they should have the same level of preparation as those seeking college admission if they are going directly into the workforce. Based on interview data, this may be a change in name only since global expectations for the all-inclusive class were for college-prep courses to fall from their historical performance level rather than hold their level or rise in performance. That was the anticipated affect shared by a majority of local teachers, counselors, and administrators. Tension arose between what teachers understood to be in the state standard regarding appropriate teacher expectations for student performance in college-prep courses vs. the new college-prep course expectations at Deer Lodge High School. In short, what it meant now to be on the college-prep diploma track locally had been revised to something less than what college-prep meant before. At this high school, college-prep now meant being "in the mix." That was the complete opposite of what the State's theory of action advocated.

Finding 2: Environmental Influences

An overwhelming commitment to racialized tracking (Tyson, 2011) as essential to the school's mission, coupled with community pressure from parents objecting to their child being in an all-inclusive class, the need to service larger course enrollments due to staffing shortages, workplace stress and resistance to change collectively fostered negative opinions of the new state policies. This finding answers the second research question: How is that understanding shaped by their environment and their understanding of their environment? This is another way of asking, what were the environmental influences or contextual factors that colored peoples' perception of the policy? Teachers' rationalizations for their unfavorable views of the State policies revealed their concerns about classroom management and discipline, lack of adequate planning time, and potential pedagogical skill deficits.

Racialized Tracking Persists at Deer Lodge County High

The school continued to maintain separate academic tracks for different groups of students and this practice facilitated artificial separation by race and socioeconomic class within the school building.

A system of maintaining dual academic tracks through honors/advanced placement (AP) courses and college-prep courses was beginning to mirror the separation that existed previously under the three diploma seal triumvirate of tech-prep, college-prep and honors/AP curriculum tracks. Researchers have coined the phrase racialized tracking (Tyson, 2011) to describe the "practice of separating students for instruction, ostensibly based on their ability and prior achievement" (p. 6). In racially diverse schools like the one under study in this case, these practices often result in predominately white upper level tracks (honors/AP and previously college-prep) and predominately black lower level tracks (tech-prep). The practice has enabled authorities in the Deer Lodge County School District to run a segregated school system within integrated buildings for many years, thus circumventing civil rights law. It is a form of de facto segregation.

A primary finding of this dissertation is that the teachers' perception of new state policies focused on raising academic achievement was shaped by a philosophy of racialized tracking and associated intangible contextual factors within the school and district. This finding is significant for several reasons: 1) Large numbers of students enter the honors/AP program outside of the designated merit selection procedure through overrides (estimated at as much as 50%) and this raises questions of fairness. 2) African American student participation in honors/AP is not proportionate to their enrollment in the school at large, and black male matriculation in honors/AP is miniscule. 3) The historical record (see chapter 5 of the dissertation) on this school district's delays in complying with school integration law, combined with the racial imbalance in African American faculty at the school (7 of 49 or 14%) renders this behavior problematic. 4) Based on interview data, demand for honors/AP enrollment appears to have gone up once the tech-prep and college-prep curriculums were combined. 5) The condition of ingrained racialized tracking as an aspect of the school's internal environmental context shaped teachers attitudes and beliefs about classroom management and intellectual ability.

Selection for Honors/AP Track

Students typically enter the honors/AP track as a result of their performance on assessments taken in middle school. At Deer Lodge County High School, counselors have designed a rubric that is

distributed to middle school math and language arts teachers. With assistance from the middle school counselor, middle school teachers fill out the rubric. Results are compiled, then reviewed by the high school leadership team. The principal and assistant principals decide on a cutoff score and take the students above the cutoff for entry into freshman honors or accelerated classes. Parents can override the recommendation if they desire to either remove their student from the honors/AP track or place their student into the honors/AP track. Thus, it is a system ostensibly based upon merit, with freedom of choice elements added in. Teachers also serve as advisors to students following the student from 9th through 12th grade. As such, teachers working in concert with counselors meet with students several times a year and in the spring to prepare their schedule for the next school year. Thus, teachers as advisors play a key role in influencing a student's course and track selection.

A more dominate practice among white parents is to override the track recommendation of teachers and administrators and place their student into an honors class even though their child's academic performance may not have merited a recommendation. Interviews conducted for this study suggest the latter situation occurs about 50% of the time. That is, half of all honors/AP enrollments in the year leading up to this study were students self-selecting (parental placement) into honors.

Why the appeal? Granted honors is more work for the student, but these parents seem to recognize that something valuable is at stake. School representatives have been challenged in public forums by members of the community to explain the transition from separate tech-prep and college-prep diplomas to a singular college-prep diploma. These parents realized combining the programs meant heterogeneous groupings of students at their high school. Parents informed school representatives that they did not want their child "in the mix" with the general population of students. By overriding the selection process, a parent can move their child, who might otherwise have been in the new college-prep track, to the honors/AP track and thus avoid being in the mix of the all-inclusive classes. According to interview data, the typical student enrolled in honors/AP courses at this high school has parents who have education beyond high school. Their families are at a higher socioeconomic level. Honors/AP courses

enjoy smaller enrollments (14 to 17) students as compared to 26 or more students in college-prep courses, and are usually taught by the more experienced teachers in the department.

Honors/AP courses in some departments were being oversubscribed by parents who did not want their child in with the general population. Reportedly, some felt that way because of alleged disciplinary problems in the all-inclusive college-prep classes that served to disrupt the learning environment. Interviews with teachers and administrators verified this parental concern. Interview participants spoke of extra sections or classes of courses being added to the schedule in some disciplines to accommodate the added demand for honors/AP courses.

Absence of African American Participation in Honors or AP Track

It is estimated that 15% to 20% of students enrolled at Deer Lodge County High School participate in honors/AP courses. At an average annual enrollment of 800 students that is 120 to 160 students in the honors/AP program in a given year. According to the Governor's report card, in the most recent year on record (2010 – 2011) only five of 42 students taking AP exams were African American and 37 were white. This corroborates interview data that African American enrollment in honors/AP track courses is very low. Teachers and administration differ on whether or not honors/AP enrollment is growing. Teachers estimated that it practically doubled after tech-prep and college-prep were merged into a singular diploma, while school leaders apprised that honors/AP participation remained about the same.

Tracking Traditions

As has previously noted, prior to instituting the most recent reforms with the incoming class of 2008-2009 school year, Georgia's State Board rules under QBE (Quality Basic Education Act) permitted schools to offer students either a tech-prep or/and college-prep curriculum track and diploma seal. It should be noted that some highly motivated students chose to acquire both seals. The QBE standard effectively endorsed the tracking of students. With the institution of the new Georgia Performance Standard (GPS) in 2008-2009 academic year the State's endorsement of tracking was technically lifted.

Now Deer Lodge County High School would be required to provide all students with access to the same curriculum.

This school district has a history of maintaining dual technical and academic tracks dating back to the days of forced integration in the early 1970s. As recently as 1996 it would have been easy for an astute observer walking down a hallway in a Deer Lodge County School District classroom building to notice entire classes in rooms seemingly divided by race (black on the left, white on the right, or white on my left, black to my right), but identified as separate academic tracks as justification. Now, except for honors/AP which I discuss above, students are heterogeneously grouped.

Tracking and Resource Disparities: No textbooks for Homework

Courses are taught with a classroom set of textbooks. Several departments have insufficient quantities of books to issue every student a text. Teachers prioritize by first reserving a classroom set, then issuing remaining textbooks to honors/AP classes. Students in college-prep track courses may not get to take a book home, as a consequence, putting them at a disadvantage if they do not finish their work in class. Parents are concerned about their students not doing homework, but without textbooks, they are unable to do so. (B. A. English, personal communication, December 16, 2009).

Tracking Related Effects in Social Science

Several relevant examples of tracking's negative effects emerged from teacher interviews in the social sciences. Some of these can be linked to either current or latent effects of sorting and sifting students within the educational system.

The social studies department head (also an experienced 30 year veteran of the classroom) stated that he had always maintained that Deer Lodge County High School does a very good job educating those at the top, the honors/AP students. However, he felt that with those at the lower levels (previously tech-prep) they probably had not done that well. Others in the school system, up to and including the superintendent, echoed this sentiment. But there was not much, if any, misgivings about this situation among teachers who shared this view. It was just accepted as the way things are, or perhaps the way they have to be.

Students who had previously been assigned to low level tech-prep classes were not being successful in grasping the concepts in the standards-based English college-prep courses. Their teacher noted that it had been a difficult transition for these students to come from the way they used to be assessed to the way that they were being assessed now under the GPS college-prep curriculum. Their work in the college-prep curriculum required them to apply higher level thinking skills than they had been accustom to using.

Across the board teachers considered the previous arrangement whereby students were sorted into lower level tracks to have been more efficient and easier to teach. One emphasized that when she had tech-prep and college-prep students in different classes she knew what she needed to do with either group to reach the learning objectives. Since they were all at about the same academic level, she also knew how to pace the class, how fast or slow to cover the lessons, and what needed to be repeated. However, she proclaimed, that is extremely hard to do when you have mixed ability groups in the college-prep class. She noted, "I felt that if I went too slowly that would be a disservice to the college-prep students" (Anonymous, personal communication, December 16, 2009).

Finding a happy medium while implementing the GPS had been difficult for some teachers to accomplish. Alternatively, when they had tech-prep and college-prep as separate groups, teachers' felt they were working towards the same goal, covering the same materials; but doing it at a different pace with different resources. Meeting the needs of a heterogeneous group is more difficult, they say, given a range of student abilities within the class

Some students shared with their teacher how they became frustrated at not being able to understand what they were expected to learn at the college-prep course level and pace. Others vented their disappointment at not having experienced success with a college-prep freshman course. Some wondered openly why they could not take tech-prep classes anymore. Some students felt they were "disadvantaged" by this new higher level college-prep curriculum arrangement. Other, perhaps less conscientious, students previously assigned to tech-prep level courses, if they felt they were "out of their element," were inclined to complain about not being able to do the work. Some became non-participants

and simply 'tuned-out' in class, or became lethargic. Some (seemingly more than before) exhibited disruptive behavior.

Differentiated instruction is the State's recommended instructional method for engaging students of varying ability in the classroom. However, teachers say it is difficult to execute when you have 28 to 29 students in a classroom, and you're trying to make sure that you reach all levels in the class and get them to the standard that you want them to grasp. Consequently, a teacher may be inclined to feel she was more successful teaching when she had students in different groups. (Anonymous, personal communication, December 16, 2009).

Some teachers felt pressured to deliver effective instruction to increasingly large classes, given the staffing shortages. Larger classes not only increased the workload, but heightened the challenge of effectively differentiating instruction. A tension existed between those who supported differentiation as the prescribed method to implement the new GPS standard and those who thought it was unworkable. There were others aligned with this point of view like the science teacher, also a 30 plus year veteran, who expressed similar disagreement with the new GPS policy, as did the mathematics and English teachers.

Tracking Related Effects in Math and Science

In Ms. Autumn's (the science teacher) view, teachers need to teach to a "70% to 80% competency level" for students to receive a true college prep diploma. She strongly believes that if students do not stay in the honors/AP tracks at Deer Lodge County High School "they truly will not be ready for college" (Anonymous, personal communication, December 15, 2009). She considers the new college-prep track diploma to be a college prep diploma in name only. Based upon her experience teaching at nearby Georgia Southern University, she has observed that students coming out of general or all-inclusive chemistry classes from schools in neighboring counties are not adequately prepared to succeed in the sciences at the university.

As one teacher said, the faculty do not see tech-prep students as being the same students as college-prep students traditionally. That means their expectations of them are lower. Three tracks have existed here for so long, they now have to learn to think about students in a different way.

Finding 3: Actions Taken

In general the school's response was to adapt to the new policies (to satisfice) while working out accommodations with stakeholders (parents, students, teachers, and the community). Research question number three asked: What were the actions taken? The following topics review the actions that were taken to adapt implementation to the policies within the various instructional disciplines and programs at Deer Lodge County High School. Topics discussed include implementation in the social sciences, adaptation in mathematics and science disciplines, and the use of technology to support implementation through remediation as needed.

English Language Arts and Social Studies Implementation

The English language arts department head, Ms. English (pseudonym), described how English teachers were incorporating the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) reforms into English language arts course instruction. The teacher implements the GPS in her daily professional practice with the objective of preparing the student to earn a satisfactory score on the end of course test (EOCT) and/or the Georgia High School Graduation Test (GHST) as the case may be. That is the process that is effected in each subject required in the curriculum for the *23* Carnegie unit high school diploma.

Standards assessment. As before, students must pass all parts of the graduation test in order to graduate. Under the new rule, the content of courses taken in the curriculum to prepare a student for graduation must have been "standards-based," as well. English language arts instruction changed with the GPS, and assessment is now on how well students learn high level analysis and synthesis skills rather than merely demonstrating understanding of literary content. In the past, students were assessed on content from the assigned literary selection itself. Now the assessment may come from other materials not previously assigned, but of the same or similar genre, from which the student must identify the parts of a plot, or recognize satire, or an example of personification, or other components of writing. The end-

of-course test and the graduation test are aligned with the GPS standards which the teacher is required to cover in class as part of the GPS curriculum (B. A. English, personal communication, December 16, 2009).

Ms. English related that many students have become so conditioned to being assessed in today's high stakes testing environment, they are not motivated to read a novel if they think they will not be tested on it. And if it's not on the standard, technically she is not allowed to test them on it (Ms. English, personal communication, December 16, 2009).

Standards-based classroom. Standards must be visibly posted in the classroom and referenced throughout the lesson. Everything that is taught must conform to the GPS standards. Students should be apprised of what standards they are working on and why. The standards serve as both a curriculum guide for the instructor and checklist for the student. Apparently they have also been construed as both minimum and maximum by the State's educational hierarchy as Ms. English related: "…We've been told if it's not in the standards, it doesn't need to be covered. It has to be in the standards" (B. A. English, personal communication, December 16, 2009).

Some vestiges of the old method of teaching remain, but these tend to complicate matters as teachers work to shift their allegiances to the new approach of standards-based classroom evaluation. There was once a standard practice that said that teachers should have students read a million words per year. English language arts teachers were focusing on having students read entire novels or entire selections to accomplish that aim. Today the focus has changed. Teachers have been told that if students do not read the entire novel that is okay, as long as they are able to identify the standards from the novel. For English teachers this adjustment required a paradigm shift.

The teacher is not expected under the GPS curriculum standard to require the student to read the entire novel. Though she would prefer that they read it, Ms. English has been instructed that it is not required. "…As long as they can get the standards, the entire thing does not have to be taught" (B. A. English, personal communication, December 16, 2009). To illustrate her point, she noted that her classes have been reading *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens. While she can teach the standards they need

to know in one day using excerpts from the book, she does not feel the students get a sense of completion from just reading excerpts. For that reason she wants them to read the work in its entirety. Otherwise, she feels, they are not likely to appreciate the significance of Dickens and are "at a disadvantage" for not having had the experience. (B. A. English, personal communication, December 16, 2009).

For both Ms. English and her colleagues this was a source of cognitive dissonance, and an opportunity for sensemaking as they endeavored to reconcile this new method of teaching literature juxtaposition against all they had learned and practiced for so many years. She allowed that the instructor has the option of sending the novel home as homework for the student to read if there are sufficient copies available, adding that she assigns students things to read at home because she wants them to get the whole picture (B.A. English, personal communication, December 16, 2009).

As with mathematics, students who fail English face a double jeopardy situation the next year because of the need to double-up on classes in the discipline in order to catch-up on the credits required to stay on track for graduation with their class. Unlike math, however there is a better opportunity to do that in English. The spiral math curriculum is less forgiving because math courses under the Math I, Math II, and so forth program in place at the time of field work must be taken sequentially.

Adaptation in Mathematics and Science

Implementation to date of the new GPS mathematics curriculum was incomplete and only marginally effective. Teachers cited low levels of reading comprehension, and gaps in students' math backgrounds as the sources of difficulty in their failing to complete assigned group tasks.

The math department was having the greatest implementation challenges with students and the GPS Math I course. The mathematics chair, Ms. Mathis (pseudonym), like the other Deer Lodge County High School faculty I interviewed, was very forthright about her opinion on the GPS, perhaps even more so. Her main point of disagreement, with regard to the math curriculum, was the State's decreeing that all students must take four years of math at a much higher level than had ever been required at this high school before. Requiring that all students be prepared to the level of pre-calculus and calculus by the time they leave high school was, in her and her colleagues' view, unreasonable and unnecessary.

Ms. Mathis felt that they needed to increase their standards, but that it was a bit too much to expect that all students at this high school would be ready for pre-calculus and calculus by the time they graduate. She expressed concern that they now had higher expectations for students, but they did not have a way to make them meet those expectations.

The transition to the new curriculum was not working for students, particularly those who would have been assigned to the lower academic track before tech-prep was merged with the college-prep curriculum. This teacher's response to the implementation question revealed math teachers had experienced high levels of frustration while attempting to implement the new GPS math curriculum. Teachers felt they were being forced to adopt a certain style of teaching, which they vehemently opposed having to do. Noting that all teachers do not instruct the same way, just as all students do not learn the same way, Ms. Mathis said that the math department had attempted to implement the curriculum with teachers instructing in the manner prescribed by the Georgia Department of Education (DOE).

As she explained, if the standards were deconstructed, teachers at base level are required to teach various prescribed tasks that students work on together in groups. In the process, students should discover math concepts and apply them to various situations. However, in their experience, both students and teachers ended up highly frustrated. One teacher recalled how when she finished all of the activities in a unit of instruction and its associated tasks, students did not know the basic things they were supposed to have learned from the unit, much less the higher-level thinking skills they should have acquired (Anonymous, personal communication, January 22, 2010).

Ms. Mathis asserts that the source of the problem was the student's inability to read and comprehend the material on grade level. Consequently, teachers adapted and went back to more direct instruction while incorporating some group work, and some of the task. But they are not able to use most of the State task (Anonymous, personal communication, January 22, 2010). The school's administration revealed that because of the necessity of having a math support class with the new curriculum, and some students taking two math courses instead of one every year, they have had to add math instructors.

Within two years after the conclusion of fieldwork the State had relented and allowed flexibility in the math curriculum.

In the science department, Ms. Autumn serves as the department chair. See her comments on the all-inclusive class above. She felt that good science teachers, like herself, can teach their courses any way the State wants them to be taught provided they are given ample planning time. However, she clearly resented being told how to teach her class, as did the math teacher. This had previously been an area where the teacher's prerogative, as to which instructional methods to employ in class, had been sacrosanct. Now the State was attempting to take that away and tell the teacher how to teach the class. Teachers in general resented that. Though they were in step with the statewide implementation roll-out, they were out of step with the State's theory of how change should occur.

The Administration's View

The administration, up to and including the district level, acknowledged the fact that after merging tech-prep and college-prep tracks into one college-prep curriculum it, "had probably been watered down." While the superintendent said that was never the intent, he recognized that teachers had done that saying:

> …So I think our college-prep students or those students coming through the regular program are not quite getting what they would have gotten under the old college-prep program that we had in place. Our advance placement (AP) program is very strong. We do a very fine job with advance placement kids and they have no problems with the graduation requirements at all (B.T. Briggs, personal communication, May 21, 2010).

Technology

Computer-based technology at school was a major aid in remediating students who had fallen behind in their studies; however, access to technology at home is not readily available to many limited resource students at this Title I high school. The rural telecommunications provider has installed fiber optic cable infrastructure enabling internet access throughout the county; but as their teacher

acknowledged, many of the rural poor do not have the resources to subscribe to the service nor are they able to provide their children with computers.

Technology to improve student achievement. One of the cornerstones of Deer Lodge County High School's remediation strategy is their model affording students the opportunity for academic recovery via the use of computer-based systems. One of the challenges that the district and high school had to overcome was the failure rate and high incidence of dropout among students who had gotten deterred from the path of earning a high school diploma for whatever reason. In an attempt to address the problem of chronic underachievement among some students, Deer Lodge County School System created through the Communities in Schools (CIS) organization a Performance Learning Center (PLC) on an abandoned campus in 2005. The program was instituted to provide an alternative academic route for students to receive a high school diploma. As a result of that initiative they were able to raise the high school graduation rate for all students, but most significantly for black students (B. T. Briggs, personal communication, May 21, 2010).

This was essentially an alternative school utilizing a technology based instructional model—The E2020 self-paced computer based instruction program for online content delivery and academic credit recovery. According to school administrators, a student can complete a PLC course in half the time required in a regular classroom setting, thus enabling them to catchup after having failed a course. Given the budget shortfall, the district decided to incorporate the E2020 program into a laboratory, Technology Aided Program for Success (TAPS), for remediation on the main high school campus (Wohlers, 2012).

Students lack technology resources at home. Many students from poor families lack access to technology at home. This researcher inquired about the availability of internet resources at home or in the community to supplement the instructional program at school, particularly for those students who might need the additional support to help strengthen basic skills. In view of the lack of textbooks to take home, it seemed a rational alternative as a learning support tool. One teacher advised that she does not give internet assignments to college-prep classes, as a rule, because many students in those classes lack access to the internet at home. Honors/AP students, on the other hand, tend to come from families that have

more resources. So they may be assigned homework that requires them to utilize the computer or the internet. All students have access to technology and can use the internet at school, but that doesn't help them at home.

Summary of Findings

The preceding section presented significant findings from this study which answer the research questions developed from the conceptual framework presented in Chapter 2, Literature Review. The major findings were that racialized tracking persists at Deer Lodge County High School, and that people understood the State policies in terms of their impact on them directly – thus, teachers saw the one diploma policy as interference in their running of their classrooms, and the schools and districts response to implementation of these externally imposed policies was to adapt while waiting them out. The next section of the chapter presents additional findings from interview data.

Actions—Performance Accountability

The following section discusses actions taken before and after the new state standards were introduced in the district and high school that bear upon the conceptual framework, but are not directly related to the research questions on implementation. Performance accountability was driving institutional and individual actions as the system sought to respond to existing federal and state standards (Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) required by *no child left behind* (NCLB), the Georgia High School Graduation Test (GHSGT), QCC Curriculum, existing graduation course credit minimums) as well as implement new state mandates (new Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) curricula, end of course test (EOCT), and the enhanced minimum graduation course credit requirement – now 23 Carnegie units).

Actions – Pre Policy.

Actions implemented prior to inauguration of the new state standards with implications thereto included student achievement targets, and pivotal staff development for teachers funded by a Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education (FIPSE) Grant to Deer Lodge County Schools in partnership with Georgia Southern University.

Student achievement. Of daily concern to the high school administration is the continuing challenge of meeting student achievement targets including: the number of special education students attaining regular education diplomas, maintaining an acceptable graduation rate, and making AYP (Annual Yearly Progress). In addition, the high school is expected to implement with fidelity and attain an acceptable level of performance on a growing list of metrics associated with state standards (GPS curricula – soon to be CCGPS, EOCT, GHSGT, minimum graduation course credit requirement – 23 Carnegie units).

Annual yearly progress (AYP). In the years leading up to my study the district and high school had engaged in a planned program of improvement that was starting to show beneficial effects. District and school leaders allowed that they had been challenged with trying to keep up with changes in curriculum standards and assessment and make AYP, especially at the high school level with regards to student achievement by subgroups, NCLB's word for minorities (United States Congress, House Committee on Education and the Workforce, 2002). But, the superintendent noted, the challenge had been productive because it made them better and thus had been a good experience for the school system. Across the board they were now taking students further academically than they had ever taken them, and reaching more students now than they had ever reached. Nevertheless, at times they struggle to make AYP, particularly at the high school level with some of their subgroups. The high school made AYP the previous year (prior to the year in which this study was undertaken) as required by NCLB (B. T. Briggs, personal communication, May 21, 2010).

***Low graduation rate*.** The district's graduation rate had been low for a number of years, particularly among African-American students (43% for this subgroup in 2007-2008 academic year per 2012 AdvancED Accreditation Report (Wohlers, 2012, p. 5). NCLB's requirement that administrators evaluate and publicly disclose academic performance data by subgroups forced change at the high school. As a result, teachers were encouraged to reassess the effectiveness of their instructional methods, though administrators were not yet tying teacher evaluations to student performance. They were, however, testing a new Georgia Teacher Observation Instrument (GTOI) that would facilitate their doing so. The

superintendent acknowledged the impact of NCLB performance accountability targets in helping to improve the high school. He credited the high school graduation rate, as influenced by the high school graduation test, with producing the most significant change in the school system (B. T. Briggs, personal communication, May 21, 2010).

Gatekeeper tests. As discussed in the preceding chapter, as of April 2011 the GHSGT was replaced by the State Board of Education and is being phased out. As replacement, State End of Course Test (EOCT) have been authorized in 11 course disciplines. For students, the EOCT now becomes the gatekeeper hurdle that they must overcome to pass and receive credit for a course. If they do not pass at the minimum acceptable level, they must still pass the GHSGT. The recently released AdvancED accreditation report disclosed that Deer Lodge County High School has made significant progress in improving its students' performance on EOCTs in the intervening years since this researcher undertook this study (Wohlers, 2012). However, as the work of McNeil (McNeil et al., 2008) and others (Nichols et al., 2006; Nichols & Berliner, 2006; Nichols et al., 2012; Nichols & Berliner, 2007)has demonstrated, serious flaws persist in a system of high-stakes gatekeeper testing (Siskin, 2003) that exacts undue pressure on youth to drop out (Valenzuela, 2005).

Special education challenges. This school district and high school have historically had a high population (18 – 20%) of students with disabilities or at least students identified as learning disable. During the interviews, this fact was made known by both the superintendent and the high school instructional coach. An immediate goal was to reduce the number of special education diplomas awarded by moving more students who would have been in the special education diploma track into a regular education diploma track. This has been a priority for the district of late.

Students with disabilities are provided an IEP (Individualized Education Program) by law, thus allowing them to take a less challenging curriculum adapted to their disability's restrictions or they may be provided other necessary accommodations. In the most recent three years, they have significantly raised the percentage of students with disabilities receiving a regular education diploma (42- 43%) and are ahead of state targets. (B.T. Briggs, personal communication, May 21, 2010).

The incentive for improving in this category appears to have been related to implementation of the new GPS curriculum standard which apparently included a change in special education policy from the state level. Ms. A. P. Venus (pseudonym), the high school instructional coach and special education teacher, shared how she reacted upon hearing state Department of Education (DOE) officials announce the new grad rule and GPS standards at an initial staff development training session in Savannah, GA. She said that she was "just as shocked as everybody else" when she heard state DOE officials talk about giving a regular high school diploma to the severe and profoundly disabled students. She described the reaction of her colleagues in this manner: "I mean there was really not much interaction at all because they were totally stunned…" (A. B. Venus, personal communication, December 11, 2009).

Actions – Capacity Building: FIPSE Grant Funds Pivotal Staff Development

An interview with the high school's instructional coach, Ms. Venus (pseudonym), disclosed that the school district had received a Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education (FIPSE) Grant (about six years before the commencing of field work for this study) to improve teaching and learning by implementing three strategies: 1) understanding poverty, 2) culturally sensitive teaching and 3) differentiated instruction.

Differentiated instruction entailed a significant change in approach going from the lecture method of teaching, to which most instructors were accustomed, to an activity centered approach to learning. My informant felt that culturally sensitive teaching made an enormous difference in the effectiveness of teachers. It is essential that as instructors, she said, teachers know their students. With regard to understanding poverty, she pointed out that many of their students come from very poor family situations and for a teacher to be successful in teaching them they must have some understanding of that experience. The FIPSE grant, obtained in partnership with Georgia Southern University (GSU), provided funding for staff development to train instructional coaches and staff of all schools in Deer Lodge County (elementary, middle, and high) for three different areas: 1) understanding poverty – there is a 70 to 75% poverty rate in Deer Lodge County – utilizing the Ruby Payne program; 2) differentiated instruction utilizing Carol Ann Tomlinson's program with a train the trainer approach; 3) culturally responsive

teaching. Ms. Venus believes that this training had a demonstrable effect on attitudes and teaching effectiveness at all schools within the system. She considers it to have been the factor that turned things around for the school system, changing its focus because for the first time everyone was on board with the training (A. B. Venus, personal communication, December 11, 2009).

Ms. Venus notes that the three training modules (understanding poverty, differentiated instruction, and culturally responsive teaching) served as an aide in building bridges across departmental disciplinary lines: i.e., typically math people relate to math people, English people to other English people, and so on. The challenge of breaking down these departmental silos when attempting to build capacity in high schools has been discussed in the literature (DeBray et al., 2003; Siskin, 2003). These teachers now had a language and a set of common understandings that they could use to diagnose the learning difficulties their students were facing. Just as importantly, they were starting to communicate and jointly develop strategies and interventions to help their students overcome those challenges. She described the exhilarating effect of the training on those involved, noting that for the first time everyone in the system was "on the same page and talking the same talk." Spontaneous conversations would erupt at the copier where people would strategize about the possible causes and consequences of various student behaviors. Together they would brainstorm, almost impulsively, about potential solutions to student learning challenges. This sparked a level of camaraderie that had not existed within the high school before (A. B. Venus, personal communication, December 11, 2009).

Deer Lodge County High also serves as a Partnership School with Georgia Southern University which provides several benefits to the school system, including opportunities for teacher staff development. The above staff development training was a major capacity building experience for the faculty of all the district's schools. Fortunately for them, this training took place a few years prior to the new standards going into effect, giving teachers opportunity to learn and gain reinforcement in these new instructional techniques. The challenge for the instructional coach was to continue to find the resources to train-up new teachers as they were recruited, since the FIPSE training grant had now expired, as well as

make coordinated time available for existing experienced teachers so that they would be encouraged to continue to collaborate.

Actions – Post Policy

Actions implemented after initiation of the new state standards with implications thereto included an impending Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) reaffirmation of accreditation visit. The district has been continuously accredited since 1952.

As I convened the interviews for my research, district and school leadership were beginning to plan for an upcoming district wide SACS reaccreditation visit. The preparation process required, among other things, that the district conduct a community survey whose findings would feed into their SACS self-study. It could also provide feedback from parents about the progress of the standards implementation. In subsequent follow-up, I learned that the district was not rated satisfactory in this area because survey responses were not of a sufficient quantity to validate the survey technique. However, the school system and high school were reaccredited (Wohlers, 2012).

Summary of Actions

The continuing challenge of meeting student achievement targets including special education students achieving regular education diplomas, maintaining an acceptable graduation rate, and making AYP (Annual Yearly Progress) required by NCLB as well as attaining acceptable performance on a growing list of metrics associated with state standards (GPS curricula, EOCT, GHSGT, minimum graduation course credit requirement – 23 Carnegie units) is of daily concern to the high school leadership team. At the commencing of my study the principal was deeply absorbed in the challenges of leading his team through second year implementation of the new GPS math standards and first year implementation of global GPS standards-based classroom instructional requirements. His staff was also experimenting with development of a new teacher evaluation instrument or GTOI which the high school planned to put into effect the following year. This instrument would serve to effectively operationalize the standards-based classroom instructional requirements by tying teacher evaluations as a measure of teacher effectiveness to the standards delineated in the GPS standards-based classroom policy.

The above section also discussed other preexisting conditions within the high school including: a historically low high school graduation rate prior to NCLB, an historically high special education population, and a review of the significant beneficial effects of the districts capacity building experience gained through participation with Georgia Southern University in a recent FIPSE grant award. This section also included a discussion of those significant actions occurring after effective date of the State reforms under study: the new GPS standard (now being superseded by the Common Core of Georgia Performance Standards, CCGPS) and the new high school graduation rule. At the time of fieldwork this consisted of the impending SACs review (self-study) for reaffirmation of accreditation.

Campus Climate and Analysis of Contextual Factors

The following is a discussion of teacher perceptions of campus climate exploring the context of implementation, as well as administrator views of campus climate and context, followed by some key perceptions from members of the Deer Lodge County Community.

Teachers' Perception of Campus Climate and Context

Clearly, the impact of budget cuts had been deeply-felt throughout Deer Lodge County High School. School administrators tried to minimize the impact on instruction, but even for those teachers who were fortunate enough to avoid the layoff and keep their jobs, changes involving sacrifice were necessary, nonetheless. And because changes to the GPS curriculum were being implemented at the same time as the budget cuts, it sometimes became difficult to separate the strain of implementation from the pain of budget cuts.

The administrative staff and faculty tended to view the funding shortfall slightly differently. For faculty the budget shortfall manifested itself in increased workloads. Teachers had their office hours or planning time reduced or eliminated as they were required to cover for coworkers in their absence (substitute teaching duties). They experienced not having adequate time to plan their lessons, collaborate on instruction or student support needs, or prepare for the elevated demands of delivering differentiated instruction in the standards-based classroom. Several teachers made observations about teacher stress. I first discussed the effect of stress on teachers with Ms. Venus, the special education teacher and

instructional coach for the high school. She played a pivotal role in helping the other teachers to cope with their situation and challenged them to improve their pedagogical techniques.

Professional development. Ms. Venus, who serves as instructional coach for the high school, is special education director as well. She sees her coaching role primarily as being "a sounding board for the other teachers" (A. B. Venus (pseudonym), personal communication, December 11, 2009). Along with her teaching and mentoring duties, she also serves as Clinical Associate and, as such, is the liaison between Deer Lodge County High School and Georgia Southern University's College of Education. She has experience mentoring pre-service teachers, supervising mentors and has been an adjunct instructor at Georgia Southern University. Ms. Venus was my first interview subject and was helpful in my gaining a broad overview of efforts to build a cohesive instructional team at Deer Lodge County High School. Ms. Venus has been at the school longer than almost anyone, well over thirty years (since 1975), and has taught the parents and grandparents of some of her students.

I asked her about the potential impact of budget cuts on faculty and ultimately on student achievement. She observed that teachers were under a lot of stress because they were having money taken away from them in the form of furlough days, and working six out of seven periods per day. She also noted the impact that stress has on instruction, saying that teachers did not have enough time to devise great lessons, unless they took their work home. Even under these constraining conditions, teachers were still moving forward with implementing the requirements of the standards-based classroom and student achievement was continuing to rise. Adding a bit of visual imagery to describe their present predicament, she said: "It's sort of, it's almost like we're walking a tight rope. You know, we're just, just holding on" (A. B. Venus, December 11, 2009).

Ms. Venus is a strong advocate for students and for teachers. She emphasized that teachers have been taught at the university via lecture method, and while they have been taught the concepts of differentiated instruction, they have very few models in their experience to aid them in putting differentiated instructional techniques into practice. She sees differentiated instruction, along with

culturally responsive teaching and understanding the needs of students as essential tools for success in the Deer Lodge County High School classroom (A. B. Venus, December 11, 2009).

Representative departmental view: English and social studies. The English department had undergone deep staffing reductions, down from an historic high of nine teachers to just six now. The department was, at the same time, compelled to implement the new GPS (Georgia Performance Standards) English/Language Arts curriculum in the 2009-2010 school year in the standards-based classroom in accordance with Georgia DOE directives. The English department chair had 13 years' experience in the department. She holds a bachelor's degree in communications with additional graduate work in education.

The social studies department chair had 30 years' experience in the department. Like other teachers in the school system, his own daughters had graduated from Deer Lodge County High School. Earlier in his career he had been a coach in the athletics program. One could sense his allegiance to the school and its traditions. The social studies department had lost at least one teacher in the recent reduction in force, and was struggling with the reorganization of tech-prep and college-prep classes. Teachers were finding it difficult to manage expectations regarding acceptable academic performance given the now mixed ability classes.

Large class sizes and individualized instruction. Ms. English's department touches every child in the high school at some point in the day and has some of the largest class sizes. Consequently, it is difficult for her to get around to all her students in the timeframe of a 55 minute class. She has roughly two minutes to spend per pupil. She spoke about the impact of the cuts on course enrollments and student achievement noting that whereas she had traditionally taught classes of 23 to 24 students she now had classes averaging 28 to 29 students enrolled. She felt this not only increased her workload and reduced the time she had to devote to each student, but that it also negatively impacted student achievement (B. A. English, personal communication, December 16, 2009).

***Student/teacher ratio*.** Current student/teacher ratio in the school district as reported in 2011-2012 academic year NCES data is 14.96 to 1. However, as we see here, that is a broad brush statistic not

necessarily indicative of course enrollments across the high school curriculum as students may be assigned to classes in core subjects at numbers twice that ratio.

Summary of Teacher's Perception of Campus Climate and Context

All four instructors and department chairs of core subjects shared the opinion that a non-tracked (*detracked*) high school in their community was not feasible today given the range of intellectual abilities, interest or motivation, and disciplinary challenges in their student body makeup. They consider the State's theory of action at best a pipe dream. Each in his own way, with the exception of the instructional coach, expressed doubt about the State Department of Education's recommended approach of differentiated instruction. Said one dismissively, "Atlanta hasn't got a clue..." The instructional coach expressed support for differentiated instruction as an alternative instructional method that should enable the classroom instructor to meet the diverse learning needs of an all-inclusive class.

Teachers see themselves as professionals who are committed to doing their jobs and what they believe to be the right thing. They each say, just as local administrators do, that they will follow and do "what the State says." However, what the State says is sometimes, in their view, open to interpretation, particularly when it comes to implementation of instruction in the classroom.

An interesting commonality among all the teachers and counselors interviewed, they each acknowledged that we need to do a better job of teaching students, particularly those students who were relegated to the lower tracks (tech-prep) before. They also say that teachers should be more accountable for improving student achievement, and that more should be expected of students. But when presented with implementation of a revised academic standard in the form of the GPS curriculum and raised graduation requirements that together operationalize these changes, they say: "not that much better."

Administrator Views of Campus Climate and Context

Administrators, on the other hand, felt the pressure of being shorthanded with limited options. For them, the inability to hire substitutes, for example, meant that they would have to stretch their staffs and make unpopular demands on a teacher's time. They witnessed the decline in morale and had limited options other than dispensing with a few "at-a-boys" or "at-a-girls" to encourage their teachers to stay

motivated under trying circumstances. Administrators, and lead teachers alike, experienced the despair of having effective programs for student learning and faculty development curtailed due to a lack of funding. An example is the alternative school program for students with chronic disciplinary problems or severe anti-social behavior. Summer programs offering students who failed coursework an opportunity to get back on track were sharply curtailed or eliminated.

Of great concern to administrators was their inability to continue to support programs and activities that served to build capacity and boost student achievement or at least overcome deficits. These administrators were being asked to push their school system towards increasingly higher levels of achievement, but they were not being given the tools to do it. In effect they were told they must do more with fewer resources than they had before because resources were being taken away. The situation is akin to that of a young prize fighter being readied for his first professional fight, but who is told he must face his challenger with one hand tied behind his back. The high school was already struggling to make AYP. It was probably just a matter of time before these financial stressors had a negative effect on student achievement.

Resource capacity to implement change. The most formidable challenge to school officials was the lack of available funding to build school capacity for teaching and learning. On the contrary, at a time when they were being asked to elevate standards and should have been receiving additional resources with which to do it, they were being hit with unparalleled budget cuts in their FTE funding and being told to do more with less. Teachers and resources were being stretched to their limits.

Every person with whom I talked was concerned about the impact of budget cuts. At the end of the preceding school year the school system cut 28.5 positions from the upcoming 2009-2010 budget, a savings of almost $2.7 million in personnel and programs to avoid raising taxes. 14 of these positions were retirements, the remaining 14.5 came from reductions in force (RIF). At the July 25, 2009, Board meeting citizens were informed that an additional 3% budget reduction would be taken by the state. Fewer teachers, furlough days, delayed textbook adoption cycles, etc. were among the techniques used to

cut costs. The budget forecast for the coming year also looked bleak as they had already determined that it would be necessary to cut ten days from next school year's calendar in order to balance the budget.

Concerned about the potential impact of all the budget cuts on the capacity building efforts his school system had initiated in recent years, I asked Dr. Briggs (personal communication, May 21, 2010) if the school system was in danger of regressing or losing the recent gains in student achievement; and if so, what might be done to maintain the efforts they had made? Unfortunately, he agreed that it was perhaps inevitable that there would be some regression with negative consequences for student achievement.

Tight budget, teacher stress. Mr. Wohlers, described the impact of a continuing budget crisis from his vantage point as high school principal, noting the effect on teachers and departments and their ability to deliver quality instructional services to students. He first pointed out that enrollment had declined in the school system for "11 straight years." "So FTE money has become less and less" (R.C. Wohlers, personal communication, December 4, 2009). However, the fact that the graduation rate had gone up in recent years meant that they were now keeping students in school longer which helped their FTE count. They had taken some staff reductions at the end of the preceding school year, mostly through attrition, retirements, etc. though they did implement a RIF (Reduction in Force) policy. Where feasible they shifted teachers from one school to another to facilitate the RIF.

Less money in the budget necessitates a reduction in staff and with that comes less flexibility in scheduling. Mr. Wohlers said that in the preceding year they had enjoyed an ideal schedule, but with the tight budget they were forced to cut one of the planning periods which had been dedicated to staff development and professional learning communities (PLCs). The previous year they were on a 7 period day and teachers taught 5 out of the 7 periods. This would have allowed teachers a common planning time to use to collaborate and to sharpen up their skills on standards-based classroom (R. C. Wohlers, personal communication, December 4, 2009).

Now they were without this vital staff development resource. At the same time teachers were being asked to teach an additional course. They would now be in the classroom six periods out of their seven period day teaching roughly 150 students. While the impact of the staff reduction was being felt,

Mr. Wohlers was in the unenviable position of having to ask teachers to do more to implement the new standards. Putting himself in the hypothetical role of an English teacher, for example – the department hardest hit by budget cuts, he illustrated how when asked to increase efforts to improve writing scores by assigning more essays for students to write, the teacher's task is magnified because of increased class sizes and more sections to teach. This makes the teacher's job very stressful (R.C. Wohlers, personal communication, December 4, 2009).

It was a stressful time for Mr. Wohlers as well as his teachers. He predicted that the pace would eventually wear them out and that teachers would not "be able to put the time in planning and adjusting curriculum to meet the needs of the students, so achievement would suffer" (R.C. Wohlers, personal communication, December 4, 2009). Mr. Wohlers displayed a bit of both frustration and exhaustion with the present state of affairs. It was apparent that he has empathy for his teachers and was concerned about what their eventual exhaustion might mean for the quality of instruction his students could receive.

Standards vs. state's ability to pay. The districts highest administrator expressed his concerns about the impact of these effects (budget cutbacks, teacher stress, etc.) on students while responding to my question about the State's new high school graduation policy. It was, in his view, appropriate to have a standard for graduating from high school and Georgia's high school graduation rule represents a fair standard. However, he thought that new standard was "… a little bit more rigorous than the State was willing to pay for…" The state says it pays for a six period school day for high school students when in essence it is very difficult for students to graduate from high school if their school is on a six period day. So most school systems have had go to a seven period day or some type of block scheduling format that gives students more opportunities to earn the credits required for graduation. For that reason, he did not think the state was adequately funding high school programs based on the high school graduation requirement (B.T. Briggs, personal communication, May 21, 2010). .

Student achievement. Deer Lodge County School District administrators perceive student achievement as being the responsibility of the student. Each student is expected to avail himself of the opportunities that are presented. The district sees its role as providing an opportunity to excel for those

who are prepared and willing to take advantage of the honors/AP program. However there appears to be insufficient emphasis on making sure that the foundational program in the school, now the college-prep program, is solid. Both teachers and administrators across the board admit that the college-prep track has been watered down since the new GPS and graduation rule policy changes were implemented. Administrators say that was never the intent; however, I found little evidence to indicate that planning for implementation was designed to ensure that did not happen. For the most part, it appears that planning was left to the State and local administrators waited to see to what extent they would have to comply. Employees were sent to State training sessions as directed. There was not a major commitment from the top of the school system to ensure teacher buy-in to the philosophical shift that would be needed to gain rank and file endorsement of this program. Instead it was allowed to trickle down as just another State requirement. However, given the environmental context, that was probably the politically safe position for school and district leaders to take, but I would argue it was not the right or just one.

Community Perceptions

American education is generally funded and governed locally and impacted by local residential patterns, but Deer Lodge County is a rural community with dispersed residential patterns and all students attend a single high school. Such schools in less affluent areas with high minority populations have generally offered less rigorous academic coursework. It was hoped that the new state standards would help guard against that to some extent.

Some perspective on community perceptions is provided by the superintendents' answer to the question, how has your community responded to the new graduation and learning standards? In general, the local business community and the citizens support meeting higher standards because quality schools are seen as vital to the economic wellbeing of the community. However, most of the board members were opposed to the new GPS math standards and thought the State overreached, a bit, in setting them. Undoubtedly, there was also some this too will pass thinking at work.

My subsequent interview with a school board member did in fact echo the superintendent's sentiment about the new GPS mathematics standard. Other community interviews drew attention to the

heavy emphasis on testing in schools. One local business leader expressed concern that the "drill and kill" approach to test preparation may improve high-stakes test scores, but does not necessarily make graduates smarter, and may in fact be counterproductive.

Another interview participant noted that some of their honor graduates are unable to make a sufficient qualifying score on the SAT's to gain admission to the regional university, Georgia Southern University. For parents this is a concern when the student has successfully negotiated an honors program with the acclaim that local teachers attribute to it. Parents do not understand why their student still may not be adequately prepared to gain entry to their desired institution.

Analysis of Findings

As a result of budget restrictions, more than one administrator at Deer Lodge High School related how teachers put in extra hours as dedicated professionals always do; but the extra hours were becoming the daily norm or the rule rather than the exception. Both teachers and administrators described the declining morale that job stress was creating and more than one expressed fear that this would lead to burnout, increased teacher turnover or early retirements. Teachers expressed the sense of guilt they felt about taking sick days knowing their already strapped colleagues would have to take up the slack by covering for them on an unscheduled day off. Both teachers and administrators informed me that the district had made a policy decision not to hire substitutes. Principals were restricted to hiring substitutes in only certain limited and defined circumstances, without exception. Teachers were being asked to teach in accordance with the new Georgia Performance (GPS) standards, but textbooks at the time of our interviews in 2009-2010 were not up to date or keyed to the standard. The principal advised that the Math I and Math II courses were unique to Georgia, consequently, no textbook had been developed for the "spiral mathematics curriculum." The lack of adequate funding meant that some textbook cycles had to be postponed. The English textbook had not been updated in ten years.

Standards-based classroom

Teacher evaluation is tied to GPS implementation via the new GTOI (Georgia Teacher Observation Instrument). This is a new teacher observation instrument that the district was planning to go

to the following school year. The high school was piloting this new teacher observation tool at the time of my visits. It was designed to enable administrators to evaluate whether or not the teacher is conforming to the requirements for teaching in a standards-based classroom and appropriately implementing the GPS.

Interviews with lead teachers and administrators revealed that their role under the implementation of the FIPSE (Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education) grant with Georgia Southern University had been critical to development of teacher capacity within the Deer Lodge County School District and Deer Lodge High School. These persons described how just three or so years before the advent of new GPS and grad rule standards the district was the recipient of a significant FIPSE grant which provided training for teachers in three critical areas: understanding poverty, culturally sensitive teaching and differentiated instruction.

This training helped to build capacity within faculty ranks and as a result teachers witnessed an improvement in student performance. Marked gains were seen in test scores and in high school graduation rate among the African American student subgroup, for example. Thus, with regard to student achievement faculty and administrators alike came to realize they could do better with their mixed population of students from a rural poverty background.

So how, then, have teachers implemented the standards in their classrooms with their students? Rather than fully adopting the new standards, teachers have adapted to their new circumstance, allowing them to cope with meeting the minimum standards required. Teachers still have an intense allegiance to a history of sorting and selecting students. Teachers report that, as expected, the most capable students are reacting favorably to the new standards-based classroom instructional methods. Those who lack adequate foundation, those on the margin, were having great difficulty and some were experiencing failure, particularly in mathematics. As DeBray (2005) found in her investigation in New York State, the school was experiencing the pains of detracking to put everyone on a path for the college-prep diploma (see page 37 of the literature review, Chapter 2 of this dissertation). Teachers spoke of the policy in terms of

practice and said that some students (notably African American males) could do the work, but were unwilling to do so.

Underlying tensions

Some say the college-prep course of study is being watered down to accommodate low achievers. Acknowledgement by the superintendent and teacher department chairs in core academic subjects confirmed that expectations in college-prep courses had been lowered in deference to other academic priorities.

Racialized tracking. On the surface it would appear that the honors/AP curriculum is not designed to circumvent the intent of new policy standards per se, though it does provide an opportunity for students to avoid the all-inclusive classes and be in the mix (Anonymous, personal communication, May 14, 2010) with the other students. According to the AP science teacher and department head, the Advance Placement curriculum probably exceeds the GPS curriculum standard in most subjects. The issue here is not so much the existence of AP, but rather the exclusivity of it in that it works out by race and class to exclude (de facto) those who are disadvantaged in the school community and school. And some who might have the talent to participate are not encouraged to do so, thus sending the unspoken signal that it is not for them (Tyson, 2011). On the contrary, I heard of instances where African American males appear to have been discouraged from participating in honors and AP courses. Thus honors/AP in this instance becomes a tool of segregation. In the end it matters little whether African Americans are simply not being encouraged to participate or are self-selecting out of honors/AP. Which is to say, they choose not to participate, perhaps because they are made to feel uncomfortable by others in the school community or accused of "acting white" by members of their own race, or hampered by weaknesses in academic foundation. The end result is still de facto segregation by race and the root cause is racialized tracking.

Adaptation rather than adoption. There is no question that the district and high school have varied from the state standard. The faculty has consciously chosen to adapt to the standard at a minimum level for a host of reasons described in their own voice above rather than adopt it wholeheartedly. An

underlying area of tension is the conflicting view about differentiated instruction. State consultants from the Georgia Department of Education and instructional coaches on staff have been promoting differentiated instruction as an instructional technique which if mastered could aid the teachers in moving to student centered instruction. This is the cornerstone of the standards-based classroom model embodied within the GPS. However, some teachers at Deer Lodge High were unable or unwilling to make the adjustment because the technique is difficult to employ, requires a good deal of time and preparation, and they were overwhelmed.

Policy Shortcomings. Perhaps the State standard itself should shoulder some of the blame for lackluster implementation. Could it be that what was proposed in the State policy represented a bit of sleight of hand at work? The State said the artificial separation that had existed between tech-prep or technical career and college-prep courses was not working in Georgia. The then sitting Secretary of State, Kathy Cox, also said the tech-prep diploma had no real value. No mention was made however, of honors/AP courses in her announcement of this new standard. Was this policy designed to give Georgia school districts that are still politically committed to maintaining racialized tracking systems an option to continue what they have been doing since segregation was dismantled by the federal courts?

Use of Technology

Deer Lodge County School System created through the Communities in Schools (CIS) organization a Performance Learning Center (PLC) on an abandoned campus in 2005. The system uses the E2020 software to remediate students and to help those on the margins get back on track in their courses. School administrators contend the system has been overwhelmingly successful, and very helpful to today's students.

However, students in English and other classes on the lower tracks have disclosed to their teacher that they do not have access to computer and internet resources at home. Although the local telecommunications provider has installed high speed fiber optic cable throughout the community, many of its children are without its educational benefits.

The natural next step is to extend technology use to the individual student or the home so that students can expand the knowledge base they acquire in school for rapid intellectual development. That will require innovative thinking, perhaps government and philanthropic assistance, and a shift in spending priorities on the part of local parents and families who want to see their children benefit from the enhanced educational experience this technology provides.

Graduation Rates and Minority Performance: A View across Time

In the case discussion of performance accountability actions this researcher reported that the district's graduation rate had been low for a number of years, particularly among African-American students (43% for this subgroup in 2007-2008 academic year per AdvancED Accreditation Report dated 2012, p. 5). Even I was shocked to read of this low graduation rate. I cannot understand how things could have been allowed to deteriorate to that level without public outcry. In my interview with the superintendent he stated that "the high school graduation rate, as influenced by the high school graduation test, has been the area that has caused the greatest amount of change in our school system" (B.T. Briggs, personal communication, May 21, 2010).

One can speculate as to why this may have been so; there are probably multiple contributing factors. Was it the high school graduation test, the gatekeeper test that the students were finding insurmountable? Or were they, as former State Superintendent of Schools, Kathy Cox said, being denied access to the curriculum through tracking and other inappropriate assignments, or receiving misleading advisement. Whatever the reason, a great wrong has been done to a generation or more of a community's children and youth.

Before the black and white high schools were combined in Deer Lodge County in the 1970's one would assume that most African American students were graduating with their class at an acceptable rate at the all black high school. It is probably also fair to suggest that it was assumed by the African American community that combining the schools would not change that. It is doubtful that anyone or any organization outside of the school itself was tracking such information as few would have suspected it to become an issue. The standards-based reform movement chronicled in Chapter 2 arose after "massive

resistance" in the south gave way to desegregation. Questions about quality are always raised after access is increased.

In the ensuing years since initial integration of the public schools, local African American community leaders and organizations have engaged the school system at varying times to ensure black representation in leadership positions up to and including principal of the high school expecting that under the watchful eye of one of their own fair and equitable treatment of students would be assured. In addition, African American citizens have had elected representatives on the school board for a number of years now since at large voting practices were outlawed (Buchanan, 2013).

Of course, street-level bureaucrats (Weatherley & Lipsky, 1977), even those who may be favorably disposed to their client's interest, are nevertheless constrained by institutional practice (Schein, 1992; Scott, 2001) and it can sometimes be difficult to change institutions from within. Then too failure has historically carried with it embarrassing stigma, so students and parents of students unsuccessful on the Georgia High School Graduation Test (GHGT) and failing to graduate would not have been predisposed to publicly disclose their misfortune. Even before the FERPA law (Family Policy Compliance Office, U.S. Department of Education, 2013) was enacted student records were generally treated as sensitive information not for public disclosure. So prior to NCLB how would the public have known that African American students were failing the GHSGT in large numbers at this high school and, consequently, not graduating with their classes? Moreover, given that drop-out data commonly reported by Georgia schools and the State historically has been shown to be unreliable, how would the community have known about high dropout rates? Dropout information was still a little hazy at the time of my interviews. It was difficult to get an exact answer to the question.

One can only speculate as to why this state of affairs arose. My guess is that once racial integration occurred there arose over time a greater emphasis on maintaining order and discipline (safety in the minds of some) within the high school, than on ensuring that each and every student demonstrated high academic performance (to the best of their ability), regardless of race or social class standing in the

community. Indeed a system of racialized tracking long embraced as policy in this school district may have served to reinforce underachievement by lowering expectations for underperforming black students.

I would also surmise that both school leaders and many teachers knew they were not getting the job done before NCLB as far as the number of students who were not graduating, particularly among African Americans and those students identified as learning disabled, a number of whom tend to be African American in this school system. But as they were not required to highlight or disclose negative data, even in the aggregate, it became acceptable to dismiss underachievement as either the fault of the student, attribute it to other factors outside of the school's control such as the student's family, background, or simply dismiss the high incidence of failure and dropout as a cost of doing the business of schooling. Moreover, it may well have been that in earlier times entrenched interests within the community would not tolerate a different instructional paradigm reflecting a more student centered philosophy of teaching and learning.

According to the recent AdvancED accreditation report for the district, the graduation situation is now turned around and moving in a positive direction. However, my research findings of high math course failure, particularly within the African American male subgroup; informants reports of excessive disciplinary issues involving that subgroup; apparent avoidance of honors/AP participation by African Americans through self-selecting out behavior or absence of African Americans from honors/AP classes due to discriminatory practices; the school's persistent use of course tracking mechanisms; the determined support of racialized tracking (Tyson, 2011) by almost all core faculty sampled; the philosophical stance of key faculty leaders in opposition to the State's theory of action; and the determined strategy of teaching to the middle of the class, or dumbing down the college-prep courses all point to a loosely coupled plan of resistance. That resistance is designed to prove the impracticality of the new State standard and work out an accommodation—adaptation. And it has the effect of ensuring status quo priorities are maintained—adaptation. The preponderance of the literature evidence (see also Chapter 2, Review of the Related Literature) argues for an end to high-stakes testing and tracking of students (Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Carnoy, Elmore, & Siskin, 2003; McNeil et al., 2008; Tyson, 2011; Valenzuela, 2005). Until that call is

heeded, Deer Lodge County Schools may enjoy limited success related to testing statistics, AYP, and the like because that is its public focus. It is what school leaders and school teachers are being evaluated on. In essence, as McNeil has noted in Texas, the system of rewards and punishments in public schooling motivates the wrong behavior, and sets metrics for evaluation such as identifiable performance by subgroups that while informative and necessary, when tied to performance evaluation (NCLB) draws the disdain of those from whom the student must seek help. It is therefore counterintuitive. Accompanied by racialized tracking it is also counterproductive for student intellectual growth. I am reminded of the comment made by a local business owner who questioned whether all the focus on "drill and kill" test preparation and repeated assessments was actually making the children smarter.

Eventual examination of the lives touched underneath the veil of public statistics (graduation rate and test scores) however, likely may tell a different story. I believe the story about who is being allowed to fall through the cracks and who is not getting an AP or even a sound college-prep education; who is being sold a college preparatory credential, but not getting access to a college preparatory curriculum deserves the community's attention, involvement and committed action to fix the problems of our own making in Deer Lodge Public Schools.

A comment on 1970's merging of Black and White High Schools in Deer Lodge County

A rich social history is encapsulated in the more than fifty years of existence of the African American school as several generations of local residents of Deer Lodge County received their formal education there at the hands of dedicated black teachers. However, investigation of that history is beyond the scope of this research. The eventual integration of the black and white public schools in Deer Lodge County, as elsewhere in the State, was the result of many years of sustained effort by many people dedicated to the cause of freedom and equality both within the local community and beyond its borders. That full story too is beyond the scope of this research. That notwithstanding, I touch upon aspects of it here to put into context certain legacy practices and paradigms operating within the school system, such as racialized tracking, which teachers and administrators continue to negotiate today.

It is important to observe that for the last forty years African American children in this "integrated" school district have had to relate to a school legacy and social history that, until recently at least, did not include them. It is also likely the African American adult community felt less than completely connected as well in the sense of loyalty to "alma mater" and ownership of their community's schools for many years. After all, most African Americans in Deer Lodge County who graduated from high school before the 1970s grew up with a different social experience at school. And once the black schools were absorbed by the white they, and most importantly their descendants, were cut off from that history and the social capital that had been amassed through that experience.

One has to wonder how many of society's ills experienced since desegregation could have been avoided in the local community if a more humanistic approach to school integration had been taken. Had those in power been willing to actually merge the two high schools rather than disband the black high school, and its rich social history, as though it never existed, what beneficial cultural capital might have been preserved? Might traditions of academic achievement been identified, preserved, and shared for the benefit of all who entered there, black and white? Might knowledge of pedagogy gained through years of experience teaching black children been preserved? The soft bigotry of white superiority and black intellectual inferiority that has been allowed to ferment at Deer Lodge County High School under the guise of merit fueled by a system of racialized tracking is toxic for children's intellectual development (Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Tyson, 2011).

Analysis of Performance Accountability

At the outset of this study, I outlined the broad conceptual framework of outcomes-based bureaucratic accountability (Gross & Supovitz, 2005; J. O'Day, 2004) as providing theoretical foundations for my research. In Figure 6.1, which follows at the end of this chapter, I extend the diagram developed by Supovitz and Gross (see figure 2.1) to a more focused logic model (Yin, 2014) to illustrate how the conceptual framework may be used to analyze the implementation process at Deer Lodge County High School. The model shows elements of the accountability system in the first column, followed by implementing actions arranged in order by program change, curricular change, or instructional change.

Policies effect change in schools either through changes to programs, curriculum, instruction, or some combination of these. In the instant case, the State was attempting to effect whole system change affecting curriculum and instruction simultaneously while also adding reinforcements to the accountability system in the form of new minimum standards and the end of course test.

Finally, teachers' perception of the effect of these various actions on what they and their students did in the classroom to impact teaching and learning provide a window to analysis of internal accountability (DeBray et al., 2003) and enable us to see the street-level bureaucrat in action (Weatherley & Lipsky, 1977). In this case, the street level bureaucrats, that is the teachers and administrators, quietly expanded the honors/AP program and relaxed instruction in the college-prep program to adapt the new state policy to the social mores and will of the power elites in Deer Lodge County, and to work out the sensemaking (Weick, 1995) necessary to satisfy their own values and beliefs.

Educational policies tend to accumulate over time (Birkland, 2011; McDermott, 2011) with new policies being layered on top of preexisting ones. Figure 6.1 enables the reader to see and identify existing policies in the school accountability system and new policies that were being added. Note that the grade 8.5 program (which also has a curriculum associated with it) and the honors/AP tracking program listed at the bottom of Figure 6.1 are local programs.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 6 presented the three major findings from the Deer Lodge County Case Study which answer the three research questions that were developed for this case based upon the theoretical framework that was developed in Chapter 2. The primary finding of this case study was that racialized tracking persists at Deer Lodge County High School and this practice along with other intangible factors negatively color stakeholders' (teachers, administrators, parents, students, etc.) perceptions and opinions about the new state polices focused on enhancing student achievement. This chapter also included a discussion of case contextual factors gleaned from interview data from the perspective of teachers, administrators, and community leaders. The chapter concludes with analysis of findings including extension of the outcomes-based bureaucratic accountability framework's model of school response to

accountability policy to the case of Deer Lodge County High School. A diagram supporting the analysis appears at the end of this chapter (see Figure 6.1).

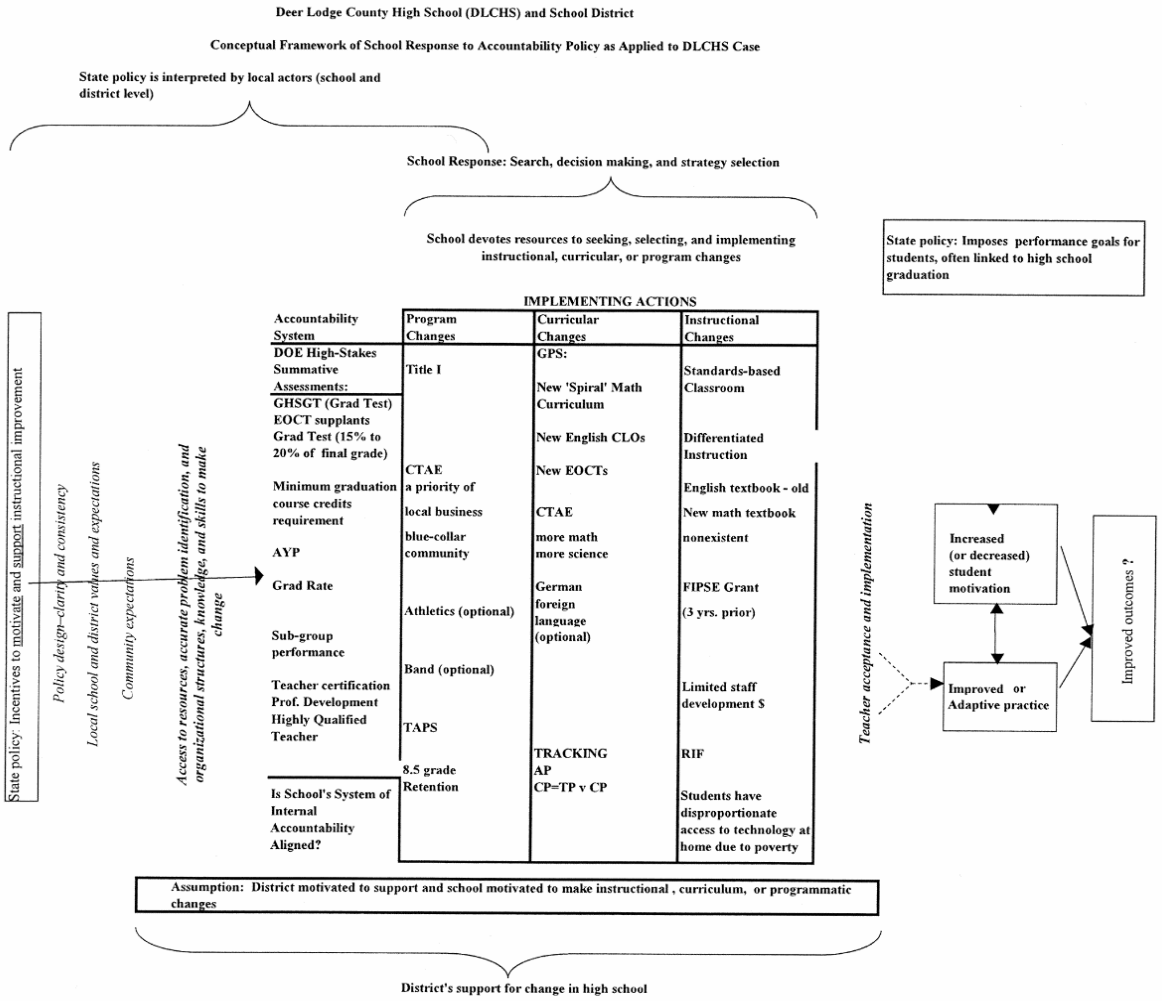

Figure 6.1. Conceptual Framework of School Response to Accountability Policy as Applied to DLCHS Case
Adapted from Chapter 1, Introduction by B. Gross and J.A. Supovitz, 2005, in "Holding high hopes: How high schools respond to state accountability policies" by B. Gross and M.E. Goertz. CPRE Research Report Series RR-056 (pp. 1-16). University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education. Copyright 2005 by the Consortium for Policy Research in Education.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of my study is to understand the interpretation and implementation of externally mandated accountability policies at the district and school levels, with particular attention to the role of community and historical context in the shaping of interpretations and implementation. This study examines implementation within a single rural South Georgia high school under standards-based reform. The object of this case study is to understand how state education policy on school reform is moderated or diffracted at the local level. This study was guided by the following research questions:

1) How do people understand the policy?
2) How is that understanding shaped by their environment and their understanding of their environment?
3) What were the actions taken?

The study is informed by the education policy implementation literature which looks at the local realization of externally imposed change as an act of "sensemaking" (Cooper et al., 2004; Fullan, 2007; Madsen, 1994; Weatherley & Lipsky, 1977; Weick, 1995). Further explanatory power of how teachers and administrators respond to accountability pressures may be found in Weatherly & Lipsky's (1977) theory on street-level bureaucrats. These theories along with a working theory of school internal accountability (Abelman et al., 2004; DeBray et al., 2003) are subsumed under the outcomes-based bureaucratic accountability (Gross & Supovitz, 2005; J. O'Day, 2004) framework expounded upon in the 'Building a Conceptual Framework' section of Chapter 2 of the dissertation.

This is a case study of how state policy reform on student achievement is perceived, understood and implemented in a high minority, high poverty, Title I high school in rural southeast Georgia. My argument is that the school's capacity to authentically implement state policy reform is constrained by, among other factors, internal alignment of responsibility, expectations, and internal accountability

mechanisms (Elmore, 2004) inconsistent with the ideal of raised expectations for achievement for all students envisioned in the new graduation requirements. This high school has constructed its internal accountability system on a foundation of student stratification with different learning goals for different classes of students and this may serve to constrict its ability to motivate all students to excel (DeBray et al., 2003).

Georgia's rigorous new graduation requirements, IHF (6), adopted by the State Board of Education on September 13, 2007, eliminated tiered diploma options wherein students followed either college preparatory or technology/career coursework. Regulation IHF (6) became effective with the incoming ninth grade class of 2008 (Georgia Department of Education, 2010). This case study was conducted in the subject rural school district in the following school year. The district consists of a singular high school fed by a singular middle school and elementary school.

Funding Policies and Capacity

At the time of my interviews, completed during fall and spring semesters of the 2009 – 2010 school year, school administrators and mathematics teachers alike were (in actuality) struggling with the math requirements of the GPS curriculum and new graduation rule. There was real angst on the part of everyone concerned that they may not be able to get enough students over the math I hurdle and successfully through the math II, III and IV sequence required for graduation. Yet from the principal on down all said they were committed to finding a way to make it happen. It seems the new freshman math I course was exposing gaps in the math backgrounds of some students which rendered them unprepared for the rigors of the course. The failure rate among the first cohort the previous year had been unacceptably high, and teachers were scrambling to find an effective method or approach to reach these students. Continued failure could easily lead to a 5th year in high school and added frustration for school administrators because schools are not incentivized to graduate students beyond four years under current AYP and state FTE guidelines and may incur a penalty for failing to graduate them on time.

Adequacy of state funding

Funding cuts and reductions in force caused by a severe economic downturn further served to restrict capacity at a time when more rather than fewer resources were needed to build capacity to meet the challenges of adopting the new standards. This rural school district lost 29 faculty positions the previous school year from a reduction in force (RIF). As a result, teachers and resources were being stretched to their limits. Every person I interviewed expressed concern about the impact of budget cuts – fewer teachers, inability to hire substitute teachers, forfeited planning time, elimination of one of two daily planning periods, forced furlough days, delayed textbook cycles, etc. were the order of the day. Despite the anxiety the lack of funding caused; however, most faculty and administrators were decidedly upbeat. Perhaps some of that can be attributed to the fact, as several of them shared with me, that most of them live in the local community; many grew up there and sent their own children to school there; some were alumni themselves, so they seem to have a vested interest in what goes on in their high school.

Is the Model for Funding Public Education in Rural Georgia Broken?

Tangential to the above discussion of funding issues is the question of whether or not the state's FTE (full time equivalent) funding model adequately supports a high academic standards mission for rural schools in communities that lack a diversified industrial base, with high concentrations of rural poverty over a dispersed geographic service area? Some local school officials argue that the new "… high school graduation policy is a bit more rigorous than the State is willing to pay for…" (Anonymous, personal communication, May 21, 2010). That concern coupled with the fact that at the time of my interviews, the State was withholding $2 million in school funds that would normally have been disbursed to the district in better economic times served to draw into sharp focus local concerns about money.

Also given the ongoing need for remediation in core subjects particularly among students from disadvantaged backgrounds, the question arose as to whether or not low cost (income sensitive/subsidized) internet services could be provided to the home as a vehicle for remote online instruction. If so, could internet resources be effectively utilized to meet this continuing challenge? Through the aide of federal grant funding the district has been able to effectively use technology on its

campuses to help address academic deficiencies. Whether or not by extension parents and students could build on this effort in this way has not been determined, but the idea may warrant further investigation.

State funding for student achievement initiatives

State school finance and budget policies appear to send a conflicting message regarding the Georgia Department of Education's priorities for enhanced student achievement. Perhaps the State's educational leaders were sincere in putting forth an ambitious plan in these new policies (Graduation rule and GPS) designed to challenge the next generation of students, but good intentions alone will not build the capacity needed in our schools to ensure that high academic standards become realized.

The state legislature's austerity moves coupled with the local electorates' distaste for property tax increases resulted in an unreliable and inconsistent funding stream with which school leaders had to work. Of course the State's budget was reeling from the impact of a severe national economic recession. The State did not have the revenues to sustain distributions to state agencies at the levels it had contributed in the past. However, as always there were budget and policy trade-offs involved, and the extensive debate surrounding equity and adequacy of school finance has been noted in the literature (see Chapter 4).

This rural economic environment has been in a state of transition for well over three decades. The community's population has remained stagnant at approximately 15,000 residents for more than a decade. Industry has been in decline to the point that now only a single industry remains. Jobs that have left in the process have not been replaced.

It appears that the long term viability and health of the school district may hinge on its ability to tap new and reliable sources of revenue. As long as the district is subject to steep or irregular fluctuations in state funding, it will not be able to continuously build and maintain high quality academic programs, nor can it provide the opportunities for collaborative instruction and continuing staff development necessary to increase instructional capacity and drive sustained student achievement. *Figure 7.1* depicts a broad school funding model comprised of local, state and federal funds (Sielke, 2011). Elements of the model are discussed in Chapter 4 of the dissertation relative to Deer Lodge County School finance.

Parameters of School Funding Model	
Local	Political climate visa-a-vi property tax
	One cent local option sales tax – restricted uses (property, plant, and equipment)
State	Funding formula -FTEs; authorized uses
	Degree of legislative commitment to capacity building via supplemental funding support?
Federal	Program funding - Conditioned upon economic or other circumstances tied to programs; authorized uses – unfunded mandates
	Grant funding – also tied to programs, may have unfunded mandates
Figure 7.1. Adapted from "A reversal of fortune": Georgia legislative update1992-2012 by C. Sielke, 2011. Journal of Education Finance, *37*(2), 175.	

Summary Funding Policies and Capacity

In summary, at the time of my interviews capacity was severely strained at Deer Lodge County High School. Had it not been for the recent success of the district partnership with Georgia Southern University leading to a Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) grant a few years prior, I do not believe the school would have been as progressive in attempting to implement the new state standards as they were. However, as a result of its participation in the FIPSE grant project the school was able to identify and shore up areas of teaching and learning relevant to its most vulnerable student populations and train teachers in enhanced instructional methods like differentiated instruction. They were also getting support for their implementation effort, particularly in the core subjects of mathematics and English, from the First District Regional Education Agency (RESA), the local Georgia Department of Education extension that services their area.

Deer Lodge County High School, though it has been in needs improvement status, is a successful high school in a successful school district with many attributes and accomplishments to its credit. It is a leader in the southeast Georgia First District RESA region of school districts. It has many dedicated professionals who are committed to academic excellence and providing a quality educational experience for its students. However, with regard to its capacity to implement state policy reforms outlined above it is faced with some unique challenges that it will need to overcome if it is to realize the pinnacle of academic achievement for all the students it serves.

Degree of Internal Alignment with the External Method

At Deer Lodge County High School (pseudonym) a high degree of internal alignment exists around values and expectations regarding ability grouping of students (tracking) that is inconsistent with the external method promulgated by new state educational accountability reforms. More specifically, previous patterns of sorting and tracking students within the district and the high school have bequeathed an entrenched philosophy of teaching, learning and classroom management within the school community that is restrictive and inconsistent with the spirit and purpose of state policy reforms designed to accelerate student achievement among all students.

The State's theory of action holds that a system of testing and accountability maintained through higher standards will encourage all stakeholders (students, parents, teachers and school officials) to focus on outcomes. The theory posits that all students will learn more and earn better grades when they take rigorous college preparatory courses because research and experience shows that students are more likely to succeed when they are expected to do so and more likely to fail when they are not. It is expressed in the ideal that if we set higher expectations students will extend their reach to get a better education, irrespective of whether they choose to pursue postsecondary education or enter the workforce after high school graduation. Research has shown this effect to be true for all students, including those from low-income or disadvantaged backgrounds (Georgia Department of Education, 2010).

In the instant case, the school and school community's steadfast adherence to placing students into college-prep or advance placement (AP/honors) track courses contradicts the State's theory of action under the new graduation rule and Georgia Performance Standard (GPS). Although the curriculum for separate groups may now be similar or the same, the day-to-day classroom learning experiences of students in separate college-prep and AP tracks is likely to be quite different (Oakes, 2005). Moreover, teacher expectations of some lower track students is colored by the perceived notion that they cannot do college preparatory work and as more than one teacher and administrator shared with me, "…do not belong in a college-prep class … because they have no intention of going to college."

A culture of yearning for the old tech-prep and college-prep curriculum tracks pervades the faculty and leadership team at Deer Lodge County High School. At base level administrators and some teachers (all of the core subject department chairs) do not believe heterogeneous groupings of students can be effectively taught so they long for homogenous groups which were forfeited by the imposition of the new Georgia Performance Standard (GPS). Though all expressed commitment to doing their jobs, their personal feelings are not in support of the change in curriculum tracks. Thus they see the change as unworkable because it is contrary to their philosophy of classroom management and belief in ability grouping. They disagree with the basic ideal of the new graduation rule and GPS which is that all students can learn academic course content and perform at a high level.

They do not support the idea that college level math and science are needed by students they perceive as going into the workforce and not to college. With few exceptions, they do not see a highly skilled workforce in their community and they discount the need for same as not relevant for many of their students. Several of the teachers have either grown up working on their family's farm or working in a small retail merchant. They attended Georgia Southern University, a short distance away, majored in an education related discipline and began a teaching career in their home community. Their conceptualization of academic skills relevant to the needs of today's diverse industry is limited by their own experience.

To be sure, there is considerable focus within the school and district on outcomes. However, the dominant view among district and school administration and faculty is that the combining of technology/career coursework (tech-prep) and college-preparatory (college-prep) curriculum tracks is seen not so much as a means to raise academic performance, but rather as an intrusion upon the school's autonomy to assign less academically motivated students to the lower tech-prep track. As professionals, school staff acknowledges they are committed to implementing the new state standards, but several shared doubts about the practical effect of doing so. As seen through the mirror of their experience, tracking is essential to efficient functioning of the school given the diverse range of interest, intellectual abilities, and motivation evident among students in this comprehensive high school. Consequently, the

new Graduation Rule and GPS policy are considered as potentially having the "unintended consequence" of "watering down" (Anonymous, personal communication, May 21, 2010) the college-prep curriculum and, thereby, causing harm to those students who previously would have chosen the college-prep track. Several school officials including the superintendent expressed concern that too much emphasis of late was being placed on helping the student at the bottom, rather than "… pushing our best and brightest students as far as they can go." (Anonymous, personal communication, May 21, 2010).

As evidence of the subtle but putative effects of implementing the streamlined college-prep curriculum in an environment where three academic tracks previously existed, interviews revealed that at the time the curriculum change was instituted some honors courses were being oversubscribed by parents who did not want their child "…in the mix" so to speak (Anonymous, personal communication, May 14, 2010). They, therefore, chose to exercise their option to override recommended academic placements for their student and place them in accelerated and honors classes even though they were not on that level. Such actions serve to perpetuate long standing patterns of socio-economic class distinction and de facto segregation by race within the school building, and by extension the community at large.

Given the history, until recently, of meager academic performance on statewide assessments by some subgroups at this high school, such actions are particularly disquieting. In an economic climate wherein the community and the State are eager for increased academic achievement among all of our young people, a level playing field that promotes a sense of educational equity should be encouraged by the school district.

Student achievement at Deer Lodge County High has been positively influenced by state and federal regulations associated with AYP (adequate yearly progress, an element of the No Child Left Behind law) and the high school graduation rate. A local school official acknowledged that "the high school graduation rate … as influenced by the high school graduation test has been the area that has caused the greatest amount of change in our school system." Officials were pleased to report that the graduation rate among their African-American subgroup improved in recent years from "fifty-five percent

(55%) … to somewhere around seventy-four percent (74%)" (Anonymous, personal communication, May 21, 2010).

These gains notwithstanding, my interviews revealed significant concern about unexplained difficulties in reaching and motivating black male students to consistent high achievement. I heard reports that a significant number of black males seem apathetic toward doing more than the minimum required to get by in their courses. Some who in their teacher's judgment could perform at the level expected in advance placement (AP) courses shun or refuse to accept the challenge even with their teacher's recommendation; or they are otherwise discouraged from doing so.

Among those students required to repeat 'Math I' in summer school due to failure their freshman year (2008 –2009) a significant number of African-American males failed the course a second time. This was causing a good deal of frustration for dedicated teachers and counselors who were convinced these students could do better, but were seemingly unwilling to apply the skills necessary to succeed in the course. Such situations may be indicative of an emotional disconnect between faculty and student groups (Fullan, 2007). Failure on the End-of-Course Test (EOCT) correlates to lack of success on the Georgia High School Graduation Test. These findings are cause for concern about whether or not all students routinely enjoy an academically stimulating learning experience at this school. In view of the claimed outstanding success of the schools AP track program, this case study would be remiss to overlook without questioning the plight of this minority subgroup of students who now constitute a racial majority at this school.

Thus, as before stated, the district has constructed its internal accountability system on a foundation of student stratification with different learning goals for different classes of students, and this may serve to constrict its ability to motivate all students to excel. The school is inhibited by entrenched cultural, political and socio-economic forces within the community from embracing with zeal the state's mandate on school reform. In effect the descriptive phrase "compliance without capacity," coined by DeBray, Parsons and Avila (2003, p. 84) might appropriately characterize the educational environment at Deer Lodge County High School. Except that in this case internal accountability mechanisms appear

quite coherent and aligned around established community norms of social behavior. Other conditions related to insufficient capacity at Deer Lodge High may serve or may have served to impede its ability to fully implement the new state standards. Additional limiting circumstances include challenges related to teaching and learning the new math curriculum and the impact of deep funding cuts as a result of the recent economic recession.

Impact on Stakes and Implications for Students

These findings have several implications for students that go beyond those commonly anticipated for the stated policy changes. High-stakes scheduling of coursework may now be a challenge for students in some circumstances. Tech-prep may be eliminated as a formally identifiable lower academic track, but the local commitment to its separate and unequal ideals has not diminished. The plight of African American male students at this school is tenuous and should be monitored. Altered 8th grade promotion policies (8.5) may be counterproductive.

High-Stakes Testing: Meet High-Stakes Scheduling

Georgia's high-stakes high school graduation test has now been supplanted by high-stakes end of course test (EOCT) that count 20% of a student's final grade in a course. As of 2011 the state had eleven of these curriculum aligned test in place.

The spiral mathematics curriculum coupled with limited hours in the seven-period (six-period at some schools) school day meant limited options for students who fail a course to remediate, get back on track, and graduate within four years. A high school freshman who fails math I and repeats his sophomore year may be destined to a fifth year in high school if he is not able to recover through a program of computer lab based credit recovery or summer school. The State funds a six period school day. That equates to 24 chances to complete the required minimum 23 courses in a four year high school career. This allows little room for recovery from youthful indiscretions.

Exclusionary Tracking

Teacher and counselor interviews also disclosed exclusionary "racialized" tracking (Tyson, 2011) practices purportedly based upon merit that have the effect of separating a select few students apart from

the general population and placing them into honors and AP track classes. These classes consistently experience lower student teacher ratios and better availability of instructional resources and support than the general student population, thus providing students therein a better quality education. These classes are also oversubscribed by parents of children who have not met consistent high achievement (gifted) criteria based upon academic merit, but desire that their child not be "in the mix." School officials have found themselves subjected to intense pressure at community events by local parents and community members who voice their disapproval of changing the traditional practice of separating students into tracks (Anonymous, personal communication, May 14, 2010). Said honors and AP classes are consistently disproportionately enrolled by white students in a high school that has an African American student majority. These honors and AP classes represent a case of what is in effect de facto segregation by race within the integrated school building (Tyson, 2011). The implications for students are negative regardless of which side of this experience one grows up on.

The Plight of African American Male Students

Interviews also disclosed that black male students are consistently found in remedial groups in numbers disproportionate to their representation in the general student population. This would suggest that black males experience academic failure at higher rates than other subgroups within the student body; or, for reasons unknown, may not be getting exposure to the curriculum early and consistently in their academic career. Black males are conspicuously absent from honors and AP classes, even when recommended for these classes by their teachers.

These conditions having been observed by reliable sources warrant further investigation. It was also revealed through interviews in school and the community that concerns about the number and proportion of disciplinary issues involving African American students generally have been raised to a level of community sensitivity, such that underlying issues needed to be investigated as of the 2009-2010 school year.

Lending support to these concerns was the minimal number of African American faculty at the high school and the absence of African American's on the principal's administrative team at that time.

The principal advised that he would like to hire more black teachers, but said he is not able to find them. He offered two reasons for this: 1) this small rural community (roughly 60 miles from either Augusta or Savannah, 200 miles from Atlanta, Ga.) he surmised is too remote to be attractive to black applicants, and 2) the town and county have no black middle class. Juxtaposition against that statement the following comment shared by the superintendent:

> I guest one other point that I would make which is kind of unique to us, you know, we've never had difficulty filling positions here among our teaching staff. We've always had lots of applicants to choose from, and we've never had problems filling positions. And I think one of the greatest strengths of our school system is that a very, very large percentage of our teachers are home grown teachers. They are teachers who came up through our school system, went to college and came back here to teach. And so as a result, I think there is a much larger since of ownership among our school system staff and our community for our school system than you might see in some other places, and I think that has helped us weather a lot of storms and make a lot of improvements (B.T. Briggs, personal communication, May 21, 2010).

The Deer Lodge County School Board and administration should be encouraged to take immediate and substantive steps to address these issues for the benefit of all stakeholders. The lack of equitable numbers of African American role models in the schools sends a negative message to black students about their self-worth. It also fails to help communicate positive messages about diversity to white students.

Altered Grade to Grade Promotion

In the course of interviews with middle school administrators, information emerged about a newly instituted program whereby 8th grade students from the previous year (2008-2009) were promoted to an "8.5 Academy". Or one might alternately describe this as they were retained in grade 8.5, rather than being promoted to 9th grade with their cohort. The rationale given for this was that their CRCT math scores were low, and they needed more time to develop these skills before moving on to the high school .

This gave them, the argument goes, an opportunity to increase their mathematics skills and improve their chance of being successful with the new Math I freshman mathematics course when they entered 9th grade. As I discuss in the literature in Chapter 2, a recently concluded study by McNeil et al (McNeil et al., 2008) found that school officials in Texas instituted a waiver on grade-to-grade promotion as a way to exclude from the tested cohort students predicted to be liabilities because of their history of low test scores, especially in math. This is used as a means of insulating the high school's rating (AYP) from the predicted low test score these students would be projected to make with their 9th grade cohort. Recall Deer Lodge County High School at that time (2008 - 2009) had not make AYP for the previous two years. McNeil et al.'s research indicates this practice tends to be counterintuitive and works to increase the probability of students dropping–out. Rather than improving these children's chances they may have made matters worse. McNeil suggests that a more desirable approach would be for state and local legislators and school officials to provide additional capacity within the system to meet the needs of these students early-on, before they arrive at an inflection point in the system where high-stakes test determine their fate.

Special Education Students

Dr. Briggs and Ms. Venus both acknowledged the historically high population of special education students in the district and high school, the majority of whom tend to be African American. Both were at a loss to explain why this occurs other than to cite the usual suspect categories: high poverty in the community; high rate of teenage pregnancies, prenatal drug use and so on. Left unaddressed was the question of whether or not children might have been (or may currently be) oversubscribed to the learning disabled categories early in their school career and once labeled, simply allowed to roll through the system. Researchers have identified this as a problem in some instances where state FTE allowances and reimbursements at higher rates for special needs students can make errant diagnosis of disabling conditions (i.e. Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, or ADHD) financially enticing. This study revealed no evidence of the above, though the question of why an above average special education count may exist within the school district remains unresolved.

Suggestions for Policy Makers

According to Fullan (Fullan, 2007), the realization or failure of heightened student achievement efforts is directly influenced by the capacity building commitments, capabilities and efforts of a state, its school districts and schools. Capacity building is the route to accountability.

As an initial element of capacity building, before one can effectively change methods and approaches to instruction one must modify one's philosophy of education, and obtain 'buy-in' to the ideal that is being proffered as a new direction. There is a certain amount of indoctrination that must occur and a new philosophy must be embraced by all levels and elements of the organization. Otherwise, the forces of street level bureaucracy (Weatherley & Lipsky, 1977) will intercede as people's survival instincts jockey to adjust to and manipulate the new procedures to a state of compromise with their existing imputed theoretical philosophical stance (Weick, 1995).

In future policy changes of this nature, Georgia's State Department of Education and State Board of Education may wish to consider making an effort to reorient faculty, administrators and local boards away from the social Darwinism that pervades attitudes about schooling in many rural areas of the south. Oakes (2005) notes that "an important place to start is to disarm the fears and misinformation held by powerful groups who see 'detracking' as necessarily diminishing their children's advantages" (p. 251). The existing faculty and administrators at Deer Lodge High understand the new GPS curriculum policy as being counter to their existing philosophical stance. Thus, they have become more aligned to the AP program which the rule apparently allows them to keep. As a result the AP program has become even more exclusive than before. This may serve to stigmatize more students as a majority now inhabits what has become the lower track in this high school, the college-prep track.

Perhaps one lesson that can be taken from the case of Deer Lodge County High School is that states should ascertain the critical head count (manpower) that is necessary and sustainable to appropriately staff schools, and make the necessary provisions to maintain adequate funding levels in good economic times and bad (establish education reserves). Otherwise, potential disruptions in funding will prove detrimental to maintaining adequate capacity and by default sufficient progress on student

achievement. As highly qualified teaching resources come to be viewed as dispensable, morale among the professional teaching corps declines and teaching becomes a less desirable career choice for the most talented professionals. This does not bode well for education in Georgia long-term.

State policy makers should commit necessary resources to supplement local funding of school capacity building efforts. Georgia's continuing down the accountability path will not significantly improve public education, teaching and learning without committed, sustained investment in capacity building.

The teacher's planning time should occur early in the teacher's work day when the energy exists to apply creative thought and analysis to the challenges of the day's work ahead. Counselor's commented that students who need math support would have experienced success in the old tech-prep track, suggesting that would have been preferable for them rather than the more challenging approach of putting them in college-prep track today. My observation is that the career pathways sequence choice decision is fraught with peril for students who in their youthfulness may not recognize the importance of making sound course selections in this area. There is no substitute for a sound educational foundation.

In retrospect Georgia's former Secretary of Education, Republican Cathy Cox may have been on the right path when she raised a point of concern at a State Board meeting about frustrated parents reacting to their child not being allowed to graduate because of their having failed to make a passing score on Georgia's high-stakes high school graduation test (GHSGT). She was obviously less than tactful in her delivery and no doubt irritated some parents when she said (paraphrasing): African American parents are angry about their child not graduating because they did not pass the GHSGT; instead they should be asking why is my student not getting access to the curriculum? While I do not support high-stakes testing, my interview data suggests that not having access to the curriculum with the necessary instructional supports (irrespective of reason) sets the student up for failure on standardized assessments.

Recommendations for Further Research

This case study is but a snapshot in time. It was not designed to look at outcomes. Therefore, it is difficult to know how the district and or the students faired over time without a follow-up longitudinal

study. If similarly situated, rural high schools can be identified where the tracking conditions noted here do not exist, or are not so deeply entrenched in the community psyche, it would be interesting to study the effects of educational reforms on student learning.

For this study, I chose the rural high school, school district, and community in which it is embedded as the case unit of analysis. I argue that the three are inseparable and intertwined. McNeil's (2008) work suggests that research focused on the school as the unit of analysis may be too limiting in the unique case of educational accountability studies focused on enhanced student achievement. She argues that it is necessary to follow the student to see the impact a synergy of public school policies may have on student's decision making, including the decision to drop-out for example.

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APPENDIX A

List of Terms

- AP – Advanced Placement Courses: Developed by the CollegeBoard, AP Program presently has more than 30 courses across various disciplines that high schools may choose to offer their students. Courses are developed by teams comprised of college instructors and high school AP teachers. Courses cover the range of content and skills taught in a comparable college course, but delivered in a familiar secondary school environment. AP Examinations are administered annually in May and provide students the opportunity to demonstrate mastery of course content and objectives for which they may earn college credit. Retrieved online from http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/apc/public/courses/index.html
    - see also https://apstudent.collegeboard.org/home
- Capacity of a school: A concept developed by Elmore (2003), DeBray et al. (2003) to gage and describe the complex interplay of dimensions, tangible and intangible, (i.e., internal accountability, program coherence, leadership, professional knowledge, skills, commitments, professional community, organizational structures, technical, human and other resources, etc.) necessary and in place to deliver quality instruction, enhance achievement, and effectively implement change in a given school context (see discussion at pages 46 – 57 of dissertation).
- College-prep: A college preparatory high school curriculum with emphasis on challenging academic courses as preparation for college and university level advanced training and education typical of that required for those seeking entry into the professions.

- Community context: The predominant socio economic, political, moral, religious and cultural environment a student grows up in and the opportunities that this environment makes seem reasonable.
- School context: Consists of the type of high school a student attends (rural vs. urban), culture, dominant ethnicity, racial balance, tradition, expectations within the school and the resources found there: classrooms, locker facilities, textbooks, computers, the students in attendance, their college going processes, teacher – leader quality, etc.
- Sensemaking: The individual's internalized conceptual process of making sense of the world around him, with which he interacts (Weick, 1995). It represents the individual's attempt to construct meaning out of his experience (see discussion at pages 48 – 49 of the dissertation).
- Tech-prep: High school curriculum and courses which prepare the student for a technical career upon graduation from high school and/or additional technical training at the postsecondary level, usually at a community or technical college or institute. Courses usually emphasize hands-on applied concepts in currently marketable skills.
- Theory of action: The collection of ideas that explains how the collaboration between those who hold others accountable and those who are held accountable will lead to goal attainment (McDermott, 2011). It explains how local beliefs and actions should change as a result of policy implementation.

APPENDIX B

IRB Approval- Amendment- DeBray-Pelot

LaRie M Sylte
Sent: Friday, April 01, 2011 9:12 AM
To: Elizabeth DEBRAY
Cc: Colbert Ladel Lovett

PROJECT NUMBER: 2010-10246-2
TITLE OF STUDY: Policy Implementation of State Graduation Requirements in Rural High Schools
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Dr. Elizabeth DeBray-Pelot

Dear Dr. DeBray-Pelot,

Please be informed that the University of Georgia Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed and approved your request for modifications to the above-titled human subjects proposal. It was determined that the amendment request continues to meet the criteria for exempt (administrative) review procedures.

You may now begin to implement the amendment. Your approval packet will be sent via campus mail.

Please be reminded that any changes to this research protocol must receive prior review and approval from the IRB. Any unanticipated problems must be reported to the IRB immediately. The principal investigator is also responsible for maintaining all applicable protocol records (regardless of media type) for at least three (3) years after completion of the study (i.e., copy of approved protocol, raw data, amendments, correspondence, and other pertinent documents). All HIPAA-related research documents must be retained for a minimum of six years. You are requested to notify the Human Subjects Office if your study is completed or terminated.

Good luck with your study, and please feel free to contact us if you have any questions. Please use the IRB number and title in all communications regarding this study.

Regards,

LaRie Sylte
Human Subjects

APPENDIX C

[redacted] County School System

[redacted] Superintendent

[redacted] • Post Office Box [redacted]
[redacted] Georgia [redacted]
(912) [redacted] Fax: (912) [redacted]

August 13, 2009

Members of the
Institutional Review Board
Office of the Vice President for Research
University Of Georgia
c/o Human Subjects Office
University of Georgia
612 Boyd GSRC
Athens, GA 30602-7411

Dear Sir or Madam:

As superintendent, I hereby authorize Mr. Colbert L. Lovett, doctoral candidate at the University of Georgia, Institute of Higher Education, to conduct research entitled *Policy Implementation of State Graduation Requirements in Rural High Schools* within the [redacted] County School System during the coming 2009-2010 school year. The purpose of Mr. Lovett's study is to investigate how rural schools, as organizations within the institution of public schooling, internalize and implement policies such as standards-based reform. This research project will seek to understand how the environmental realities and culture of a community and its school district explain said district's interpretation and implementation of a new state policy.

Our understanding is that there will be minimal risk to those interviewed; that Mr. Lovett will not use the names of teachers and administrators in his work; and that he will make them aware of that protection when he obtains their consent for the interviews.

In recent years, [redacted] County Schools has been quite successful in implementing high standards of academic achievement for all students. Typically studies of this nature focus on large school districts in metropolitan areas. We are delighted that Mr. Lovett and the University of Georgia College of Education have sought to undertake this research on rural schools in an effort to broaden the knowledge base and enhance our understanding of standards-based reform as a tool of policy implementation in education.

Sincerely,

[redacted]

An Equal Opportunity Employer

APPENDIX D

INFORMED CONSENT

I, _____, agree to take part in a research study titled "Policy Implementation of State Graduation Requirements in Rural High Schools," which is being conducted by Colbert Lovett, Institute of Higher Education, University of Georgia, 770-891-5644, under the direction of Dr. Elizabeth DeBray-Pelot, Education Policy & Evaluation Center, University of Georgia, 706-542-0957. My participation is voluntary; I can refuse to participate or stop taking part at anytime without giving any reason, and without penalty. I can ask to have information related to me returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

The purpose of this study is to understand how rural school districts and schools internalize and implement state policies such as standards-based reform, and how that is shaped by their environment and their understanding of their environment.

I will not benefit directly from this research, nor will I receive any remuneration for my participation therein. The sole benefit to me shall be the personal satisfaction of knowing that my input may have contributed to the advancement of knowledge in this important area of educational research. No discomforts or stresses are expected. No risks are expected.

If I volunteer to take part in this study, I will be asked to do the following things:

1) Participate in a tape-recorded interview of approximately 45 to 60-minutes duration wherein we discuss school district implementation of the new high school graduation requirement, campus climate, community context and my experiences.
2) Provide descriptive information regarding my professional background and educational perspective.
3) Share my story about my own experiences during the transition to the new high school graduation rule.
4) Participate in a brief follow-up interview, either in person, via email, or by phone to clarify any questions from the first interview or verify accuracy of the transcript. Internet communications are unsecure and there is a limit to the confidentiality that can be guaranteed due to the technology itself. However, once the materials are received by the researcher, standard confidentiality procedures will be employed.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with me will remain confidential, and will not be released in any individually identifiable form, unless otherwise required by law. I will be assigned an identifying number and this number will be used to catalog the audio tapes, interview documents, and on any questionnaires I may fill out. The master list with identifiers and the audiotapes will be retained by the researcher under lock and key and destroyed at the end of the Spring Semester 2015. I understand that the audiotape will be transcribed and a pseudonym of my choosing will be used instead of my name in all transcribed documents referencing the content of this interview. The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project, and can be reached by telephone at: 912-871-1622 or 770-891-5644.

My signature below indicates that the researchers have answered all of my questions to my satisfaction and that I consent to volunteer for this study. I hereby give my consent to audio taping of the interview. I further understand that by consenting to participate in this study I give up any right I may have to

recourse against the researchers, person's acting on their behalf, the University of Georgia, or any organization with which they may be affiliated. I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Researcher	**Signature**	**Date**

Telephone: _____
Email: _____

Name of Participant	**Signature**	**Date**

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 612 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu

APPENDIX E

TEACHER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Respondents Background and Position

1) How long have you held this current position? Briefly summarize your prior positions, over the past ten years?
2) What are the most important issues and events facing this district today and in the coming years?

Institutional Protocol (1st half of teacher interview)

History of Organizational Reform and Decision Making Frameworks

[*do not read this to the respondent*: Stepping back a bit, we would like to frame your current practices with an understanding of broader forces that influence your decisions, policies and practices. Specifically, we would like to know how your organization has been influenced by important events and organizations outside of the district. Second, we would like to ask how your school has changed, specifically.]

3) Regulatory Issues:
   a) What are the most influential state regulations impacting student achievement?
   b) How are you informed of these regulations?
   c) To what extent have contractual issues with teachers influenced student achievement?
4) Resource Reallocation:
   a) To what extent have resources been reallocated in your school in order to educate all students? (Listen for respondent's conceptions of resources and conceptions of reallocation).
   b) What other fiscal issues have either constrained or enhanced your school reforms?
5) Community Context
   a) In this community, what individuals or organizations most influence your professional practice as a teacher?
   b) Beyond this community, what individuals or organizations most influence your professional practice as a teacher?

Adapted from Generic Guide for Semi-Structured Interviews at the Building Level by J. W. Sipple, K. Killeen, and D. H. Monk (2004). Adoption and adaptation: School district responses to state imposed learning and graduation requirements. Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, *26*(2), 143-168. Reprinted with permission.

[

Technical Protocol (2nd half of Teacher Interview)

School Response to the standards based reform movement towards full GHSGRR implementation, exit/graduation testing and achievement for all students

6) What is your perception of the new GHSGRR and expanded learning requirement? What is the policy?

7) Share with me your impression of how the policy is working in your school?

8) How did you come to understand the policy to mean what you thought it did?

9) We would like to inquire about the impact of this policy change on the organizational culture of the school. How and in what ways has this policy change affected your pedagogical style and philosophy of teaching, or that of your peers? What changes, if any, have you noticed among the attitudes, behaviors, and instructional approaches demonstrated by professional colleagues?

10) What has been the impact on campus climate? Have you noticed changes in student attitudes, behaviors, social or academic adjustment relative to this change in policy?

11) We would like to inquire about changes in teacher assignments with respect to Standards.
    a) To what degree have staffing patterns changed in your school or district changed in direct response to standards reform?
    b) Have certain positions been "cashed in" for others?
    c) What issues constrain teacher assignment here in your school?

12) We would like to inquire about changes in student assignment and tracking with respect to standards reform.
    a) How has the grouping of students in your school changed since 2003?
    b) Are students grouped differently in different subjects?
    c) Has your approach to special needs students changed since 2003? Specifically….

        i) How are children with learning difficulties (LD) grouped? (Mainstreamed? Heterogeneous groups? Tutors?)

        ii) How are LEP children accommodated (are there bilingual classes? ESL classes? Pull-out programs or tutors?)

        iii) How are Title I or low achievement students served?

Closure

Is there anything you would like to add?

Do you have any questions for me?