RACE TO THE TOP IN GEORGIA: EXAMINING THE ROLE OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES IN THE EARLY IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FEDERAL RACE TO THE TOP GRANT IN GEORGIA, 2009-2013

by

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(Under the Direction of Elizabeth Debray)

ABSTRACT

For any public educational policy, which has a critical influence on how K-12 education is reformed, there should be some framework for public deliberation and debate that allows all stakeholders to have a voice. Race to The Top (RT3) is a federal educational policy that has had, and continues to have, major influences on the US educational system and on our children's experiences at school. Georgia's successful proposal for federal RT3 grants, and hence the adoption of these federal policies, originated at the state education department level, primarily from the governor's office and only involved some local school boards.

This inquiry utilizes a case study methodology to examine the educational policy implementation process from the federal level, through state and district levels, down to the local community, as it relates to RT3 Georgia, and to identify the voice of local communities in that process. In particular, it focuses on how RT3 is translated into a locally implemented educational reform policy, the stages of that process, the policy actors at each stage, the decision making process, and the opportunities and level of involvement of local communities. Data collection included interviews with Georgia state education officials participating in the reform

initiative, in addition to document analysis and employed three theoretical lenses – implementation regime framework, advocacy coalition framework, and policy cycles and institutional trends.

This examination of the implementation of RT3 in Georgia has resulted in four primary findings: 1) Race to the Top in Georgia presents as a very clear example of the top-down model of policy implementation. 2) The framework and characteristics of this particular reform initiative have, currently, produced high levels of fidelity between policy design and policy implementation in Georgia. 3) Significant barriers to public participation and debate included key aspects such as time constraints, major political activities, the existing state education organizational structure, the established norms within existing state educational agencies, and the absence of motivational factors that may have encouraged greater public debate. 4) Three of the four areas of reform are currently impacting instruction at the classroom level and are likely to develop into institutional trends.

INDEX WORDS: Federal education policy, Local community involvement, Policy implementation process, Policy actors, Public deliberation and debate

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DEDICATION

For my beautiful wife Nancy, and for my wonderful daughter Kelsey,

I am a most undeserving man who has been doubly blessed.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

You are reading this not due to my efforts but because of the incredible support of my family, friends, and colleagues. Without the encouragement, guidance, and occasional prodding by a wonderful collection of people I would not have had the time, strength, and dedication to complete this journey.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Preamble

"I do not know who they are. They are an invisible lot out there.
I do not have a clue who they are. I don't know who makes these decisions."
27-year veteran Georgia school teacher speaking about education policymakers

These sentiments provide an illustration of the catalyst and motivation for this research study. How are educational reform policies, whether initiated at the state or federal levels, designed and then implemented in local community schools? Who are the policy actors, involved in making educational policy decisions, at various levels of the policy process? To what extent do local communities have a voice in what reforms are implemented in their own schools? These questions are at the core of what this study intends to explore, analyze, and discuss.

Study Purpose and Research Questions

Federal and state educational policies can have a major impact on the everyday lives of individuals within local school communities. This author contends that for any public educational policy, which has a critical influence on how K-12 education is reformed, a framework for public deliberation and debate that allows all stakeholders to have a voice in educational policy decisions should be available. For stakeholders to participate in any

democratic process they first have to have an understanding of how that process works. Thus, for policy actors within local school communities to participate in the educational policy process they too must have knowledge and understanding of how that process works.

Race to The Top (RT3) is a federal education reform initiative that has, and will continue to have, major influences on the US educational system and on our children's experiences at school. Georgia's successful bid for federal RT3 grants, and hence the adoption of that federal policy reform, originated at the state education department level, primarily from the governor's office with some involvement of local state educational agencies.

The primary purpose of this study is to clarify the RT3 educational policy processes in Georgia with the aim of providing a transparent and open description of the organizations, policy actors, and decision making systems involved to a wider audience in general and local school communities in particular. This study also intends to identify the extent to which local communities were informed and involved in the RT3 policy processes.

Supplemental goals for this study include an analysis of the implementation of Race to The Top with a view to identifying which policy elements may or may not result in changes in institutional trends, and the proposal of a deliberation framework that aims to provide for and encourage wider public participation in the discussion and debate of educational policies that impact local schools and communities.

In order to achieve the purpose of this study, the following research questions provide the focus for data collection and analyses. The two primary research questions and the one supplemental research question are illustrated in the following lists. Each key research question is listed with additional sub-questions as well as the theoretical framework that will be employed as the prime means for conducting the data analysis of each research question. The three

theoretical frameworks are briefly described later in this chapter with a more extensive review following in chapter two.

Primary Research Questions with Analytic Frameworks

1. How did the Governor's Office of Georgia manage the communication of macro-level expectations/requirements of RT3 policy design with the micro-level conditions of RT3 policy implementation?
    a. What structures were established to manage the policy processes?
    b. What were the stages of development and implementation for RT3?
    c. What were the roles and contributions of departmental policy actors?
    d. What were the roles and contributions of policy actors external to the department?

Framework: Implementation Regime Framework of Stoker (1989)

2. From the point of view of the state and district officials charged with RT3 policy processes, to what extent were local communities informed/involved in this implementation process?
    a. What forums were established to inform/involve local communities?
    b. What was the value to the policy implementation process of either of these forums?
    c. What was the nature of the federal/state and state/local relationships?

Framework: Advocacy Coalition Framework of Sabatier (2007)

Supplemental Research Question with Analytic Framework

3. How does Race to the Top implementation in Georgia reinforce, or conflict with, previous cycles of educational reform initiatives?

a. What similarities/differences with previous educational reforms exist in the RT3 design?

b. What outcomes for this policy can be anticipated from these similarities and differences?

c. What elements of RT3 design could impact classroom practices?

Framework: Policy Cycles and Institutional Trends of Tyack and Cuban (1995)

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter one begins by outlining the study purpose and research questions. A background to the study is then presented with an initial discussion of the purpose of the American education system and two key federal policies that have shaped its direction and goals. The discussion on the current education policy arena and the field of education policy implementation research set the context for the federal RT3 policy's involvement in Georgia's state and district education policy agendas. Following a rationale for the significance and implications of the study, an overview of the research procedures is provided. The three theoretical frameworks being applied to this study are then briefly described and a chapter summary sets the stage for chapter two.

Chapter two provides a literature review of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks relevant to this study and discusses various aspects of the RT3 policy design and implementation process. Policy cycles and institutional trends are examined within the political, social, and historical contexts of educational reforms. The standards and accountability policy reform is discussed together with an outline of where the future of this particular policy cycle may be headed. After examining the role of federalism in public education, the literature review explores educational policy implementation research and its subsequent implications for RT3

within an implementation regime framework. A descriptive explanation of the advocacy coalition framework is then provided.

Chapter three provides the research design and rationale for this project, the preliminary data sourced from a pilot study, and a detailed breakdown of the methodology to be used. Consideration is given to the use of informants and document analysis, coding of data, sites of the research, participants, and the theoretical frameworks employed to analyze the data. Further consideration is given to validity, reliability, ethical issues, and the limitations of this research study.

Chapter four will present data findings from four data sets together with their analyses and emerging theories. The three theoretical frameworks will be applied to the data as a method of clarifying the major findings. The chapter concludes with a discussion of models of public participation and a suggested framework for public debate that could have been employed by Georgia's Department of Education.

Chapter five presents a summary of major findings from the data sets, and analytic frameworks, and identifies barriers to public participation in this particular reform initiative in Georgia. Following a discussion of an alternative method of public participation, post-implementation processes, the chapter concludes with an identification of the implications and lessons for educational policymakers, legislators, and local communities.

Background to the Study

The American Education System: Purpose and Policies

The American education system and schools in particular, can evoke a vast array of thoughts, images, memories and emotions in almost everyone who has been in contact with

them. It is a system that has grown exponentially over the last century and a half, providing opportunities for an ever increasing number of students to develop the knowledge and understanding to make sense of themselves, their community, and the world in which they live. It is a system that has endeavored to develop its students in multifarious concepts, ideas and disciplines.

Contemporary students are now exposed to a variety of experiences designed so that they may have: basic literacy and numeracy skills with an understanding of science and history, the ability to think critically in analyzing information to solve problems, an exposure to the visual and performing arts and classic literature, social skills that allow for effective communication and an awareness of personal responsibility, a sense of citizenship and community and knowledge of how government works, good habits of exercise and nutrition, self-confidence and respect for themselves and for others. These have traditionally been the desired broad outcomes of the American education system (Rothstein, Jacobsen, & Wilder, 2008).

Cuban (2003) gave a general description of how the purpose of schools has evolved through several stages to reflect the changing needs of the society they served. Initially, its purpose was to give American children equal access to schooling and literacy in order that they could serve on juries, govern communities, and make the right judgment as voters in local, state and national elections. This concept of 'equal access' was clarified though by Tyack and Cuban (1995) as primarily favoring white and wealthy students when they posed the question "Progress for whom?" (p. 25). Cuban (2003) continues this evolution when reporting that schools were then required to turn out students who were prepared to take their place in an industrialized, socially stratified nation as both workers and well-adjusted citizens to reflect the needs of industry.

Completing the evolutionary cycle of the purpose of schools indicated that, by the early 21st century, the primary goal and purpose of schools was to prepare students for college, the workplace and personal success (Cuban, 2003). A purpose that is remarkably similar to the one expounded by the National Governors Association (NGA) and Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) in their Common Core Standards initiative and the Obama administration's Race to the Top (RT3) education reform competitive grant program (U.S. Department of Education, 2010d). This is, of course, an oversimplification of the many developments in American educational history. Kliebard (2003), in discussing American public schools, stated that they have continuously operated in an environment of crisis and contradiction where American society has appointed its schools to solve social problems and, at the same time condemned them for failing its children. There is also the continual philosophical battle where liberal critics challenge the sterility, rigidity and lack of creativity of overly academic schooling, while conservative critics decry the declining standardized tests scores and the need to return to the 'basics', with both sides complaining of the failing public school system to further their arguments (Kliebard, 2003, p. 360).

The American education system is operating under an expanding federal influence (McDonnell, 2005; Manna, 2006; Smarrick, 2009) and is judged primarily on the extent to which students, schools, and districts meet performance targets on standardized tests in two subject areas, reading and math. Under stricter accountability measures for Race to The Top winning states (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2011; U.S. Department of Education, 2010d), school leaders and individual teachers will now have more direct accountability for improvements in student achievement. In Georgia this is exemplified with the inclusion of student growth scores as one evaluation element in the state Teacher Keys Evaluation System

(TKES) and Leadership Keys Evaluation System (LKES). Student performances on standardized state tests comprise 50% of each of the teacher and school leader evaluation systems. The evaluation data in TKES and LKES are used to inform certification, promotion, retention, and salary decisions.

Rothstein, Jacobsen and Wilder (2008) identified eight contemporary goals that communities believe schools should be helping students to attain: basic academic knowledge and skills, critical thinking and problem solving, appreciation of the arts and literature, preparation for skilled employment, social skills and work ethic, citizenship and community responsibility, physical health, and emotional health. One of the key challenges of the American education system as we move deeper into the 21st century is the reconciliation of the broad educational goals that these authors say the American public want from their schools with the focus of college and career readiness, measured by student achievement in standardized tests, as demanded by federal and state policymakers and legislators. This simplified dichotomy should not be taken as a comprehensive overview of the challenges ahead, we must also give due consideration to the overlapping motivations of a wide and diverse range of policy actors that are operating in an ever changing and increasingly complex educational policy arena.

This background directs us to ask the questions that began this chapter. How are educational reform policies, whether initiated at the state or federal levels, designed and then implemented in local communities? Who are the policy actors, involved in making educational policy decisions, at various levels of the policy process? To what extent do local communities have a voice in what reforms are implemented in their own schools?

The context of this study can be set by a brief explanation of recent federal educational policy and trends in educational policy implementation research.

No Child Left Behind

There has always been accountability in the American education system. Accountability is controlled mainly at the state level where policies and procedures are set, but is also very evident at a local level where district personnel and school building administrators have a more direct influence on factors effecting student and school performance such as appointment, or otherwise, of faculty members. The current accountability reform movement, afforded priority status and validity by the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 (NCLB), has had a major impact on all aspects of the system. McDonnell (2005) identifies NCLB as the most significant revision of federal education policy in decades. NCLB has influenced the governance of schools, curricular content, methodology of testing, use of test data, and even the time allocated for subject disciplines. NCLB has been commended and criticized for its policy outcomes.

Perceived benefits of NCLB include a federal commitment to promoting substantive educational outcomes rather than just focusing on equality of educational opportunity, and the direct attention paid to the achievement of disadvantaged students (Manna & Ryan, 2011, p. 524). NCLB also led state and local governments to improve their technical capabilities (primarily in the collection and use of data) as well as providing valuable 'political' cover for legislators to push through difficult but necessary policy and administrative changes such as legislation that promoted increased rigor in teacher evaluation systems or provided a framework for the identification/management of lower performing districts /schools (Manna, 2011).

Critics of NCLB noted that federal granting of state flexibility in content standards, choice of assessment, and the setting of achievement standards allowed for substantial variability in what states needed to achieve to meet NCLB requirements (Linn, 2005), conflicts where districts achieving high levels of performance under the state accountability system could be

deemed as failing under NCLB (Linn, 2008), states lowering their own 'proficiency' scores to meet NCLB requirements (Rothstein, Jacobsen & Wilder, 2009), districts reporting decreased time in non-tested subjects (Goertz, 2009), and methodological concerns in assigning high-stakes to accountability systems (Elmore, 2004), and the actual 'cheating' on standardized tests (Atlanta Public Schools, District of Columbia) as well as the widespread potential for cheating (Amrein-Beardsley, Berliner & Rideau, 2010).

NCLB can be clearly identified as a top-down model of educational policy implementation. Its mandatory requirements, combined with punitive actions for non-compliance, compelled state education departments to follow the path set by the federal government despite any objections they may have had or their capacity to fully comply.

McDonnell (2005) discussed the question as to whether NCLB could be described as "evolution or revolution" when compared to past federal education policies. If evolution implies organic growth and revolution is a deliberate change of direction, perhaps we could consider the increasing role of the federal government in state educational policy as a combination of the two – cultivation. This 'cultivation' does not necessarily imply a linear progression though. It could reasonably be argued that the increasing role of the federal government in education has taken place in a series of leaps and bounds separated by periods of stability or inertia akin to Baumgartner and Jones' (1993) theory of 'punctuated equilibrium' in political outcomes. The 'cultivation' of state education policies by the federal government can be further illustrated with the introduction of the Obama administration's Race to the Top (RT3) educational reform initiative. This reform is another example of a top-down model of reform but a significant difference is evident in the implementation model between RT3 and NCLB.

Where NCLB imposed the federal government's mandatory requirements on state education policies, RT3 only imposes its mandatory requirements once states have 'voluntarily' opted into the program. The issue of states 'volunteering' for this reform initiative is discussed in detail later in this paper.

Race to the Top (RT3)

In the fall of 2009, as part of The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act 2009, the Obama administration promoted a competition amongst states to bid for over $4 billion of federal grants. The educational grants were to be awarded under their "Race to the Top" (RT3) initiative. This initiative was intended to support new approaches to school improvement. The funds were to be made available in the form of competitive grants to encourage and reward states that were creating conditions for education innovation and reform, specifically implementing comprehensive plans in four key education reform areas:

1. Recruiting, preparing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals, especially in districts and schools where they are needed most.
2. Adopting standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace and to compete in the global economy.
3. Building data systems that measure student growth and success, and inform teachers and principals about how they can improve instruction.
4. Turning around the lowest-achieving schools.

RT3 is not the latest reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965) that followed NCLB. RT3 is just one of a new wave of policies implemented using a federal competitive grant initiative. This method of federal policy implementation makes use of competitive grants that are offering winning states financial incentives for the implementation of

federal educational policy reforms. Examples of current federal educational competitive grants include the following:

1. RT3 $4.35 billion
2. RT3 Assessment Program $300 million
3. Head Start $1 billion
4. Early Head Start competitive grants $1.1 billion
5. Effective Teachers and Leaders $620 million
6. Teacher and Leader Innovation Fund (high-needs schools) $400 million

RT3 is not an example of a new approach to federal policy implementation. Competitive grants in education have been around since the 1960s. This method of federal policy implementation makes use of competitive grants that offer winning states financial incentives for the implementation of federal educational policy reforms. The key difference with RT3 is that the size of the grant is a major increase than the usual funding grants awarded.

Georgia was successful in its grant application and was awarded $400 million to implement its Race to the Top plan. Georgia's application was prepared through a partnership between the Governor's Office, the Georgia Department of Education, the Governor's Office of Student Achievement, and seven other state education agencies. The State Board of Education has direct accountability for the grant. Georgia's Department of Education partnered with 26 school systems around the state to pilot several elements of the RT3 initiative.

A portion of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act 2009 grant, $330 million, was set aside for consortia competing in the Race to The Top Assessment Program (RT3AP). The federal government invited applications to create a new standardized assessment system that would be aligned to the newly developed common core state standards.

Following the application process, two consortia were announced as winners of the federal grants. The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers was awarded $170 million. The Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium received $160 million. The consortia are charged with creating an assessment system using specific criteria that has been set by the federal government.

The Race to the Top Executive Summary (U.S. Department of Education, 2010d) identifies the key federal priorities of this reform initiative. Subsequent to the first, or primary, priority of an assessment system that matches the common-core state standards, priority 2 related to an emphasis on science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) where applicants had to; address the need to offer rigorous courses in these areas, cooperate with industry experts, museums, universities, and research centers to prepare and assist teachers in integrating STEM across grades and disciplines, and meet the needs of underrepresented groups and women and girls in STEM (U.S. Department of Education, 2010d, p. 4).

Priority 3 related to innovations that improved early learning outcomes (pre-kindergarten through third grade). Specifically, there were proposals to improve school readiness and the transition between preschool and kindergarten (U.S. Department of Education, 2010d, p. 4).

Priority 4 focused on the expansion and adaptation of statewide longitudinal data systems. These proposals were required to include or integrate data from special education, English language learner, early childhood, at-risk, school climate and culture, and drop-out prevention programs with information on student mobility, school finance, student health, and other relevant areas with the purpose of connecting and coordinating all parts of the system to allow important questions related to policy, practice, or overall effectiveness to be asked and answered (U.S. Department of Education, 2010d, p. 4-5).

Priority 5 required proposals that addressed P-20 coordination with vertical and horizontal alignment. This is an effort to coordinate early childhood programs, K-12 schools, postsecondary institutions, workforce development organizations, and other State agencies to improve all parts of the education system and create a more seamless preschool-through-graduate school route for students (U.S. Department of Education, 2010d, p. 5).

Priority 6 addresses school level conditions for reform, innovation, and learning. Key elements seek to provide schools with flexibility and autonomy in such areas as the following:

- Selecting staff
- Implementing new structures and formats for the school day or year
- Controlling the school's budget
- Awarding student credit based on performance instead of instructional time
- Providing comprehensive services to high-needs students
- Creating school climates and cultures that remove obstacles to student achievement and engagement
- Implementing strategies to effectively engage families and communities in supporting academic success of their students (U.S. Department of Education, 2010d, p. 5).

These priorities illustrate the diverse and comprehensive range of outcomes required from this single federal initiative.

It is possible to draw general inferences as to the direction of federal educational policies by analyzing key aspects of this initiative. The desired outcome of the RT3AP was illustrated in the definition of the program's absolute priority. The absolute priority for the RT3AP was for the creation of a comprehensive assessment system capable of measuring student achievement

against common college- and career- ready standards (Duncan, 2010, p. 18171). This, in essence, forms the goal or objective of this reform initiative and identifies the key federal educational policy requirement of having students graduating high school ready for college or a career without the need for remediation.

Remaining priorities identified in the application criteria give an indication of several other educational policies that the federal government is promoting through this initiative.

In meeting eligibility requirements, applicants must represent a consortium of States, and design assessment systems to measure student performance against the new common core state standards. This illustrates the federal commitment to a national curriculum using nationwide standards that are assessed by national tests. By insisting that applications come from consortia of states it naturally produces a greater level of standardization than is currently being practiced.

There is also a clear indication that the federal government policy wishes to use valid, comprehensive data to support policy decisions at the school level. Priorities identified a desire to be able to use student performance data to make judgments at an individual school, student and teacher level. A significant change from current policy is that individual teachers are to be evaluated, in part, with the use of their student test scores. This data will be utilized to more directly inform decisions regarding certification, retention, salary, and promotion

There is also an effort to use the assessment data in combination with demographic, health, mobility, finance and other data in order to guide policy decisions that, in conjunction with action to streamline the P-20 experience, strives to improve overall effectiveness of the education system.

An effort to summarize the federal government educational policies that the RT3 and RT3AP seem designed to address may be concisely illustrated by the following statement.

All RT3 States will utilize common core standards where student performances are assessed using nationally standardized assessments in order to provide valid, comprehensive data that can be used to identify student growth, individual school performance, and provide an evaluation of individual teacher, school, and district effectiveness. All these policy objectives are directed towards meeting the President's goal of the United States having the highest high school graduation rate by 2020.

Educational Policy Arena & Educational Policy Implementation Research

Within the current educational policy arena, it could be observed that we are in a period of complexity and conflict. In the realm of educational policy we now have a multitude of issues being attended to by a diverse group of policy actors who are working in a variety of policy arenas to influence agenda setting, policy formulation, policy implementation processes and the monitoring of policy outputs.

With the Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) requirements of No Child Left Behind (2002) (NCLB), where 100% of students in all sub-groups should meet proficiency standards in reading and math by 2014, producing an exponentially increasing number of schools and districts that are categorized as 'needs improvement' or 'failing', states are in dire need of a solution to the problem of measuring and identifying effective, efficient, and successful schools and districts.

Georgia is one of many states that applied for and received waivers from many of the NCLB mandates including the AYP requirement. Remaining states are still subject to the statutory accountability measures and sanctions under AYP as we approach the 2014 deadline for 100% student proficiency. If NCLB is not reauthorized during the current administrative session the vast majority of districts and schools in the U.S. that are without waivers will be assessed as not meeting AYP and therefore labeled as 'failing'.

Several other issues combine to further exacerbate this climate of complexity and conflict in the educational policy arena: the long awaited and long over-due reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965) currently known as NCLB, the gradual transition of states adopting and implementing a 'national curriculum' in the form of the Common Core State Standards, the US Department of Education's continued policy of accepting waiver applications from states wishing to be exempted from certain requirements of NCLB, and the need for states to select one of the two standardized testing consortia who are designing assessments matched to the Common Core State Standards.

When you add to this mix: the call for greater teacher and principal accountability but lack of agreement on the most effective evaluation model, the debate over the use of whether status or growth models should be used for assessing student achievement, and the discussion associated with linking of standardized tests scores directly to teacher and principal evaluations, it is easy to see how educational governance could appear to be in a quandary as to where to turn next. This raises the question of how these current issues should/could be addressed and, perhaps more importantly, who should be involved in fixing them.

Honig (2006) discussed the history of the field of educational policy implementation research. She identified the research field as having undergone 3 different waves of study since the 1960s. Wave 1 involved research on the implementation of policy designs from the Great Society period that were largely distributive, categorical, or regulatory. Research primarily investigated the extent to which policies were implemented (Elmore & McLaughlin, 1988). During this wave, causes of policy failures were identified as conflicts between the interests of policymakers and implementers, and policy implementers lack of capacity and will to carry out the policy (Murphy, 1971; Derthick, 1972).

The theme of wave 2, during the 1970s, was what got implemented over time. The criticism of earlier research was that it studied policies over too short a time period and that longitudinal studies showed a greater fidelity between policy design and implementation. Here the focus shifted to the idea that, when it came to fidelity in policy implementation, it was people and places that mattered. Implementation unfolds as a process of "mutual adaptation" as implementers reconcile conditions in their micro level context with macro level federal demands (Berman & McLaughlin, 1976, 1978).

Wave 3, through the 1980s, was focused on researching what works in the world of educational policy implementation. Previous studies were centered on individual programs whereas the wave 3 reforms dealt with issues such as "…who shall teach and what shall be taught and in what manner," (Fuhrman, Clune, & Elmore, 1988, p. 239).

The current state of the field is trying to answer the question of how researchers can confront the concepts of complexity and conflict in the policymaking process. Given the multitude of issues and the diversity of policy actors working on alternative solutions to those issues, it would be relatively easy to concur with Heck's (2004) conclusion that no one research approach is likely to yield a complete picture.

The existing literature, previously outlined, on educational policy implementation research primarily involved studies of categorical programs, rather than competitive programs based on incentives. RT3 received a significant level of funding from the federal government ($4.35 billion) based on a theory of action that perhaps more effective educational reform could be achieved via incentives rather than mandates. Given this premise, an unprecedented opportunity is provided, with the implementation of RT3 in Georgia, to conduct detailed analyses of this new direction in educational policy implementation. The findings of this study

may provide invaluable data to policymakers and legislators as they design and implement future educational reforms.

Significance and Implications

This study is significant for several reasons. First, in the current arena of educational reform, policy actors are emerging from an increasingly diverse array of institutions, foundations, organizations, interest groups, and advocacy coalitions (DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009). This increased level of complexity in the educational policy arena may require a higher level of understanding and expertise from policy actors to participate in the policy process. It is unclear whether policy actors at the local community level have the required knowledge of policy processes or systems to participate or even if forums for participation are available and/or adequate. It could be argued that policy actors, at the local level, are either uninformed of the policy design and implementation processes, are unaware of forums for their participation, or both.

This study intends to answer those questions by clarifying the RT3 educational policy processes in Georgia. With respect to RT3 in Georgia, this study aims to: provide a transparent and open description of the organizations, policy actors, and decision making processes involved to a wider audience in general and local school communities in particular; identify the extent to which local communities were informed and involved in the RT3 policy processes; and propose a framework that aims to provide for and encourage wider public participation in the discussion and debate of educational policies that impacts local community schools.

Secondly, it is hoped that the field of educational policy, in which the federal government is taking an ever increasing role in making policy, will benefit from a better understanding of how

federal policies are reconciled with state policies and subsequently translated into locally implemented educational reforms. Much of the existing literature on educational policy implementation looks at categorical, regulatory, or distributive programs rather than policies that utilize competitive programs based on incentives. This study also provides an opportunity for policymakers and legislators to gain insight into the use and effectiveness of large scale incentivist reforms, rather than mandates, as a means of influencing state/local educational policies as well as allowing consideration of the efficiency and fidelity of this method of policy design.

There is also the hope that 'minor' actors in the educational policy arena such as administrators, teachers, and parents are recognized for the vital role they play in the implementation process, given the crucial role they have in the success or failure of any policies, with the identification of a framework for deliberation and debate that provides opportunities for effective participation in educational policy formulation.

Finally, the President's goal of having the highest number of students, in competing nations, graduating from high school by 2020 must surely receive comprehensive support. The RT3 policies and its assessment initiatives are major components of the federal educational policy created to support this goal. Through this federal funding initiative state educational policies have been directly influenced, or strongly leveraged depending on your perspective. The Georgia RT3 plan is currently in the early stages of implementation. This study of the details of the plan can be interpreted in such a way as to demonstrate that this new state (federal) reform policy is just a finely tuned version of NCLB. Given the flaws and unintended consequences that resulted from implementing NCLB it is difficult not to have grave concerns

that the RT3 policy will result in the same outcomes. In clarifying the implementation process of RT3 in Georgia, it is hoped that an identification of any causes for concern may arise.

Research Methods Overview

Statement of the Problem

In this educational policy design and implementation research case study, I conducted interviews with state education officials, and analyzed documentation, in order to understand how the federal education reform initiative of RT3 was being translated into locally implemented educational policies in Georgia and the extent to which local community members were informed and contributed to the RT3 policy processes.

This research utilizes a case study approach to understanding and clarifying the educational policy processes of a federal education reform initiative that employs the use of a competitive grant with incentives. This case study provides a detailed, contextual analysis of the application, adoption, and implementation of Race to The Top in Georgia.

The case study methodology includes interviews, document analysis, data analysis, and interpretation of findings in a bounded system. Interviews of state education officials at the Governor's Office, the State Department of Education, and district offices will be required. Documentation analysis will be conducted on federal, state, and district documents, websites, policy briefs, and public reports. Documents will include, but not be limited to, the Race to The Top Executive Summary, Georgia's RT3 application, Georgia's Scope of Work for the implementation of RT3, scopes of work of the 26 districts piloting RT3 policies, memoranda of understanding between partnering state agencies and districts, task force meeting minutes, and documents on the official Georgia website for RT3.

This research study will utilize data gathered from interviews which identified the organizational structure of RT3 in Georgia, the key policy actors involved in the implementation processes, and political and strategic milestones in the four year time-limited implementation plan. The data will be used together with documentation to corroborate and validate the data and to support any findings.

Research questions were created with a view to providing a clarification of educational policy processes for a broad public audience and with a desire to identify a framework for public deliberation and debate that would allow all stakeholders to have a voice in policies that directly affect a public school system that they fund.

The data was analyzed through the use of three theoretical frameworks as a means of presenting the findings in a way that can effectively and efficiently be understood and used to identify the implications for policymakers, legislators, and local community members and also to inform directions for future research. The frameworks include an historical perspective of educational policy cycles, educational policy implementation research, and the advocacy coalition framework.

Theoretical Frameworks

Three independent, but complementary theoretical frameworks will provide appropriate lenses with which to analyze this study.

Implementation Regime Framework: Stoker (1989) created a conceptual framework for analyzing the policy implementation process that combined key aspects of the top-down and bottom-up models of implementation analysis. The top-down/bottom up components incorporated into this framework makes it appropriate for examining policy implementation

across several levels of government. Essentially the framework assesses the likelihood of implementation success and proposes strategies for implementation participants to improve the prospects of that success. This framework will be applied to this study as a means of analyzing RT3 in Georgia and establishing how state education officials managed the communication of the macro-level expectations and requirements of RT3 with the micro-level situational conditions of implementation. This framework allows for the management structures as well as the stages of development and implementation to be identified, and for the roles and contributions of policy actors within and external to the State Department of Education to be established.

In applying Sabatier's (2007) revised and updated Advocacy Coalition Framework to RT3 in Georgia, this study will identify the coalition groups within the federal/state policy subsystem and within the state/local policy subsystem. Foundational elements of both subsystems will be clarified and an understanding of RT3 policies with respect to beliefs, strategy, resources, policy outputs, and impacts will be developed. Policy actors will be identified as well as their level of involvement and participation in RT3 policy implementation processes in Georgia. Data from this analysis will be employed in the identification of a framework for deliberation and debate that provides opportunities for effective participation in educational policy formulation.

Policy Cycles and Institutional Trends: Tyack and Cuban (1995), in attempting to reconcile the conceptual contradictions between the apparent linearity of educational progress and the repeating and cyclical nature of educational reforms, proposed a framework to explain the relationship between policy cycles and institutional trends. The authors provided an interpretation of how 'policy talk' can sometimes result in 'policy action' and then, occasionally, 'actual implementation' of policy reforms that lead to institutional trends. This 'policy cycles

and institutional trends' framework will be applied to the design and implementation of RT3 in Georgia as a method for describing how this new reform policy conflicts with or reinforces previous cycles of reform, the outcomes that can be anticipated from these similarities and differences, and what elements of RT3 will actually impact classroom practices and evolve into institutional trends.

Chapter Summary

With the current federal Race to The Top (RT3) educational reform initiative, many states have been awarded hundreds of millions of dollars to implement a federal policy that puts even greater emphasis on raising student performance on standardized tests and even stricter accountability measures for school leaders and individual teachers. Elmore (2004) in discussing accountability under NCLB stated that stakes for teachers were diffused into the organization in which they work and as such the consequences were also diffused (p.292).

With the implementation of RT3, teachers and school leaders will be more directly accountable for student achievement and as such any consequences are less likely to be diffused. It remains to be seen if this policy of more direct accountability will result in a further narrowing of the curriculum than was produced by NCLB. The accountability model under NCLB made extensive use of standardized test data. With the promotion, retention, salary, and certification decisions of teachers and school leaders being directly tied to student achievement under RT3, albeit as part of a comprehensive evaluation system, it also remains to be seen how individual district/school/teacher policies and practices will be impacted by the 'higher stakes' associated with this new policy.

The RT3 initiative is a competitive grant that employs financial incentives to encourage states to bid for funds and therefore, as winners of the grant bidding process, implement the federal educational policy requirements of RT3 in their states. Given the current economic climate it was no surprise that so many states made applications and could potentially have sacrificed complete autonomy and independence in their educational policy making decisions in favor of financial aid and federal oversight.

NCLB and RT3 are federal policies that have had and will have major influences on our education system and our children's experiences at school. These policies are classic examples of a top-down model of policy design and implementation. Georgia's decision to bid for the federal grant, and hence the agreement to work under the framework of this federal initiative, was taken at the state department level, primarily from the governor's office with some involvement of local school boards.

Our education system is providing for the future foundations of American society and citizenship by ensuring that our children receive the highest quality education possible. It also receives substantial public funding and its administration needs to be effective and efficient. A well informed public policy process can promote deliberations on the future of our educational system so that it will be productive, purposeful, and reflect the combined wishes of the citizenry of the US. For any educational policy, federal or state, that has such a dramatic influence on how K-12 education is reformed there should be some kind of framework for public debate that allows all stakeholders to have a voice.

A problem has arisen because, in the arena of educational reform, policy actors are emerging from an increasingly diverse array of institutions, foundations, organizations, interest groups, and advocacy coalitions (DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009). This increased level of

complexity in the educational policy arena may require a higher level of understanding and expertise from policy actors to participate in the policy process. It is unclear whether policy actors at the local community level have the required knowledge of policy processes or systems to participate or even if forums for participation are available and/or adequate.

This educational policy study will focus on investigating and clarifying, for local communities, the educational policy processes as it relates to RT3 in Georgia. In particular, it will focus on: how the Governor's Office of Georgia reconciled the demands of the macro-level federal RT3 policy design with the micro-level conditions of RT3 policy implementation, who the policy actors involved in the various process were, and the extent to which those responsible for its direct implementation in schools, the local communities, were informed and contributed to the educational policy process.

This study documents the experiences of policy actors at multiple levels of government and actors from within local communities during the preliminary and intermediate stages of the RT3 implementation. As state legislators and officials in Georgia maneuver RT3 across the various stages of policy implementation from application through to local practice, this study also considers the relationships between actors, and identifies opportunities where local communities were and could have been involved and the reasons for their inclusion or exclusion.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Overview

In chapter one the core purposes of this study were identified and partitioned into primary and supplemental categories. The primary purpose of this study is to clarify the RT3 educational policy processes in Georgia with the aim of providing a transparent and open description of the organizations, policy actors, and decision making systems involved to a wider audience in general and local school communities in particular. This study also intends to identify the extent to which local communities were informed and involved in the RT3 policy processes.

Supplemental goals for this study include an analysis of the implementation of Race to The Top with a view to identifying which policy elements may or may not result in changes in institutional trends, and the proposal of a deliberation framework that aims to provide for and encourage wider public participation in the discussion and debate of educational policies that impact local schools and communities.

Three frameworks were proposed as independent, but complementary, theoretical lenses with which to analyze this study - implementation regime framework, advocacy coalition framework, and policy cycles and institutional trends.

The following sections: review current and previous literature associated with these three theoretical frameworks, connect the frameworks to the purposes of this study, and clarify what this study intends to find out and its importance to the arena of educational policy.

Implementation Regime Framework (IRF)

Introduction

In a system of federal governance, conflicts between contradictory or competing values, across several levels of government, could reasonably be expected to exist. When the U.S. federal government initiates national educational policies such as Race To The Top (RT3) it would be reasonable to assume that certain levels of cooperation and compromise of values between federal/state and state/local district organizations would be necessary in any implementation process. For federal education policies to reconcile the conflicts and contradictions between participants, and therefore be successfully implemented across several levels of government, a process, system, or model of implementation would need to be identified then utilized. By conducting analyses of how educational policies are implemented it is possible to identify factors, characteristics, and processes that increase the possibility of a successful implementation.

Stoker (1989) created a conceptual framework for analyzing the policy implementation process that combined key aspects of the top-down and bottom-up models of implementation analysis into the Implementation Regime Framework (IRF). A rationale for this combination of implementation models explained how Stoker derived the IRF.

Stoker (1989) expressed that top-down models of implementation value central leadership where wisdom and legitimacy resides with the national government and benefits include getting to scale, cost sharing, consistency, and coordination. Implementation analyses tend to focus on what gets implemented over time (p. 29). Whereas bottom-up models of implementation values diffused leadership where knowledge is particular and situational and benefits include defense against the excesses of a national government and making national

initiatives more attuned to variation in problems and perspective that exist among local jurisdictions. Implementation analyses are employed to understand problems, perspectives, and interactions of implementation participants at the contact point (p. 29).

Both these models were considered essential for analyses of federal policy processes that are implemented across several levels of government. To select either model in isolation was to imply a choice to emphasize one value over another (Stoker, 1989, p. 29). By borrowing from both frameworks in a combined more comprehensive Implementation Regime Framework (IRF) a more balanced analysis should result.

Essentially IRF assesses the likelihood of implementation success and proposes strategies for implementation participants to improve the prospects of that success. This framework will be applied to this study as a means of analyzing RT3 in Georgia and establishing how state education officials managed the communication of the macro-level expectations and requirements of RT3 with the micro-level situational conditions of implementation. This framework allows for the management structures as well as the stages of development and implementation to be identified, and for the roles and contributions of policy actors within and external to the State Department of Education to be established.

Prior to exploring the characteristics and elements of the IRF an examination of the contextual application of this framework to the design and implementation of RT3 in Georgia will be provided by discussions of the current federal educational policy arena, the future federal educational role, and the field of educational policy implementation research.

Federalism and Public Education

The current federal educational policy landscape can be adequately illustrated, if not comprehensively understood, by two key articles that:

- provide an overview of federal policy since 1965 (McDonnell, 2005)
- discuss the shift from 'old' to 'new' politics of education (DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009)

McDonnell (2005) identifies NCLB as the most significant revision of federal education policy in decades (p. 19). She states that NCLB raises the question of whether it is a sharp departure from past policy or simply the next step in the evolution of that policy (p. 19). McDonnell (2005) then explores this question by reviewing the implementation history of ESEA from the original enactment in 1965 through to NCLB. The answer to the question "evolution or revolution" lies in NCLB's policy goals and how they compare to those of past federal education policies (p. 20). The author makes clear that the question of what an appropriate federal role should actually be is a separate and tangential issue.

McDonnell (2005) grouped federal educational reform policies into three distinct periods. The period from 1965-1980 could be described as the reform era of 'equity'. The federal role in education and its relationship, through Title I, with states and local districts were centered on serving at-risk students (p. 22). The federal government operated at a distance from regular educational programs, and Title I was, according to her, peripheral to the core instructional program of most schools (p. 22).

The period from 1980-1987 could be labeled as 'excellence'. During this period the direct federal role in state education became diminished as Title I, and other federally funded programs, were reduced. There was a shift, however, in how the federal government saw its role. The shift was to a more persuasive function of federal government through the president's direct access to the American people, rather than its regulatory role in the funding of categorical programs (p. 25). Following the publication of A Nation at Risk in 1983, where the state of

public education was blamed for the United States' poor economic performance and lack of international competitiveness, the federal government became very vocal in promoting its recommendations and reforms to improve state education in a push for higher standards.

The period from 1988 to the present could be labeled the period of "accountability". Following the 1988 reauthorization of ESEA states were required, for the first time, to define the levels of academic achievement that Title I eligible students should attain (p. 29). The federal role in state education was further defined by the 1994 reauthorization of ESEA that required states to establish content and performance standards in reading and math and to design assessments that aligned with those standards (p. 29).

This was the advent of high-stakes, performance-based accountability. With this requirement and the additional accountability measures introduced under NCLB in 2002, including the new punitive measures for failure to achieve benchmarks, the federal government has exponentially increased its role in state education programs.

McDonnell (2005) takes a 40-year perspective on the development of Title I to the present. The author argues that the federal government has indeed deliberately moved to direct state educational reforms through its policies but that has only been possible "due to the frameworks and general policy directions that states were already taking" (p. 34). The author describes the actions of presidents since the 1980s as taking advantage of political conditions and policy directions developing outside the federal in order to achieve their goals. In the move, from equity, to excellence, and to accountability, the author appears not to make a distinction as to whether this is a question of evolution or revolution.

If evolution implies organic growth and revolution is a deliberate change of direction, I would consider the increasing role of the federal government in state educational policy perhaps a combination of the two – cultivation.

McDonnell's (2005) ideas are supported by Kaestle and Lodewick (2007) when evaluating how the federal role in education has changed over time, one must of course consider the actions of successive presidents, Congress, and the Supreme Court, but one also needs to note changes in the political landscape on which those actions take place (p. 17).

DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn (2009).The article begins with a statement regarding the future of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the possibility that the traditional educational interest groups would reassert their power and force the repeal of the NCLB mandates. The traditional interest groups are described as being part of the "old politics" of US education (p. 15) and are represented by specific institutions.

These institutions include teachers unions, libertarian and state's rights groups and Congress. The article goes on to dispute this scenario given the new politics of education in the post-NCLB era. This is illustrated by the staying power of the standards-based reform movement, the existence of the law itself and the considerable resources that states and districts have expended to implement the law during its first 5 years.

Three clear arguments are made as to the idea that the national politics of education has been fundamentally and permanently changed. First, NCLB has altered the context within which the educational debate occurs at the federal level. Secondly, the 'traditional' interest groups have had to shift their policy positions and advocacy activities in light of the new context. Finally, important new interest groups have become established and are challenging the strength of influence of the traditional groups.

A central argument of the article is that the politics of federal education policy has been far more complicated that has often been portrayed and that is has become far more complex as a result of the new interest groups established in the post NCLB era. It has been the traditional assumption that teachers unions and liberal groups on the left were united by the desire for federal spending in education to be increased (especially for disadvantaged groups) and conservative groups on the right were opposed to any federal role in education completely.

The teachers unions have built themselves into a major national political force because they have a large quantity of 3 key political elements from which they can draw on – money, votes, and campaign volunteers (p. 18). The two main teaching unions, the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) contribute over 95% of their campaign funds to the Democratic Party and compose the largest voting bloc when it comes to the presidential nomination process so it is clear to see they have a lot of power. But, how has this power been used?

The unions traditionally have used their power to fight for increased federal funding, and oppose reforms that threaten their power in collective bargaining agreements or school policy. They have been more effective by obstructing rather than creating policy – opposing school vouchers, choice, charter schools, and merit pay to name just a few.

There were three main right wing groups that were opposed to federal involvement in education – libertarians who generally opposed any federal involvement in education, state's rights groups who believed education was a state responsibility, and religious conservatives who fought against federal influence because they believe it promoted secular humanism, multiculturalism, and sex education.

There were several developments that brought us from the 'old' politics of federal education policy to the 'new' politics but two of them were critical. First, several important groups became disenchanted with the slow pace of state education reform and doubted whether states could make meaningful change without federal pressure (p. 23). Secondly, the election of the reform-minded Bill Clinton as president in 1992 led to the passage of Goals 2000 and important changes to ESEA in 1994 that encouraged states to develop standards, testing, and accountability systems (p. 23). A third key development was that outcome of public opinion polls which indicated that the American public wanted active federal leadership in school reform and a new emphasis on standards, testing, and accountability. The national Republican Party's (GOP) opposition to this played a significant role in their loss in the 1996 presidential elections (p. 24).

As NCLB was passed the article observed that interesting new dynamics were created (p. 28). First, the authors remarked that as NCLB upset the traditional distribution of costs and benefits, they invariably also upset the traditional interest group environment in the policy arena (p. 28). Secondly, states and school districts had committed an enormous amount of money and resources in order to comply with NCLB mandates. Whether states agreed with the law or not, their huge investment meant that they had an interest in maintaining its structure and requirements.

The result of the shift in policy perspectives of the traditional 'power houses' of the 'old' political system and the expansion of the number of interest groups with a stake in removing or keeping NCLB created a new framework for federal educational policy and politics. The article illustrates this with the identification of two major political trends.

The first was the development of recognizable coalitions of groups and think tanks with positions on how and whether NCLB should be changed. The second trend was the diversification and expansion of players in the educational policy arena, particularly in the think tank sector (p. 29). This view on the changing political landscape was also observed by Kaestle and Lodewick (2007) when they identified that growth occurred at two levels: the sheer numbers of interest groups multiplied, and the types of organizations in existence expanded (p. 32).

In summary, the article discusses the fact that, historically, the federal educational political arena was fairly complicated, probably more so than people imagined, but flexible even though the major players had a very strong influence over what got passed or blocked in Congress. Since NCLB, the policy arena has become even more complicated with the diversification and expansion of interest groups and advocacy coalitions. As such the 'power' of the traditional 'old' politics groups has been diluted but it has also meant that it is much harder for any one or two groups to dominate the policy agenda.

Groups from both the political left and right had a stake in preserving the 'old' education policy regime (p. 20). The left wanted to keep the federal focus limited to funding initiatives for disadvantaged students and general education costs, while the right wanted to minimize federal influence and promote local control.

Conservative organizations have grown to become a powerful force in debates about education policy. Once focused primarily on limiting the role of the federal government, they now generate and promote new ideas in policy and practice.

Rather than using their influence to develop new policies, teacher unions have been more successful in preventing the passage and implementation of policies than in promoting particular

approaches to improving teacher quality and/or student achievement. Their main focus is in opposing reforms that threaten their power to bargain or that decreases federal funding.

Political context matters. Conservative think tanks grew in number and influence after the 1994 elections when Republicans won control of congress. NCLB won passage in the wake of 9/11. Its renewal is influenced by and may influence future federal elections. Therefore, it is important for policymakers and practitioners to be aware of the political and event social context of the time as it is very likely to influence policy.

Federal policy has been a lever for widespread change in education. In the absence of significant change in ESEA between 1965 and the mid-1990s, there was not significant change in the structures and processes that shape what happens in the classroom.

NCLB has shaped beliefs about and expectation of public education. It is unlikely, for example, that there will be a retreat from accountability for multiple reasons. States and districts have invested considerable sums into the creation of data systems and have embedded the use of data in making decisions. Performance, largely based on data, will even influence pay and incentives. The requirements of Race to the Top not only consolidate but reinforce the need for states to keep effective longitudinal data systems. Other constituencies such as civil rights groups seem equally unlikely to retreat from reliance on data; data, for these groups, is a means to ensure that the needs of disadvantaged students will at least be recognized if not attended to. Consequently, practitioners should look at data production, analysis, and dissemination as a permanent feature of schools.

The Future Federal Role and Implications from Race to the Top (RT3)

In response to the rapidly increasing number of schools and districts failing to meet the Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) requirements of NCLB, Arne Duncan, the Secretary for

Education at the US Department of Education, allowed states to submit applications for a waiver of AYP requirements in return for a rigorous accountability model that would be designed to meet the goals and purposes of NCLB, but allows states greater flexibility in achieving them. The AYP waiver requirements were strikingly similar, if not identical, to the requirements for success outlined in the RT3 application process.

As an RT3 state, Georgia was, unsurprisingly, successful in its AYP waiver application. Georgia's NCLB waiver application was "… informed and guided by principles outlined in such communications as the U.S. Department of Education's (2010a) 'A Blueprint for Reform: The Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act' and the Council of Chief State School Officers' (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2011) Roadmap for Next-Generation Accountability Systems" (Georgia Department of Education, 2010b).

The CCSSO's (2011) roadmap clearly outlines their vision and preferred direction with regards to the Common Core State Standards and provides acknowledgement of the centrality of common standards in future educational debates. The taskforce designated to design and create the roadmap for CCSSO recognized that the adoption of Common Core State Standards by an overwhelming majority of states and the assessments aligned to them, "…will significantly affect how states devise measures and metrics for next-generation state accountability systems" (p. 18).

These four recent key documents (CCSSO's 'Roadmap', Georgia's NCLB waiver application, US Dept. of Education's 'Blueprint for Reform', and the Race to the To competitive grant application requirements) illustrate a clear indication of where federal and state governments share a comprehensive commonality of purpose for the future of educational policy and reform.

Common Core State Standards, designed to prepare students that are college and career ready, are now being implemented across 45 states. A majority of states are currently aligned to one of only two testing consortia (22 to Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, 21 to Smarter Balanced) that are creating standardized tests that will be aligned to these standards by 2014-15. The results of those assessments will be used to make judgments and inform direct evaluations of districts, schools, principals, and teachers.

The following statement was made earlier in this paper with regard to identifying federal priorities from the RT3 program. All RT3 States will utilize common core standards where student performances are assessed using nationally standardized assessments in order to provide valid, comprehensive data that can be used to identify student growth, individual school performance, and provide an evaluation of individual teacher, school, and district effectiveness with a view to informing promotion, retention, certification, and salary decisions. Given the CCSSO's (2011) 'Roadmap" and Georgia's waiver application, it would appear that states are aligning themselves with the federal educational agenda.

An alternative, albeit unlikely, viewpoint on how the future of standards-based accountability should look is provided by Rothstein, Jacobsen, and Wilder (2008). They offer solutions to the current disconnect between policy and practice at federal and state levels of governance.

At the federal level they make two key suggestions: interstate fiscal equalization to ensure that all states have the fiscal capacity to support educational policies (p145), and National Assessment of Educational Progress data should be modified and expanded to include subjects in addition to reading and math, use age-level, not grade-level sampling with scores reported on scales not achievement levels (p. 149).

At the state level, Rothstein, Jacobsen, and Wilder (2008) first suggest that testing should cover the eight goals they identified as the traditional goals of schools: basic academic knowledge and skills, critical thinking and problem solving, appreciation of the arts and literature, preparation for skilled employment, social skills and work ethic, citizenship and community responsibility, physical health, and emotional health.

Secondly, that standardized test scores are used only in combination with other school accountability data. Thirdly, that states should abandon the use of inherently flawed absolute cut scores, or proficiency level goals. Finally, the authors suggest employing an adaptation of the inspection (accreditation) models used by Her Majesty's Inspectors in England to suit the American context.

For RT3 states the key issue of policy implementation relates to the infrastructure that has been set up as part of the process. Has enough capacity been built at the state level? When the federal dollars for this competitive grant program run out at the end of 2014-15, will state departments still be able to maintain the innovations, systems, and supports that have been implemented?

Vinovskis (2008) tells us that the public is neither very knowledgeable about national educational reforms nor personally involved in educational reforms. Given the myriad and complex changes, across many dimensions, in the American education system over the last fifty to sixty years it is easy to see how the public can become isolated, marginalized and even ignored in a system that they fund and which plays a very large part in most of their live. Questions for the public to answer now is - Are they satisfied with their current knowledge of, and involvement in, educational policymaking? To what extent will local communities allow the federal government to 'intrude' in state educational policy?

Manna (2011) raised questions about what defined good education and what educational excellence might look like, and perhaps the most crucial question when it comes to deciding on the realities of proficiency for all, "How much variation in educational expectations and opportunities for students should the nation tolerate?" (p. 162). The answers to these to questions could and should shape the future of the educational policy landscape.

Educational Policy Implementation Research: A Developing Field

Honig (2006) discussed the history of the field of educational policy implementation research. She identified the research field as having undergone 3 different waves of study since the 1960s. Wave 1 involved research on the implementation of policy designs from the Great Society period that were largely distributive, categorical, or regulatory. Research primarily investigated the extent to which policies were implemented (p. 5). During this wave, causes of policy failures were identified as conflicts between the interests of policymakers and implementers, and policy implementers lack of capacity and will to carry out the policy (p. 5). Honig cites Bardach (1977) and Sabatier & Mazmanian (1979) in reporting that several strategies were being offered to reduce this disconnect, or gap, between policy and implementation (practice) – coalition building between implementers, stronger incentives, and clearer instructions for implementation.

Aligning these three strategies to the implementation of RT3 offers mixed results. Clearer instructions seem more apparent in RT3 when compared to NCLB. There is a common language and common message being passed through different levels of government. RT3 reform goals are brief and clearly stated, and continually referenced at various levels of implementation thereby providing all policy actors with a message that is uniform. The four key reform areas are: recruiting, preparing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals,

adoption of standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace, building data systems that measure student growth and success, and turning around the lowest-achieving schools.

With RT3 still in a relatively early stage of implementation it is less clear if stronger incentives, through performance related pay, will ensure a greater fidelity between policy and practice. Indeed, the incentives may actually create complications as states try to fairly compare teachers from different disciplines or who are working with students with markedly different abilities. There is also uncertain whether any incentive scheme will be adequately funded in the long, or even short, term.

The extent to which collaborations between implementers at the local level will be influenced is not clear. It is also difficult to assess how much the 'competition' between teachers, for limited performance-related pay funding, will encourage or discourage any levels of collaboration.

The theme of Honig's (2006) second wave, during the 1970s, was what got implemented over time. The criticism of earlier research was that it studied policies over too short a time period and that longitudinal studies showed a greater fidelity between policy design and implementation. Here the focus shifted to the idea that, when it came to fidelity in policy implementation, it was people and places that mattered. Implementation unfolds as a process of "mutual adaptation" as implementers reconcile conditions in their micro level context with macro level federal demands.

New policy models, such as Elmore's (1979-80) 'backward mapping' where policy design begins at the implementation stage and works backwards, were created in an attempt to inform policy designers of where the implementers of that policy may deviate from, or amend,

parts of the policy. RT3 can clearly be identified as primarily a top-down model of policy design and implementation.

Wave 3, through the 1980s, was focused on researching "what works in the world of educational policy implementation" (Honig, 2006, p. 7).

The current state of the field is trying to answer the question of how researchers can confront the concepts of complexity and conflict in the policymaking process (Honig, 2006, p. 9). In the world of educational policy we now have a multitude of issues being attended to by a diverse group of policy actors who are working in a variety of policy arenas to influence agenda setting, policy formulation, policy implementation processes and the monitoring of policy outputs. It would be relatively easy to concur with Heck's (2004) conclusion that no one research approach is likely to yield a complete picture.

Social Constructions and Tight-loose Coupling

Social Constructions: Public policy is 'whatever governments choose to do or not to do' (Dye, 1992, p. 2). Governments and/or governing bodies can only make those choices and implement them if they possess the power to do so. McLaughlin (2006), states that power is "an essential dimension of the implementation process and policy actors with political power can impose their will on others" (p. 217). But who has political power and who are the 'others' that are being imposed on? Social constructions of target population can be used to give an indication of who has power (perceived or real), who gets to participate, and who does not.

According to Schneider and Ingram (1993), social construction of a target population refers to the recognition of the shared characteristics that distinguish a target population. Social constructions are stereotypes about particular groups of people that have been created by politics, culture, socialization, the media, and the like.

Social constructions can hold positive characteristics such as deserving, intelligent, honest, and public-spirited whereas as negative characteristics include concepts of selfishness, stupidity, and dishonesty. Constructs can also be identified as being powerful or weak. Schneider and Ingram (1993) provided a model that assists in the classification of these attributes by creating four groups of target populations and further illustrating those classifications with examples of their likely constituents.

1. Advantaged: positive and strong – the elderly, business, veterans, scientists
2. Contenders: negative and strong – the rich, big unions, minorities, cultural elites, moral majority
3. Dependents: positive and weak – children, mothers, disabled
4. Deviants: negative and weak – criminals, drug addicts, communists, flag burners, gangs

It would be an interesting exercise to place policy actors involved in educational policy implementation today (parents, teachers, teacher unions, superintendents, state legislators, intermediary organizations) and identify if their involvement in the implementation process is reflected by their classification.

Policy is purposeful and attempts to achieve goals by changing people's behavior. It identifies the problems to be solved and the people whose behavior is linked to the achievement of the desired ends. By specifying eligibility criteria, policy creates the boundaries of target populations.

The social construction of target populations by policymakers affects their participation in the policy process and the outcome of that process in several ways. The way the policy is framed is a crucial aspect of this process. For example, the RT3 application process provided

very strict time requirements and targeted state agencies as the policy actors who were eligible to apply. This essentially excluded any public debate about whether a particular state should apply for those federal funds and subsequently be bound to RT3 reform policies.

There are strong pressures for public officials to provide beneficial policy to powerful, positively constructed target populations and to devise punitive, punishment-oriented policy for negatively constructed groups. Perhaps more importantly, social construction becomes embedded in policy as messages that are absorbed by citizens and affect their orientations and participation patterns. Policy sends messages about what government is supposed to do, which citizens are deserving of support (and which are not), and what kinds of attitudes and participatory patterns are appropriate in a democratic society.

In essence, public policy is about maneuvering or manipulating target populations into changing behavior patterns which are undesired towards ones which are considered positive or desirable. Members of the "Advantaged" group are considered as deserving of beneficial rather than burdensome policies and also have a greater influence in deciding which policies are make it onto the agenda. An 'advantaged' group under the RT3 program could be identified as those states that were already implementing educational reforms that were aligned with the priorities set out in RT3 and would willingly comply with its demands. Members of the "Deviants" group have far less power and policies which more forcefully attempt to alter their behavior patterns receive widespread support. In terms of RT3, would this classify teachers as deviants?

The rationales that policymakers use to legitimate their policy choices are also dependent on the target populations i.e., how the policy is framed. For powerful, positive viewed groups, the rationales will commonly feature the group's instrumental links to the achievement of important public purposes, currently conceptualized in terms of national defense and economic

competitiveness. Justice-oriented rationales such as equality, equity, need, and rights will be less common for this group (Schneider & Ingram, 1993, p. 339). Policy rationales for the negative and weak group (criminals, etc.) can provide burdens in the form of punishments or benefits in the form of rehabilitation (p. 340). The rationale in any case is designed to legitimize the policy in the eyes of society and gain its acceptance. A poor rationale can result in the rejection of the policy with little or no change in behavior patterns.

An example of social construction of target populations in education policy implementation could be the policies associated with standardized testing procedures. The policy tools employed are very much authoritarian with very strict guidelines as to the required behaviors at each step of the testing process. These are reinforced by the punitive measures (job loss, fines, even prison) associated with not adhering to the policy guidelines. The target population associated with this policy is any administrator, educator, or support staff who may come into contact with the testing materials. The punitive measures may be considered harsh given the generally assumed positive characteristics of the target population but with the consequences associated with poor student, and hence school, performance these measures may be considered necessary to deter possible undesirable behaviors in handling student test answer sheets.

The social construction of target populations could have a significant influence on how educational policies are framed and implemented. More research needs to be conducted to develop how these constructions affect the implementation process. Answers to certain questions may inform how policies can be designed to ensure the implementation process does not corrupt the original aims of the policy. To what extent does the framing of the policy depend on the target population? Does the social construction of a group change during different stages

of the implementation process? If so, how, and why does this happen? Can policy designers use these social constructions to model the implementation process and identify areas where 'corruption' of the policy may occur? To what extent can a social construction of a particular group inform whether that group is more or less likely to participate in what Malen (2006) describes as policy 'nullification' or policy 'amplification'?

Tight-Loose Coupling: Weick (1976), in discussing educational organizations as loosely coupled systems, provided a definition of what he meant loose coupling to mean. He said that coupled events are responsive, but that an event also preserves its own identity and some evidence of physical and logical separateness (p. 4). An illustration of this loose coupling in educational organizations could be provided by a principal's office and a teacher's classroom. They are linked, or coupled, by the commonality of the school building, and the common purpose of educating students, but the coupling is loose as their interactions may be infrequent, and they have differing and separate roles in the organization.

By contrast, the principal's office and the secretary's office could be illustrative of tighter coupling. There are more frequent interactions, a physically closer proximity, and greater oversight and monitoring of each other's activities possibly leading to higher levels of interpersonal accountability. It is possible to identify a range of loose and tight coupling events, actors, and systems within any school organization or system. So what has this to do with educational policy implementation research?

When we consider policy design, there must be a serious consideration of how that policy will be implemented, and what rules, regulations, or checks and balances will be used to ensure a reasonable level of fidelity between what the policy design intends and what actually happens in practice. This is where the concept of tight or loose coupling comes into play. For purposes of

clarity we can consider the following descriptions for these concepts. Tight coupling implies more oversight, control, and greater accountability measures built within a close working relationship. Loose coupling implies greater flexibility, less oversight, and interactions that are less frequent and with fewer or lower levels of accountability.

The concept of tight and loose coupling seems to have become a contemporary method of describing the relationship between federal and state organizations and how educational policy should or should not be implemented. The CCSSO (2011) Roadmap for Next-Generation Accountability Systems discussed the historical context for accountability in public education, and the fact that it was an essential strategy to improve student performance.

The article described the federal/state relationship regarding accountability under the Improving America's Schools Act (1994), a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) (1965), as 'loose-loose'. With the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, the 2002 reauthorization of ESEA) a loose-tight relationship was created where the federal government was 'loose' on goals that states set i.e., definitions for proficiency but were 'tight' on the means by which states would work towards achieving those goals.

The CCSSO's (2011) 'roadmap' explains that states now have the opportunity to move toward a model that is "tight-loose". The 'tight' component comes from states advancing the goal of college and career readiness for all students. The 'loose' component is explained by states having the flexibility to determine how best to meet that goal and to design appropriate consequences should the goal(s) not be attained.

The tight-loose concept of educational policy implementation is further developed by Finn and Petrilli (2011). In discussing the next reauthorization of ESEA by the Obama administration, the authors make suggestions as to the key issues for discussion, and how they

should be resolved, under what they call 'reform realism'. The authors call for a tight-loose form of policy implementation instead of the current loose-tight model.

Finn and Petrilli (2011) propose that current federal policy is loose about what students should know and be able to do but very tight about what happens when schools fall short, and that this equation should be flipped. Their clarification of the flipped model explains that there is a need for greater national clarity about the expectations for student learning (Common Core State Standards), and that these should be linked to the real-world demands of college and career readiness. But greater flexibility is required in how states, local communities, and schools deciding how to get their students to meet these expectations.

The authors propose that requirements associated with standards and outcomes should be 'tight', and that everything else should be 'loose' (Finn & Petrilli, p. 50). This is illustrated by their categorization of what they see as the ten biggest issues, in the reauthorization of ESEA, into tight and loose elements of educational policy.

What should be tight? – common core standards, adoption of rigorous cut scores, mandatory use of growth measures, science and history testing. What should be loose? - interventions for failing schools, requirements concerning teacher quality or effectiveness, Title I comparability, flexible options, competitive grants (including RT3 and I3).

This model for policy implementation is also supported by Manna (2011) in what he calls 'Liberation Management'. Manna (2011) details the role of the federal government as providing a uniform set of rigorous standards and expectations, and states/local districts deliver policies and administrative routines and systems to ensure student achievement. As the author puts it, while the principal is still responsible for determining the goals, the agents are liberated because they have the freedom to choose how to accomplish them.

The apparent growing 'popularity' of this tight-loose model needs further research. The relationships between federal/state educational organizations and state/local district organizations are complex. There are numerous examples and models of tight and loose coupling arrangements in how those organizations interact. When you apply the educational policy implementation process through and across those various models some questions come to mind. To what extent does tight or loose coupling affect educational policy implementation? Is this effect consistent across all levels of government? Are specific types of policy implementation better suited to a tight or loosely coupled system? Do certain policies work better as tight-loose or loose-tight? Can patterns or generalizations be made that would inform more effective designs of educational policy implementation?

The RT3 implementation process through various levels of government could reasonably be described as tight-loose (federal to state) and tight-loose (state to local district). A more accurate picture can be described that tempers the use of the term 'loose' in the previous statement. The federal government set out very clear and specific policy targets for states successful in their RT3 grant application.

States are being given a certain amount of flexibility in how they meet those goals but are closely monitored but the U.S. Department of Education. Meeting staged implementation deadlines is an imperative given the time-limited nature of the grant and states can have federal funds withheld for failing to keep to those deadlines. This implies more of a tight-less tight situation than a tight-loose. A similar situation is represented by the state/local district policy subsystem. Although legal mandates are more of a 'stick' than withholding funds in this situation.

Educational Policy Implementation Research: Implications for RT3

Spillane (2007) reveals three themes that cut across several aspects of educational policy and its implementation – the segmented educational system, the shifting terrain of the educational policy arena, and relevant research.

Federal, state, and local school districts all make educational policy, and authority over education is spread across the executive and legislative branches of government both at state and federal levels. The segmentation of policymaking and authority over policy present challenges not only for educational policymakers but also for the implementation processes. Another extra system, outside of the more formally regulated one, is also posing challenges for educational policy implementation. Many new actors with more diverse agendas have engaged in the education policymaking process and include organizations such as publishers, testing companies, professional associations, and private consultants.

The theme of a shifting terrain relates to the continuing state of change with respect to which entities have responsibility for which aspects of schooling America's students (p. 130). The author attributes this state of continuous change to the origins of the U.S. education system in local school districts and the evolution of that system as state and federal governments increasingly became involved in the system.

Spillane's (2007) third theme concerns research on educational policy. While supporting educational policy researcher's responsiveness to working on research questions of interest to the public and policymakers, the author proposes that researchers should be driven by the more theoretical debates of their discipline. Another proposition is that, due to the multifarious aspects and complexities of the education system, policy researchers should be forging collaborations

from among a variety of disciplines such as economists, political scientists, and sociologists in the area of educational policy to generate new knowledge about policy and its implementation.

RT3 provides a clear example of the segmentation of the U.S. education system and the different agencies that have authority over its implementation. Policy actors at local, state, and federal levels have to collaborate and cooperate for the RT3 reforms to be implemented. Even though there is federal and state oversight, policy actors further down the policy implementation chain have authority over the fidelity of the implementation in their particular policy arena. Actors at the school level have the ultimate authority over the success or failure of RT3.

The complexity of implementation processes of RT3 across so many segmented levels of government will provide real challenges in the future when researchers try to assess the success, or not, of the program. To ascertain which aspect(s) of the implementation can be credited for any real or perceived successes and failures would be a very difficult task indeed.

The speed, momentum, and governmental drive behind the implementation of RT3 is incredibly fast and forceful, at federal and state levels, relative to the usual pace of educational reform policies. It is too early in the RT3 implementation process to make definitive statements as to its success relative to the policy goals. If that success is achieved, to what extent would that success be attributed to the model of its implementation?

Spillane's (2007) discussion of the shifting terrain relates to identifiable changes in the educational policy arena over significant lengths of time. Although RT3 is a major reform covering four key areas of educational policy, the relative speed with which it is being implemented must surely provide some protection to the implementation processes, and the fidelity of the policy from issues, barriers, or concerns arising from any shifting of the policy terrain.

For future, and current, educational policy researchers, the analyses of the implementation of RT3 would surely benefit from the perspective of a variety of disciplines. The purpose of analyzing any policy must be to identify the strengths and weaknesses is design, factors affecting implementation, and variables that may have altered the practice from the policy to name a few. The information gathered from this analysis is used to better inform future policy designs. It therefore makes sense to conduct analyses from a variety of perspectives that may include economists, sociologists, and political scientists. My previous proposal of conducting further research into social constructions and tight-loose coupling to inform policy just adds to the list of perspectives.

What this does indicate to me is that a policy design, relative to its purpose and level of public influence, may well need to employ information produced from a great number of perspectives and viewpoints to inform its formulation and implementation processes. It then follows that individuals or small groups of policymakers may not have the extensive knowledge of several disciplines with which to make sense of differing perspectives and be able to apply them to the policy design. Continuing this to a logical conclusion - for policies that are more comprehensive and complex, and that have a greater impact on the public it makes sense that the composition of the policymaking body reflect the need for a combined knowledge of several disciplines i.e. a large team of policymakers rather than small groups or individuals.

McLaughlin (2006) provides us with some lessons learned from research into educational policy implementation research. First, the authors shares that how a policy problem is framed is arguably the most important decision made as a policy is developed. For RT3, the federal government framed the program by highlighting the failings of the education system and offering RT3 as a well-funded solution to help states fix the perceived failings. States could legitimize

their participation in the application process to districts by pointing out their greatly reduced tax revenues, the need for reform efforts to improve student achievement, and the states lack of capacity in producing those reforms. These framings of the problem certainly made it a bigger challenge to submit objections to the policy initiative than if the framing spoke of the need for greater federal intrusion to fix the problems of the public education system.

Secondly, McLaughlin (2006) discusses the importance of the ultimate implementation site – the agency or organization that was at the end of the implementation process and therefore crucial in its success or failure. The RT3 policy design clearly understood this aspect and its accountability measures were designed to make schools and teachers in particular, more directly accountable for student outcomes. The accountability comes in promotion, retention, certification, and salary decisions being based primarily on student achievement. This system is in the process of being implemented in Georgia.

It is still early in that implementation and it will be a year or two before we start seeing student achievement data feeding directly into teacher and principal evaluations or whether any unintended consequences arise from this accountability system. The extent to which instructional practices reflect the influence of the RT3 policy will be revealed as the implementation process is completed and accurate evaluations of the policy's effects can be made.

The question of whether a policy implementation is successful is also open to interpretation. Does success mean fidelity to the policymaker's intent or specific directions? Does success mean that the desired change in instructional or organizational practices have occurred even if it does not result in improved student outcomes? Does success also include the unintended benefits that may result from implementer's actions? (McLaughlin, 2006).

With RT3 it is my assumption that whether it can be described as a successful educational policy implementation will certainly depend on your perspective, and how you interpret the implementation outcomes. If it is anything like NCLB there will be common agreements on some of the successes and failure but probably more disagreement on other aspects of the implementation that would be deemed a success or a failure based on perspective.

From initial inspection, and observing what is happening at the state and local level, it is clear that the comprehensive reforms embedded in RT3 are being implemented at speed and with a high level of fidelity. The questions we are waiting to answer include – Which factors will determine if the implementation is a success? What, if any, were the unintended consequences of the policy and can they be classified as positive or negative? Will the educator salary structure reflect the various levels of teacher performance? Will student outcomes improve and can they be accurately attributed to RT3 policies?

Outside of RT3, there is another major question waiting to be answered. How will lessons learned in the research of educational policy, and policy implementation in particular, impact or influence the design of the long-awaited reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965).

Implementation Regime Framework (IRF)

As stated at the outset of this section, Stoker (1989) created a conceptual framework for analyzing the policy implementation process that combined key aspects of the top-down and bottom-up models of implementation analysis. The top-down/bottom up components incorporated into this framework makes it appropriate for examining policy implementation across several levels of government.

Essentially the framework assesses the likelihood of implementation success and proposes strategies for implementation participants to improve the prospects of that success. This framework will be applied to this study as a means of analyzing RT3 in Georgia and establishing how state education officials managed the communication of the macro-level expectations and requirements of RT3 with the micro-level situational conditions of implementation. This framework allows for the management structures as well as the stages of development and implementation to be identified, and for the roles and contributions of policy actors within and external to the State Department of Education to be established.

IRF Framework Specifics

Top-down models of implementation can be more reliant on compliance of participants than cooperation with them while bottom-up models necessarily have a focus or desire on resolving conflicts or seeking compromise. The IRF seeks to find a balance between these approaches by identifying common areas of agreement and setting guiding principles for implementation activities designed to achieve common goals...

> Intergovernmental implementation requires cooperation. However, federalism creates tension during the implementation process, that is not easily overcome, challenging leadership from the national government and complicating even the implementation of policies that promise mutual gains (Stoker, 1989, p. 30).

When implementing policies across several levels of government, the navigation of that implementation can be complicated by competing or contradictory values amongst implementation participants. The IRF can be seen as an arrangement among implementation participants that identifies the values to be served during the implementation process and provides an organizational framework to promote those values. The organizational framework is a set or norms, rules, and procedures that govern the interaction of participants to some

collective action (Stoker, 1989, p. 30). Within this framework there is an assumption that cooperation must be sought out as a guiding principle of participation despite, or because of, a lack of a dominant authority.

The political context of the IRF is also a significant factor in the drive for cooperation. The organizational structures in the implementation process have a direct impact on the frameworks ability to manage the political context. Specific question arise from a consideration of the political context that can be directly applied to this study of RT3 implementation in Georgia.

> Who is positioned to influences the outcome of the implementation process? Who should be consulted (and in what circumstances)? What information is shared and with whom? What are the standards of acceptable behavior? How are standards and procedures to be enforced? (Stoker, 1989, p. 30).

Policy initiatives provide a context for the implementation regime, and as such can set certain parameters or limitations for that regime, but flexibility within those parameters can still provide for effective levels of cooperation.

Implementation regimes are institutions that embody principles, norms, rules, and decision making procedures around which actor's expectations converge (Stoker, 1989, p. 37). The regimes are devoted to understanding how cooperation and accommodation can be achieved in a mixed motive context and why some implementations succeed and some fail.

A key element of the assessment is an examination of the relationship between cost/risk of cooperation and the cost/risk of defection for implementation participants. Actors have to consider the cost, or risk, to them or their values by cooperating or by defecting. In the ideal IRF the cost/risk of cooperation would be low and the cost/risk of defection high.

If we view implementation process as a continuum from policy initiation to full policy implementation, we can identify the cost/risk levels of cooperation and defection at different stages. At the policy initiation stage Stoker (1989) identifies the cost/risk of cooperation as high due to participants appearing too accommodating cost weaken negotiation positions later in the process. The cost/risk of defection at policy initiation is low as minimal losses with regards to time, money, and resources would be low if actors defect in the early stages of implementation.

Essentially IRF assesses the likelihood of implementation success and proposes strategies for implementation participants to improve its prospects (Stoker, 1989, p. 38). It does this by examining the implementation regimes in place and assessing the levels of cost/risk for cooperation and defection.

The implementation regime theoretical construct will be applied, as the primary framework, to this study of the design and implementation of the federal RT3 reform initiative across several levels of government and aims to answer the following section of this study's research questions.

1. How did the Governor's Office of Georgia manage the communication of macro-level expectations/requirements of RT3 policy design with the micro-level conditions of RT3 policy implementation?
    a. What structures were established to manage the policy processes?
    b. What were the stages of development and implementation for RT3?
    c. What were the roles and contributions of departmental policy actors?
    d. What were the roles and contributions of policy actors external to the department?

The Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF)

ACF Introduction

In applying Sabatier's (2007) revised and updated Advocacy Coalition Framework to RT3 in Georgia, this study will identify the informal coalition groups within the federal/state policy subsystem and within the state/local policy subsystem. Foundational elements of both subsystems will be clarified and an understanding of RT3 policies with respect to beliefs, strategy, resources, policy outputs, and impacts will be developed. Policy actors will be identified as well as their level of involvement and participation in RT3 policy implementation processes in Georgia. Data from this analysis will also be employed in the identification of a framework for deliberation and debate that provides opportunities for effective participation in educational policy formulation. It is important to state that the advocacy coalition framework was initially designed, and traditionally used, to apply to formal coalitions working within any given policy arena or area of public concern.

In applying this framework to this study I am applying the framework in a new way as a means of gaining a deeper understanding of how educational groups coalesced to implement a federal educational policy across several levels of government with no formal, or traditional, coalitions in evidence.

Foundation Stones

Sabatier (2007) informs us that the ACF starts with three 'foundation stones'. These foundation stones operate at three distinct levels: 1) A macro-level assumption that most policymaking occurs amongst specialist within a policy subsystem but the behavior of those policy actors are affected by the broader political and socioeconomic system; 2) A micro-level model of the individual that is drawn heavily from social psychology. This level is situated in

ethical and moral theoretical frameworks and informs the beliefs of policy actors; 3) A meso-level conviction that the best way to deal with the multiplicity of actors in a subsystem is to aggregate them in advocacy coalitions. These foundations affect our dependent variables, belief and policy change through two critical paths – policy-oriented learning and external events (see Appendix A for a visual representation of the framework).

Purpose

In the complex world of public policymaking, problems are conceptualized and brought to governments for solutions; governmental institutions then formulate alternatives and select policy solutions; and those solutions get implemented, evaluated, and revised (Sabatier, 2007). The ACF of the policy process emerged out of the perceived need to find alternative methods to the 'stages' heuristic, a desire to integrate top-down and bottom-up approaches to policy implementation, and a commitment to incorporate technical information into understanding the policy process (Heck, 2009). It is a systems-based model that incorporates most of the stages of the policy cycle but places an emphasis on the use of scientific and technical information and the understanding of the belief systems of various policy actors (Weible, Sabatier, & McQueen, 2009).

A key problem with the stages heuristic was that it portrays the policy process as a set of discrete stages that follow sequentially and is one directional. It did not allow policy analysts to examine the complexities, feedback loops, and policy actors involved at the various stages and certainly did not reflect the fact the some stages were active simultaneously. An analysis of policies from the top-down or the bottom-up model is limited by the perspective taken as it focusses mainly on the viewpoint of actors at the extremes of the policy design/implementation

continuum and thus can lose valuable insight of areas, issues, values, constraints, or resources that are more relevant to the other extreme.

Basic Premises

Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1999) identified five basic premises that underlie the framework. These premises were abstracted from policy implementation literature and the use of technical information in public policy (Heck, 2009).

Belief systems and core values. The ACF explicitly identifies beliefs as the causal driver for political behavior (Weible, Sabatier, & McQueen, 2009). Sabatier (2007) expands on this notion of beliefs by identifying three distinct levels. 'Deep core beliefs' are a product of childhood socialization and are thus very difficult to alter. They are general normative beliefs about right and wrong and values such as liberty and equality. 'Policy core beliefs' are revealed by an individual's support of particular polices that are compatible with their deeply held beliefs. At this level we are looking at people's particular stance on social issues, education, health, and national security for example being informed by their deeper held values and beliefs. This ensures that core policy beliefs are also very static and very difficult to change, although not impossible. The third and final level is 'secondary beliefs'. They are relatively narrow in scope and may relate to very specific programs, rules, or regulations. Due to their narrow scope changing them requires less evidence and fewer agreements between policy actors and are thus far less difficult to change.

It would be reasonable to state that individual beliefs are at the heart of the policy process. The strength and depth of an individual's beliefs, and therefore action, in a particular policy comes as a result of where that policy stands in relation to their deep core beliefs. This must be crucial information for policy actors who are looking for a coalition in support of their

policy ideas. The greater the correlation in belief systems between policy actors must surely increase the possibility of a more stable and longer lasting coalition.

Policies and programs generated through interaction incorporate beliefs and theories about how to achieve policy objectives (Heck, 2009). Perceptions of the policy problem, its magnitude, its causes, and the solutions to the problem are all involved, together with deep core beliefs, in what the policy actors wish to achieve, their strategies for achieving those goals, and what they may 'settle' for if all objectives cannot be fulfilled. As discussed previously, the content and parameters of the three levels of a belief system will have differentiated effects on the level of advocacy coalition.

Technical information. Policymakers desire technical information concerning the magnitude and facets of problems, their solutions, and probable impacts of various solutions (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1999). The decision to incorporate technical information into the framework really makes logical sense. These are such crucial elements in the design, adoption, implementation, and evaluation of a policy that it may seem preposterous not to include this category of information when using a framework to understand the policy process.

The ACF contends that the availability and use of technical information can be an important element of the policy development process, including the strategies groups use to influence the agenda setting and legislative processes (Heck, 2009).

Policy subsystems. The ACF specifies policy subsystems as a major unit of analysis because political systems involve many topics over broad geographical areas that compel actors to specialize on a topic and locale to understand its complexity and to be effective in producing change (Weible, Sabatier, & McQueen, 2009). It consists of individuals from a variety of public

or private organizations who are actively concerned with a policy problem or issue and who regularly seek to influence policy in that domain (Heck, 2009).

There are two key elements in that definition. First, the word 'active' is of paramount importance. I am sure that we can all relate tales of individuals who are very vocal on many issues of public concern, ourselves included, but how many are actually active in their opposition or support of a particular policy initiative? The clarification here is that for an individual to be considered part of policy subsystem they have to be an active member.

Secondly, the action of subsystem actors being directed towards a particular domain of a policy problem is very significant. Public policies can be very complex and be implemented across a wide spectrum of arenas. This can provide an insurmountable challenge to a coalition group's efforts to support or derail a policy. The decision of subsystem actors to affect a particular domain of a policy problem rather than an entire policy may be a more effective approach and may even be a required approach dependent on several factors.

A lack of resources such as time, funding, public opinion or even the number of policy actors can leave coalition groups with the option of being active only within a small domain. There is also the realization that even if a whole policy cannot be influenced, it may be possible to affect smaller sections of it. The nature of the policy process also affords mobile and active coalitions the ability and opportunity to challenge some, or all, aspects of a given policy at many stages of the legislative process. Dependent on the relationships within the advocacy coalition, it may also be possible for those groups to prioritize domains of a policy problem they wish to influence.

Coalitions of actors within subsystems. Policy subsystems are comprised of a considerable number of groups including administrative agencies, legislative committees,

interest groups, journalists, policy analysts, and researchers who regularly generate, disseminate, and evaluate policy ideas (Heck, 2009).

The coalition of actors within ACF is suggested by Heck (2009) to be relatively stable over lengthy periods of time. This raises the question of dynamics and coalition groups. If coalitions are stable and well established over many years, do they become a part of the establishment?

A current perspective of advocacy coalitions is that they can be a dynamic force for change in an ever mobile, and increasingly more complex, political arena. They can seem appealing because they are not generally recognized as being part of the establishment of policy actors. If they become stable, which seems a desirable quality, does that mean they lose the 'tag' of being new in town and therefore a crucial element in getting 'noticed' or making others wary of them.

A very quick example could be a new principal arriving in at a school. As that person is new, with presumably new ideas, there is interest in what he/she has to say and concerns about what may change, what new policies may be revealed, or challenges to the status quo. As the principal becomes established and familiar any previous anxiety and perceived threats may disappear and they are seen as part of the establishment. This does not mean that they have become ineffective but it could be proposed that an 'edge' has been lost. Could this also translate to long established coalition actors within a policy subsystem?

Change process. Previous time frames for examining policy formulation, implementation, and reform cycles have been too short (Heck, 2009). It makes rational sense that viewing a policy in action over a longer period of time will allow you to make a more effective and accurate evaluation. But given the contemporary policy arena, where economic,

legislative or political expediency seems to be the default when it comes to identify if a policy is working properly, do policy analyst have to get used to working with less data? Or do policy designers have to place greater emphasis on considering the consequences of policies before they are implemented, in order to meliorate the shorter amount of time in which they are likely to be evaluated? It sounds like a 'catch 22'. We are always looking for better policy designs, but you can't get better policy designs unless the evaluations that inform those designs are allowed to be conducted over long periods of time, but, for many reasons, we are not allowing that to happen.

Inter-related Components of ACF

Policy subsystems. This is the major unit of analysis of the ACF. It consists of individuals from a variety of organizations who are actively concerned with a policy problem or issue and who seek to influence policy in that domain (Heck, 2009). Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith (1999) expand on this by explaining that individuals may have to specialize within this subsystem if they are to have influence. This means that coalitions, due to the complexity or size of a policy, may opt for trying to influence smaller sections of it as a means of trying to increase the chances of success. Policy subsystems may be in existence or emerge from new situations or problems.

The coalition groups within the policy subsystem may work together or in opposition at the same governmental level or at various levels. Actors within particular policy domains are likely to initiate a number of actions at these various levels in pursuing their goals (Heck, 2009). This divergent strategy can provide coalition groups with several avenues, and opportunities, for success and they made, indeed prioritize these 'attacks' based on the likelihood for success.

Relatively stable parameters. Within the ACF there are parameters in the policy process that are relatively stable. In the framework itself (Appendix A) the parameters are listed

as 1) Basic attributes of the problem area and the distribution of natural resources. 2) Fundamental sociocultural values and social structure. 3) Basic constitutional structure. These stable parameters, in many ways, provide a skeleton on which the ACF is constructed. They are stable factors that are not likely to change over the course of a policy cycle (Heck, 2009).

External subsystem events. Factors operating outside a particular policy domain can affect processes within the domain and shift the policy core attributes. Factors include broad changes in socioeconomic conditions, changes in governing coalitions, policy decisions and impacts from other policy subsystems (Heck, 2009) as well as public opinion. These external shocks can foster change in a subsystem by shifting and augmenting resources, tipping the power balance in coalitions, and change beliefs (Weible, Sabatier, & McQueen, 2009).

Long-term coalition opportunity structures. This element of the ACF arose out of a need to address one of the frequent criticisms of the ACF. Its empirical origins were based in American pluralism. The ACF makes assumptions about well-organized interest groups, mission-oriented agencies, weak political parties, multiple decision making venues, and the need for supermajorities to enact and implement major policy change (Sabatier, 2007).

This led policy analysts to conclude that the ACF would not be applicable to less democratic governments and societies in Europe and in developing countries. This extension of the ACF adds a new variable to the framework, one that mediates between the stable parameters and the subsystems.

Two key subsets of variables within the long-term coalition opportunity structures strongly affect the resources and behavior of advocacy coalitions (Sabatier, 2007) – degree of consensus needed for policy change and the openness of the political system.

Applications of ACF in Public Policy

The ACF originated from a desire by Paul Sabatier to develop better theoretical frameworks for analyzing the policy process. The ACF was then further developed in partnership with Hank Jenkins-Smith. Given the authors area of expertise in the environment and energy it is no surprise that these were the policy arenas where the framework was initially applied. The nature of public policy when it comes to environmental or energy issues also lends itself to the creation and employment of advocacy coalition groups to affect policy. As the ACF has been developed over the last two decades it has been applied to a wider scope of policy arenas that also include health, economic, and social policies.

The development of ACF has expanded the framework's application in that it can be utilized in almost any political setting and culture, including authoritarian regimes in developing countries and that it can be applied across almost any policy domain (Weible, Sabatier, & McQueen, 2009).

The ACF has had very limited use, initially, in the field of educational policy. But, as the educational policy landscape has altered significantly over the last decade, opportunities for ACF's application in the arena of educational policy may expand exponentially. This point of view is given support by the observed move away from the few policy actors (teaching unions, department of education, Congress) involved in the old politics of the 'iron triangle' to the 'new' politics of education as described by DeBray-Pelot and McGuinn (2009). The result of the shift in policy perspectives of the traditional 'power houses' of the 'old' political system and the expansion of the number of interest groups with a stake in removing or keeping No Child Left Behind (2002) (NCLB) created a new framework for federal educational policy and politics (DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009).

The authors go on to illustrate this with the identification of two major political trends. The first was the development of recognizable coalitions of groups and think tanks with positions on how and whether NCLB should be changed. The second trend was the diversification and expansion of players in the educational policy arena, particularly in the think tank sector (DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009).

This view on the changing political landscape was also observed by Kaestle and Lodewick (2007) when they identified that growth in educational policy actors occurred at two levels: the sheer numbers of interest groups multiplied, and the types of organizations in existence expanded.

DeBray-Pelot and McGuinn (2009) also discussed the fact that, historically, the federal educational political arena was fairly complicated, probably more so than people imagined, but flexible even though the major players had a very strong influence over what got passed or blocked in congress. Since NCLB, the policy arena has become even more complicated with the diversification and expansion of interest groups and advocacy coalitions. As such the 'power' of the traditional 'old' politics groups has been diluted but it has also meant that it is much harder for any one or two groups to dominate the policy agenda. Advocacy coalitions may indeed be one of the prime factors in influencing major educational policy changes in the future.

Public Deliberation and Debate

Vinovskis (2008) tells us that the public is neither very knowledgeable about national educational reforms nor personally involved in educational reforms. Given the myriad and complex changes, across many dimensions, in the American education system over the last fifty to sixty years it is easy to see how the public can become isolated, marginalized and even ignored in a system that they fund and which plays a very large part in most of their lives.

The crucial questions for the public to answer now is - Are they satisfied with their current knowledge of, and involvement in, educational policymaking? Are opportunities for public participation in democratic deliberation adequate? What format of citizen participation will provide their best opportunity for influencing changes in educational policy?

So how does the general public become involved in the discussion and debate over educational reforms generally and in what they want to see happen in their local schools specifically? Following a brief discussion on public involvement in policymaking, the political process and factors that influence decision making, theoretical models for public deliberation and debate are explored with a view to finding opportunities that will give citizens maximum voice in the policy process.

Policymaking, the Political Process, and Influencing Factors

Public Policy is such a broad term that in order to create a useful, workable definition you would probably need to introduce criteria or parameters to narrow the context in which you are discussing its definition. Public policy was defined, in very comprehensive terms, by Anderson (2003) as…

> …a relatively stable course of action followed by an actor or set of actors in dealing with a problem or matter of concern (p. 2)
> …may be somewhat loosely stated and cloudy in content, thus providing general direction rather than precise targets for implementation (p. 3)
> …includes not only the decision to adopt a law or make a rule on some topic but also the subsequent decisions that are intended to enforce or implement the law or rule (p. 3)
> …emerge in response to policy demands, or those claims for action or inaction on some public issues made by other actors…upon government officials and agencies (p. 3)
> …involves what governments actually do, not just what they intend to do or say they are going to do (p. 4)
> …may be either positive or negative (p. 5)
> …in its positive form, is based on law and is authoritative (p. 5)

It was defined in very simplistic terms by Dye (1992) when he stated that "public policy is whatever governments choose to do or not to do" (p. 2).

Both definitions were selected for the purpose and context of the writer and are appropriate for the message they were trying to communicate. A practical definition of policy cannot be so succinct that it fails to reflect the intricacies and complexities of the process nor should it be so convoluted that understanding of the process is bewildering or perplexing.

It is important to consider that policy is not just related to outcomes such as laws, rules or regulations. Policy is about the whole process. Anderson (2003) dissects this process for us into five distinct stages: agenda, formulation, adoption, implementation, evaluation. The policy making process guides problems or issues through these stages systematically. It is also important to remember that policy is evidenced in many forms. Anderson (2003) provides categorizes of policies such as distributive, regulatory, redistributive, material, and symbolic,

These policies can be substantive, detailing what the government will do or provide, or they can be procedural, in which how something will be done or who will do it is specified. The innate complexity of the public policymaking process can easily provide a barrier for public involvement and participation in the process.

When we consider who or what influences policymakers in their decision making some answers are provided by Schneider and Ingram (1993) and Griffin (2006).

According to Schneider and Ingram (1993), social construction of a target population refers to the recognition of the shared characteristics that distinguish a target population. Social constructions are stereotypes about particular groups of people that have been created by politics, culture, socialization, the media, and the like (p. 335).

Social constructions can hold positive characteristics such as deserving, intelligent, honest, and public-spirited whereas as negative characteristics include concepts of selfishness, stupidity, and dishonesty. Constructs can also be identified as being powerful or weak. Schneider and Ingram (1993) provided a model that assists in the classification of these attributes by creating four groups of target populations and further illustrating those classifications with examples of their likely constituents (p. 336).

1. Advantaged: positive and strong – the elderly, business, veterans, scientists
2. Contenders: negative and strong – the rich, big unions, minorities, cultural elites, moral majority
3. Dependents: positive and weak – children, mothers, disabled
4. Deviants: negative and weak – criminals, drug addicts, communists, flag burners, gangs

There are strong pressures for public officials to provide beneficial policy to powerful, positively constructed target populations and to devise punitive, punishment-oriented policy for negatively constructed groups (p. 335). Perhaps more importantly, social construction becomes embedded in policy as messages that are absorbed by citizens and affect their orientations and participation patterns. Policy sends messages about what government is supposed to do, which citizens are deserving (and which not), and what kinds of attitudes and participatory patterns are appropriate in a democratic society (p. 335).

Members of the "Advantaged" group are considered as deserving of beneficial rather than burdensome policies and also have a greater influence in deciding which policies are make it onto the agenda. Members of the "Deviants" group have far less power and policies which more forcefully attempt to alter their behavior patterns receive widespread support. Social

constructions can play a major role in not only the motivation of a particular group to participate but also the extent of how that participation is valued.

Griffin (2006) cites that the political system (in the UK) ensures that policy change is incremental, and that policies are "determined by bureaucrats and officials who are more responsive to the interests of major economic groups in society than to educationalists" (Evans, 1987, p. 224). I would concur with this and add to it the political influences that come directly from political parties and through influential (rich) private foundations and institutions.

Griffin (2006) reinforces the need to know who the policymakers are but I would add that it would more important to know the processes by which they arrive at their decisions and the key factors that influence their decision making. These competing factors could include, but are not limited to: policymakers own values and beliefs, political pressures (re-election), economic considerations, levels of autonomy, use (or not) of research, interest groups, and individual citizens.

It is not always clear that the kinds of evidence upon which policies may be formed can count as "research" at all: in other words, where does the concept of "research" begin and leave off? So it is important to consider the ambiguity of the concept of research as well as its public appropriation and ultimate commodification (Griffin, 2006, p. 124). Another perspective on this "research" question considers the selection of research and who is providing it. The traditional source for research in policymaking tended to favor government think tanks or research universities. This tradition has been infiltrated by a plethora of private institutions and foundations, funded by rich entrepreneurs, seeking to influence public policy. How do these foundations promote their agendas? How much influence do they have in directing policy? (DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009).

Over 20 years ago it could be said that public interest in politics could be described as stable or in decline (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1991, p. 607). The picture today is now very different. Neblo, Esterling, Kennedy, Lazer, and Sokhey (2010) found that the willingness to deliberate in the United States is much more widespread than expected and it is precisely those people less likely to participate in traditional partisan politics who are most interested in deliberative participation. They are attracted to such participation as a partial alternative to politics as usual (p. 566).

Leighninger (2009) provides an illustration of the changing political arena and the relationship between citizens and their elected representatives. Primarily the author argues that citizens today are more vocal, informed, and skeptical than in previous generations, and that they feel more entitled to the services and protection of the government but have less faith in government delivering on those promises (p. 2). It is further argued that official formats for public participation are inadequate. Most public meetings are structured in ways that preclude productive deliberation and do not give citizens a meaningful chance to be heard. The announcements of any meeting or public forum in a newspaper or city website are generally ineffective (p. 2).

It could be reasonably stated that the general public has never been in a better position to keep themselves informed of current political issues. With the proliferation of information sources now available there can surely be no excuse for not understanding issues and concerns of any public debate. With innumerable publications, websites, blogs, social media outlets, radio talk shows, multiple television news channels, and private foundation and philanthropic events the issue for citizens today may be that there is too much information.

So, how should the public get involved? By being involved, I do not mean just being consumer of information or posting political statements on twitter or Facebook. I mean active, informed, and deliberate participation in the policymaking process. Several models of participation provide varying degrees of accessibility, opportunity, and effectiveness for citizens' efforts to have a voice in the policy process. These will be discussed in chapter five.

ACF and RT3 in Georgia

The ACF theoretical construct will be applied to this study as the primary framework employed to answer the final section of the research questions.

2. From the point of view of the state and district officials charged with RT3 policy processes, to what extent were local communities informed/involved in this implementation process?
    a. What forums were established to inform/involve local communities?
    b. What was the value to the policy implementation process of either of these forums?
    c. What was the nature of the federal/state and state/local relationships?

Policy Cycles and Institutional Trends Framework

Framework Introduction

Tyack and Cuban (1995) situate their discussion on policy cycles and institutional trends within the conflicts that have arisen around education and education reform in the U.S. Based on an individuals or organizations particular perspective, the purpose of schools for American children can be different and often contradictory (Rothstein, Jacobsen, & Wilder, 2008; Cuban, 2003; Kliebard, 2003).

On an individual basis, parents wanted schools to: socialize their children to be obedient yet teach them to be critical thinkers, pass on academic knowledge yet teach practical skills, cultivate cooperation yet teach students to compete, stress basic skills yet encourage creativity and higher-order thinking (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 43).

The collective function of schools can also illustrate conflicts and contradictions. The purpose of education was to: assimilate newcomers or to affirm ethnic identity, perpetuate gender roles or challenge stereotypes, provide equal opportunity to the poor or preserve the advantage of the favored class (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 43).

Within these conflicts and contradictions is where Tyack and Cuban (1995) situated their discussion on policy cycles and institutional trends, and utilized terms such as 'policy talk', 'policy action', and 'actual implementation' to illustrate the relationships between elements in their framework.

The use of the 'policy cycles and institutional trends' framework facilitates an explanation of the nature of educational reforms and how some are eventually translated into institutional trends, as well as suggesting reasons why some reforms succeed and others fail.

The theoretical concepts behind the translation of an educational reform initiative into an institutional trend, and the factors impacting its eventual success or failure, is what will be applied to the design and implementation of RT3 in Georgia.

Framework Specifics

Tyack and Cuban (1995) proposed that two apparently contradictory beliefs can be reconciled dependent on what is meant in each case. The first is that educational evolution can be viewed as a more or less gradual linear progression while the second belief claims that

educational reforms occur in repetitious cycles. These beliefs can be viewed as consistent if 'policy talk' has cycled and 'institutional trends' have not.

The authors provided useful clarification on the terminology they are using within this framework. 'Policy talk' is described as the diagnosis of problems and advocacy of solutions and is an event that cycles frequently as just 'talk', and less frequently as 'policy action'. 'Policy action' is what occasionally follows from policy talk – the adoption of reforms through state, district, or local legislation. A much slower and more complex stage than the first two is the final stage in this process. 'Actual implementation' is where policy talk and policy action actually results in planned changes in schools (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 41).

For the purposes of this framework an institutional trend can be viewed as a behavior, practice, or process that started as a 'reform' but then became so embedded within the school context or culture that it is no longer viewed as a reform but as a standard operating procedure. Simple examples of this phenomenon in schools include subject specialist teachers, use of a whiteboard, grade level cohorts, and foreign language classes. Once established as part of the school framework reforms may be criticized, as were certification and graded classrooms and standardized testing, but rarely are they abolished (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 58).

Relationship of Policy Talk to Implementation

In developing their understanding of the relationship between policy talk and implementation Tyack and Cuban (1995) endeavored to identify key characteristics that were evident in reforms that survived the journey from 'policy talk' to 'institutional trend'. They focused on reforms where implementation proceeded relatively smoothly and lasted long enough to register as trends and highlighted the following characteristics.

Reforms that were ‘add-ons’ and that did not disturb the standard operating procedures of schools had their chances of lasting enhanced by this non-interference. These ‘add-on’ reforms tended not to be controversial to the lay people on school boards or legislatures. Programs were likely to persist if they produced influential constituencies interested in seeing them continue. Reforms also tended to last if they were required by law and easily monitored. Reforms proposed and implemented by teachers and administrators themselves were more likely to survive than innovations pushed by outsiders. Whether policy talk led to implementation very much depended on who was doing the talking (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 57-58).

Policy talk is an outcome from the conflicts and contradictions regarding the purpose or goals of school mentioned at the beginning of this section. When policy talk cycles it can appear that policy makers, legislators, and educators are involved in ‘reinventing the wheel’ over and over again resulting in the familiar claims of veteran teachers and school administrators that old reform proposals keep recycling as innovators reinvent them (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 41). This apparent recycling of the same old reforms can certainly induce feelings of futility and frustration as old problems are revisited over and over again but each time just with ‘new’ solutions. Tyack and Cuban (1995) contend that schools are changing all the time and that as a reform theme returns or recycles to the policy talk arena the school context in which that discourse occurs is different each time.

The key to understanding the relationship between institutional trends and policy cycles is to identify the elements that contribute to the translation of a reform initiative into an institutional trend. This understanding can be complicated by elements of variability and complexity in several aspects of any reform that can include but are not limited to: the size and scope of the reform, the groups impacted by the reform, the same reform impacting different

social groups in different ways, a time lag between policy talk and actual implementation, and the uneven penetration of reforms.

Policy cycles and institutional trends also do not operate in isolation but within the historical, political and social contexts in which they were formulated. Tyack and Cuban's (1995) framework of policy cycles, talk, action, and implementation and its elements of variability and complexity can be practically illustrated with a discussion of educational reform cycles instituted over the last century in the U.S.

Historical, Social, and Political Contexts of Policy Cycles and Institutional Trends

Through the early decades of the 20th century, the progressive movement was instrumental in reforming traditional schools, and educational policy, to become more centered on the needs and interests of the individual. Cuban (1992) identifies that the goals and functions of schools were expanded to include concern for a child's health, preparation for the workplace, family, and community. The policy talk through these early decades centered on how to teach the increasing number of students, many of whom, allegedly, were incapable of learning the academic curriculum (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 51).

With American entry into the Second World War, and the post-war public perception of a national security threat from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, educational policy began shifting from schools that were centered on the individual to schools that were centered on the needs of society (Marsh & Willis, 2007, p. 52). Math and Science were seen as the pivotal disciplines to counteract any military superiority the Soviets may have had. It was recognized that national policymakers translated their growing unease about security threats into a concern over the public school's diminished role in producing scientists, mathematicians, and engineers (Cuban, 1992, p. 43).

As Kaestle and Lodewick informs us (2007), through the fifties and into the sixties, America increasingly recognized education as a national priority, but traditions of local and state control over education were still very powerful (p. 21). This general belief in the benefits of a good education, coupled with the social movements of the 1960s, lead to another shift in the direction of educational policy.

Social movements through the 1960s and into the 1970s, which included the civil rights movement and women's movement, helped turn the focus of educational policy back towards the needs and interests of the individual rather than the entrance requirements of colleges or the skills demands of employers which were the driving force of the discipline-centered reforms. During this period the high school became an arena for achieving new forms of equality, participation, self-determination, and liberation from bureaucratic controls (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 53).

The public 'discovery' of poverty in American society in the 1960s set the stage for a series of federal programs designed to help disadvantaged Americans (Vinoskis, 2009, p. 11). One of the most important was the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1965. This established the Title I funding for disadvantaged students. Another crucial factor of the passage of this legislation was the fact that it signified the end of a lengthy stalemate in Congress in approving aid to schools (DeBray-Pelot, 2006, p. 6).

Federal policy through the 1960s and 70s continued to reflect this theme of 'equity' (Manna, 2011, p. 4). Following the passage of ESEA in 1965, further policies illustrated the theme of equity. The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, now known as Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) increased opportunities for students with disabilities to attend public schools.

By the late 1970s, the poor economy, coupled with the often times disorganized and disorderly classroom environment of the open classroom reforms, and the public negativity towards schools expressed by university scholars and researcher gave impetus to the climate of sociopolitical conservatism and the retrenchment of "back-to-basics" (Tanner, 1986, p. 8) as the next cycle in policy talk. This return to the basics meant a refocusing on what the real purpose of schools should be and pressure began mounting on schools for what then became known as "accountability" (Marsh & Willis, 2007, p. 56).

There had always been elements of democratic accountability within schools at a local level through the involvement of parents and school boards, but now a greater pressure for accountability was coming from society, and from politicians. The increased external pressure for accountability and the minimum competency testing contributed to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reporting, in the early 1980s, a decline in student abilities to think and apply their knowledge (Tanner, 1986, p. 9)

International competition for global industrial and technical markets grew increasingly intense through the late 1970s and early 1980s. Concerns about the relationship between the deteriorating American economy and its education system led the way for school reforms in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Vinoskis, 2009, p. 14). As in the 1950s, policy talk during the late 1970s and 1980s arose as a reaction to the period that preceded it with reformers decrying the mediocrity of academic performance (Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

The opening page of a report, by the National Commission on Excellence in Education (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), entitled "A Nation at Risk" with their condemnation of the US education system - "If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to

impose on America the mediocre performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war".

There followed an educational policy reform movement intent on achieving academic excellence with far greater accountability measures. Education issues became linked to economic productivity and anxieties about America's declining world position (DeBray-Pelot, 2006, p. 10).

With the push for academic excellence and greater accountability, talk about a national curriculum with standardized goals and standardized testing for all schools increased in frequency and intensity (Marsh & Willis, 2007). President George H. Bush promulgated a set of six national goals at a 1989 'Education Summit" in Charlottesville, Virginia. The goals were presented as 'America 2000', though state governors were to be the primary drivers of reforms.

The standards movement reached its high point following the 1989 Charlottesville governor' summit at which the six National Education Goals were adopted and the National Education Goals Panel was created to monitor progress towards achieving them (DeBray-Pelot, 2006, p. 27).

Smith and O'Day (1991) proposed the conceptual strategy of systemic school reform. This model was a response to the perceived fragmented reform efforts of both top-down or bottom-up models. It combined both models in a system-wide strategy for reform. States were deemed to be in the ideal position to provide coherent leadership and coordinate resources and support to the school-based reform efforts although some would argue that states did not have the capacity to lead the implementation of this standards reform. By the end of the 1990s, virtually all states had developed learning standards, and most had assessment systems and accountability policies designed to ensure mastery of the state's standards (Schwartz, 2009).

The number of national goals was increased to eight by President Bill Clinton as Goals 2000, which was a critically important move as it actually placed the concept of national standards into federal legislation. President Clinton was also responsible, at least in part, for moving both political parties along the path of standards-based education reform during the 1990s, something that was to shape the eventual success of No Child Left Behind as much as changes in congress itself (DeBray-Pelot, 2006, p. 26).

There has been concern that the federal government is having an unwarranted influence over state education systems. For instance, McDonnell (2005) argues that the federal government has indeed deliberately moved to direct state educational reforms through its policies but that has only been possible due to the frameworks and general policy directions that states were already taking. Elmore (2002) illustrates this point by describing the 'horse trade' where states would grant districts and schools greater flexibility in decision making in return for more accountability for academic performance.

It is interesting to note, notwithstanding the federal involvement in the America 2000 strategy, that throughout the development of the standards movement, the stress was on the role that local communities should play (Vinovskis, 2008). In creating drafts of the America 2000 legislation, legislators were keen for the President to promote a strategy that persuaded Americans to solve their education problems at the state and local levels thereby giving primary responsibility to local communities (Vinoskis, 2008, p. 44).

The idea of a national curriculum could go no further through in the early 1990's mainly because the Constitution of the United States does not allow for federal mandates with regard to state education policies, and the issue was not currently on state education agendas. So a

federally sanctioned, centralized national curriculum would, apparently, not be possible, at this time or any other time, without a constitutional amendment.

The No Child left Behind Act (NCLB), signed into law by President George W. Bush in January 2002, was the latest re-authorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965). NCLB initially required states to develop achievement standards in mathematics and language arts and to test students in grades 3 through 8 to measure students' annual yearly progress. Later science was added to the list of subjects to be tested, and standardized testing became required in almost all grades (Marsh & Willis, 2007, p. 63). The state governor of Vermont at that time characterized NCLB as a 'terribly flawed law that was going to be very expensive' (Kaestle & Lodewick, 2007, p. 160).

Perceived benefits of NCLB include a federal commitment to promoting substantive educational outcomes rather than just focusing on equality of educational opportunity, and the direct attention paid to the achievement of disadvantaged students (Manna & Ryan, 2011, p. 524). It could not have helped the states' cause of independence from federal influence when members of Congress and their staffs were dismayed when state education officials could not identify the characteristics of the students who were failing to achieve proficiency on their state tests (DeBray-Pelot, 2006, p. 47). NCLB also led state and local governments to improve their technical capabilities (primarily in the collection and use of data) as well as providing valuable 'political' cover for legislators to push through difficult but necessary policy and administrative changes such as legislation that promoted increased rigor in teacher evaluation systems or provided a framework for the identification/management of lower performing districts /schools (Manna, 2011).

Critics of NCLB noted that federal granting of state flexibility in content standards, choice of assessment, and the setting of achievement standards allowed for substantial variability in what states needed to achieve to meet NCLB requirements (Linn, 2005), conflicts where districts achieving high levels of performance under the state accountability system could be deemed as failing under NCLB (Linn, 2008), states lowering their own 'proficiency' scores to meet NCLB requirements (Rothstein, Jacobsen & Wilder, 2009), districts reporting decreased time in non-tested subjects (Goertz, 2009), and methodological concerns in assigning high-stakes to accountability systems (Elmore, 2004), and the actual 'cheating' on standardized tests (Atlanta Public Schools, District of Columbia,) as well as the widespread potential for cheating (Amrein-Beardsley, Berliner & Rideau, 2010).

The idea that no child should be left behind seemed reasonable, if not desirable. But, given the punitive accountability measures used and the extensive use of standardized testing as the only means by which school performances were evaluated, it had, and still does, come under intense criticism given its reported negative effects. Manna (2011) attributed the failings of NCLB, at least in some part, to the disconnect that existed between NCLB's theories of action and the policy world that implemented the law (p. 159).

Policy talk and policy action toward curriculum alignment, high stakes testing, and accountability was further reinforced by the common core state standards (CCSS). The National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers collaborated to create a set of common core state standards.

This state lead coalition is very clear about what these standards are. They…

> …define the knowledge and skills students should have within their K-12 education careers so that they will graduate high school able to succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing academic college courses and in workforce training programs (National

Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010)

While they are not, in any way, a part of NCLB the same high-stakes testing, accountability measures are being implemented to monitor the implementation of the CCSS.

The Obama administrations Race to the Top education reform initiative also calls for greater individual accountability at the building level (principals and teachers) with its requirement that states are building data systems that measure student growth and success, and inform teachers and principals about how they can improve instruction (U.S. Department of Education, 2010d). In Georgia, these data systems will be used to make certification, retention, promotion, and salary decisions (Georgia Department of Education, 2010b).

The U.S. education system has evolved through several policy cycles over the last century. An attempt to illustrate these cycles is provided by Tyack and Cuban's (1995) description of some major school reforms – in contrast to the liberal era focus on access and equality during the 1930s and 1960s, the politically conservative 1890s, 1950s and 1980s stressed a struggle for national survival in international competition where policy elites wanted to challenge the talented, stress academic basics, and press for greater coherence and discipline in education (p. 44/45).

The design and implementation of RT3 in Georgia, set within these historical, social, and political contexts, is a major reform in the current educational policy cycle. The theoretical concepts behind the translation of an educational reform initiative into an institutional trend, the factors impacting its eventual success or failure, and is what will be applied to this study of RT3 in Georgia. The policy cycles and institutional trends theoretical construct will be applied to this study as the primary framework employed to answer the following section of the research questions.

3. How does Race to the Top implementation in Georgia reinforce, or conflict with, previous cycles of educational reform initiatives?

    a. What similarities/differences with previous educational reforms exist in the RT3 design?

    b. What outcomes for this policy can be anticipated from these similarities and differences?

    c. What elements of RT3 design could impact classroom practices?

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Federal and state educational policies can have a major impact on the everyday lives of individuals within local school communities. For any public educational policy, which has a critical influence on how K-12 education is reformed, a framework for public deliberation and debate that allows all stakeholders to have a voice in educational policy decisions should be available. For stakeholders to participate in any democratic process they first have to have an understanding of how that process works. Thus, for policy actors within local school communities to participate in the educational policy process they too must have knowledge and understanding of how that process works.

Race to The Top (RT3) is a federal education reform initiative that has, and will continue to have, major influences on the US educational system and on our children's experiences at school. Georgia's successful bid for federal RT3 grants, and hence the adoption of that federal policy reform, originated at the state education department level, primarily from the governor's office with some involvement of local state educational agencies.

This study intends to clarify the RT3 educational policy processes in Georgia with the purpose of providing a transparent and open description of the organizations, policy actors, and decision making systems involved to a wider audience in general and local school communities in particular. This study also intends to identify the extent to which local communities were informed and involved in the RT3 policy processes, and propose a framework that aims to

provide for and encourage wider public participation in the discussion and debate of educational policies that impacts their local schools.

With the current federal Race to The Top (RT3) educational reform initiative, many states have been awarded hundreds of millions of dollars to implement a federal policy that puts even greater emphasis on raising student performance on standardized tests and even stricter accountability measures for school leaders and individual teachers. Elmore (2004) in discussing accountability under NCLB stated that stakes for teachers were diffused into the organization in which they work and as such the consequences were also diffused (p. 292). This broad system of accountability underwent a significant change with the federal requirements introduced by 'winning' states in the RT3 competitive grant process.

With the implementation of RT3, teachers and school leaders will be more directly accountable for student achievement and as such any consequences are less likely to be diffused. It remains to be seen if this policy of more direct accountability will result in a further narrowing of the curriculum than was produced by NCLB. The accountability model under NCLB made extensive use of standardized test data. With the promotion, retention, salary, and certification decisions of teachers and school leaders being directly tied to student achievement under RT3, albeit as part of a comprehensive evaluation system, it also remains to be seen how individual district/school/teacher policies and practices will be impacted by the 'higher stakes' associated with this new policy.

The RT3 initiative is a competitive grant that employs financial incentives to encourage states to bid for funds and therefore, as winners of the grant bidding process, implement the federal educational policy requirements of RT3 in their states. Given the current economic climate it was no surprise that so many states made applications and could potentially have

sacrificed complete autonomy and independence in their educational policy making decisions in favor of financial aid and federal oversight.

NCLB and RT3 are federal policies that have had and will have major influences on our education system and our children's experiences at school. These policies are classic examples of a top-down model of policy design and implementation. Georgia's decision to bid for the federal grant, and hence the agreement to work under the framework of this federal initiative, was taken at the state department level, primarily from the governor's office with some involvement of local school boards.

Our education system is providing for the future foundations of American society and citizenship by ensuring that our children receive the highest quality education possible. It also receives substantial public funding and its administration needs to be effective and efficient. A well informed public policy process can promote deliberations on the future of our educational system so that it will be productive, purposeful, and reflect the combined wishes of the citizenry of the US. For any educational policy, federal or state, that has such a dramatic influence on how K-12 education is reformed there should be some kind of framework for public debate that allows all stakeholders to have a voice.

A problem has arisen because, in the arena of educational reform, policy actors are emerging from an increasingly diverse array of institutions, foundations, organizations, interest groups, and advocacy coalitions (DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009). This increased level of complexity in the educational policy arena may require a higher level of understanding and expertise from policy actors to participate in the policy process. It is unclear whether policy actors at the local community level have the required knowledge of policy processes or systems to participate or even if forums for participation are available and/or adequate.

Research Purpose and Questions

Statement of the Problem

In this educational policy implementation research case study, I interviewed state education officials, and analyzed documentation, in order to understand how the federal education reform initiative of RT3 was translated into locally implemented educational policies in Georgia and the extent to which school local community members were informed and contributed to the RT3 policy implementation process.

Research Purposes

The primary purpose of this study is to clarify the RT3 educational policy processes in Georgia with the aim of providing a transparent and open description of the organizations, policy actors, and decision making systems involved to a wider audience in general and local school communities in particular. This study also intends to identify the extent to which local communities were informed and involved in the RT3 policy processes.

Supplemental goals for this study include an analysis of the implementation of Race to The Top with a view to identifying which policy elements may or may not result in changes in institutional trends, and the proposal of a deliberation framework that aims to provide for and encourage wider public participation in the discussion and debate of educational policies that impact local schools and communities.

In order to achieve the purpose of this study, the following research questions provide the focus for data collection and analyses. The two primary research questions and the one supplemental research question are illustrated in the following tables. Each key research question is listed with additional sub-questions as well as the theoretical framework that will be employed as the prime means for conducting the data analysis of each research question. The

three theoretical frameworks are briefly described later in this chapter with a more extensive review following in chapter two.

Primary Research Questions with Analytic Frameworks

1. How did the Governor's Office of Georgia manage the communication of macro-level expectations/requirements of RT3 policy design with the micro-level conditions of RT3 policy implementation?
    a. What structures were established to manage the policy processes?
    b. What were the stages of development and implementation for RT3?
    c. What were the roles and contributions of departmental policy actors?
    d. What were the roles and contributions of policy actors external to the department?

Framework: Implementation Regime Framework

2. From the point of view of the state and district officials charged with RT3 policy processes, to what extent were local communities informed/involved in this implementation process?
    a. What forums were established to inform/involve local communities?
    b. What was the value to the policy implementation process of either of these forums?
    c. What was the nature of the federal/state and state/local relationships?

Framework: Advocacy Coalition Framework

Supplemental Research Question with Analytic Framework

3. How does Race to the Top implementation in Georgia reinforce, or conflict with, previous cycles of educational reform initiatives?

a. What similarities/differences with previous educational reforms exist in the RT3 design?

b. What outcomes for this policy can be anticipated from these similarities and differences?

c. What elements of RT3 design could impact classroom practices?

Framework: Policy Cycles and Institutional Trends

Research Design and Rationale

Case Study Research

Using case study methodology, this research details the policy activities as Georgia implements the federal Race to the Top (RT3) educational reform initiative to identify organizational structures, policy actors, and decision making processes. Three criteria identify why a case study methodology fits this research project; when 'how' or 'why' questions are being asked in an explanatory case study, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context (Yin, 2009). Although the 'how' and 'why' questions will provide the main thrust of questioning in developing an explanation of this phenomenon, 'what' 'who' and 'where questions will be used to add more descriptive detail and inform the developing theories.

Using Yin's (2009) classification of case studies this research can be identified as a single-case (holistic) design as the implementation of RT3 in Georgia will be considered in its totality. Although multi-case studies are often used by public policy researchers (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993; Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993) to explain policy processes and develop

conceptual frameworks, using a single-case methodology for this study allows for a greater depth of analysis and understanding of the particular context in which this policy was implemented.

Interviews and Document Analysis

The data collection was sourced from participant interviews, document analyses, and organizational online websites as multiple means of data development can contribute to research trustworthiness and verisimilitude, or sense of authority (Glesne, 2011, p. 48). Participants were identified in two stages. First, through preliminary document analysis, informants that were relevant to the study and held essential attributes (Jones, 2002) based on their strategic position in the implementation process were identified. Secondly, those key informants were asked during interview to identify other relevant policy actors by asking, as Patton (2002) explains, questions such as 'who knows a lot about…?' By asking about other key actors in this way, data-rich sources of information are identified and the data 'snowball' gets bigger as more informants are included.

Each type of data on their own did not provide the full picture of the policy processes involved in this research study. The documentation provided visual, schematic and textual, evidence of each stage of the policy implementation and reflected the inputs and outputs of their decision making.

The interviews provided an insight into the deliberations, discussions, conflicts, and compromises behind those decisions and documents. I used these two forms of data recording in a practice called "triangulation" or "crystallization" (Glesne, 2011, p. 47) of the data. Using multiple methods for data recording provides for a verification of the analysis of the data collected. It is a form of cross-checking. It is useful for two reasons. The researcher's

interpretation of the data may be mistaken or participants actions may not match what they say and researchers are trying to reconcile the inconsistencies (Glesne, 2011, p. 47).

I used semi-structured interviews i.e. interviews that have an open-ended quality about them with the interview taking shape as it progresses (Wolcott, 2008, p. 56) to ensure consistency across all interviews but allowed for specific exploration relevant to the participants position in the organizational structure (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). I explored the participants role in this particular policy making process. I was able to examine the discussions and debates in an effort to understand the influences, constraints, conflicts and collaborations involved in creating and implementing the final policy. I engaged in interviews with key personnel in order to identify and clarify the various perspectives, values, and beliefs that the participants brought to the policymaking arena. In order to minimize the risk, all interviews were voluntary. Participants had the opportunity to not respond to interview questions they deem 'risky', participants will have an opportunity to review a draft of the case study and may withdraw their participation at any time.

Visual data, documents, artifacts, and other unobtrusive measures provided both historical and contextual dimensions to my observations and interviews. They enriched what I saw and heard by supporting, expanding, and challenging my portrayals and perceptions. My understanding of the phenomenon in my research grew as I made use of the documents and artifacts that were a major part of this research study.

The documentation and artifacts raised questions for interview, provided a rich description of the phenomenon, allowed for pattern and content analysis, and created opportunities for general hypotheses (adapted from Glesne, 2011, p. 89). These documents

included such items as minutes to meetings, policy briefs, departmental memos and presentations, brochures, and official publications.

During the study I kept a detailed researcher's journal in which I recorded the date, time place, and context of all events (significant or not), thoughts, concerns, ideas, and aha! moments. Once I had analyzed all the data using my theoretical frameworks and research questions, my interpretation of the data were written up. I was aware that as the research was conducted new informants may have been identified and further interviews conducted. Once this study is complete, I will send my analysis to the participants and schedule a member check interview with each individual to ascertain the accuracy of my analysis. I am aware that their feedback may require a collection of more data and/or a revision of my analysis.

Interview Participants and Sites

I interviewed state and district officials that were involved in the implementation of Race to the Top (RT3) in Georgia. These participants were selected based on their position in the organizational structure of the Georgia Department of Education, the related state educational agencies, and the task forces charged with the implementation of specific sections of RT3. See Appendix C for the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Consent Form.

The Georgia Department of Education is the governmental organization responsible for overseeing all aspects of K-12 education on Georgia. The department has, under its remit, the governance of over 116,000 K-12 educators and over 1.6 million students statewide.

The Governor's Office for Student Achievement is an agency that provides educational information to stakeholders across Georgia. It focuses on all levels of education, from pre-kindergarten centers to higher education institutions. Parents, educators, business leaders, and

community activists alike are able to use this information in an effort to help support and improve education statewide.

Georgia was successful in its Race to The Top grant application and was awarded $400 million to implement its Race to the Top plan. Georgia's application was prepared through a partnership between the Governor's Office, the Georgia Department of Education, the Governor's Office of Student Achievement, and seven other state education agencies. The State Board of Education has direct accountability for the grant. Georgia's Department of Education is the lead organization for Race to the Top in Georgia.

The primary site for the research study was the Georgia Department of Education but visits were also needed to be made to the Governor's Office of Student Achievement. These two sites host the key members of the grant application partnership. As such, all the major policy processes and stages were conducted at or between these two venues. Access to these sites was initiated through existing and long-standing professional contacts between the two departments and the Education Administration and Policy Department at the University of Georgia.

The RT3 Communications Director has designed the RT3 website for Georgia (www.gadoe.org/Race-to-the-Top). This website provides an overview of Race to The Top as well as the 'scopes of work' for the state of Georgia and for the 26 partner districts. It shares information on seven initiatives associated with RT3 in Georgia: Great Teachers and Leaders, Data Systems to Support Instruction, Standards and Assessments, Turning Around Lowest Achieving Schools, Improving early Outcomes, Innovations Fund, and the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) initiative. News updates, links to partnership organizations, and contact information is also provided on this public website.

Data Analysis

As this research study intended to develop a deep understanding of the policy design and implementation of a federal education reform policy across several levels of government, a single-case (holistic) design was utilized.

Data analyses focused on passages and text from interviews and documents related to the implementation of RT3 in Georgia. Text was coded for emerging themes with particular attention paid to descriptions related to the relationship of RT3 with previous policy cycles, the reconciliation of macro-level policy expectations with micro-level implementation conditions, and the nature of federal/state and state/local relationships.

The data analyses were conducted simultaneously with the interview process. Following each interview, data was categorized and coded. As the process continued categories and codes were added or deleted to reflect the data as it was compiled. Analyses was conducted on both interview and document data. The coding system initially chunked the data into three broad categories that primarily reflected the three main areas of focus from the research questions. Further categories and sub-categories will be added as the quantity and quality of data directs. The three initial broad categories were as follows:

1. The similarities/differences of RT3 design with previous models/cycles of education reform
2. The organization and structures employed for RT3 implementation in Georgia
3. The nature of coalitions/communications across levels of government

Analytic Framework

An analytic framework was employed to systematically analyze data from interviews and documents. The three theoretical lenses that inform this study will provide the framework for the

analyses. The initial analytic framework, which was subjected to revision as new data was revealed, along with relevant operational questions are as follows:

1. Characteristics of RT3 policy design: What elements are similar/different to previous reforms? What outcomes can be predicted?
2. Impact of RT3 on local schools: How have schools been affected? What practices have been adopted in local schools? How have the reforms been viewed? Which aspects are likely to remain long term practices?
3. Organizational structure of implementation: Who were the significant policy actors? What roles did they play? How were participants selected and organized?
4. Policy processes instituted: What were the stages of implementation? What forums were established for consultation? How was communication managed?
5. Nature of coalitions: How did states translate federal requirements into local implementation? What were the perceptions of federal/state and state/local relationships? What was the balance of cooperation and conflict?
6. Public information and involvement: How informed/involved were district and school personnel? What opportunities were created for consultation? Was public input, if any, influential in the decision-making processes?

Data Coding

By employing the analytic framework, data was initially coded into categories and then connecting strategies were used to develop and build emerging themes. In qualitative research the goal of coding is not to count things but to 'fracture' the data (Strauss, 1987, p. 29) and rearrange them into categories that facilitate comparison between things in the same category and that aid in the development of theoretical concepts.

The first stage of coding was to use ‘organizational’ categories. Organizational categories function primarily as ‘bins’ for sorting the data for further analysis (Maxwell, 2005, p. 97). This initial filtering of data acted as a way of providing general headings or subject areas rather than a deep analysis. This occurred at the next stage of coding – substantive and/or theoretical categories.

Substantive categories are primarily descriptive in a broad sense that includes descriptions of participant’s concepts and beliefs while theoretical categories place the coded data into a more theoretical or abstract framework (Maxwell, 2005, p. 97). Following this second stage of coding connecting strategies between data were employed.

Connecting strategies attempts to understand the data in context without the ‘fracturing’ into segments, but another level of connection, within and between categories and themes, can also be seen as a connecting step in analysis (Dey, 1993). This alternative connection of data between and within categories is necessary to build theory (Maxwell, 2005, p. 98).

A set of primary codes were identified and are listed below. As further data was collected and analyzed, the coding was amended to reflect the new information that was analyzed. Initial codes were as follows:

> nature of coalition; nature of federal/state relationship; nature of state/local relationship; organizational norm;, organizational rules; common ground between participants; coalitional activity; implementation communication (effective/non-effective); flexibility or not of locals; knowledge of origination; local attitudes; local sense making; perceptions of ability for input.

Theoretical Frameworks

Three independent, but complementary theoretical frameworks provided appropriate lenses with which to analyze this study. The Implementation Regime Framework, Advocacy Coalition Framework, and Policy Cycles and Institutional Trends Framework were introduced in chapter one and discussed in detail in chapter two.

Ethical and Political Issues

There are no serious or major ethical issues to consider. There may be a slight possibility of political issues arising from the interviews dependent on what is revealed about any political influences involved in the different stages of the policy process. The confidentiality of the participants will be part of the IRB application process and member check interviews will identify any revealing, incorrect, or politically sensitive material.

Document Analysis

Beyond the interview data, this research draws on additional sources of data to inform the data analysis process. Documents used for analysis include but are not limited to:

1. U.S. Department of Education. (2010b). *Race to the Top assessment program guidance and frequently asked questions.* Retrieved November 13, 2011 from http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/faq.pdf
2. Duncan, A. (2010). Overview information; Race to the Top Fund Assessment Program; notice inviting application for new awards for fiscal year (FY) 2010. *Federal Register*, *75*(68), 18171-18185. Retrieved November 3, 2010 from http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2010-04-09/pdf/2010-8176.pdf
3. The White House Office of the Press Secretary. (2009). *Fact sheet: Race to the Top*. Retrieved November 13, 2011 from http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-

office/fact-sheet-race-top

These documents outline the Race to the Top educational policy objectives of the Obama administration, provides a set of selection criteria for consortia bidding for federal funds to create assessments for Race to the Top, provides guidance on frequently asked questions with regards to the bidding process, and outlines key goals of the program for the public. Georgia signed up with the two successful bidding consortia and will select one when they have finalized their systems.

4. U.S. Department of Education. (2010c). *Race to the Top: Appendix B – Scoring rubric*. Retrieved November 13, 2011 from http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/scoringrubric.pdf

5. U.S. Department of Education. (2010d). *Race to the Top executive summary*. Retrieved November 13, 2011 from http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/executive-summary.pdf

This document provides a summary of the Race to the Top educational policy objectives of the Obama administration. It sets out the four key areas for educational reform and provides clear guidance on what states will need to put in their application for funds if they are to be successful in their bid.

6 Georgia Department of Education. (2010a). *Georgia's Race to the Top application*. Retrieved November 13, 2011 from http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/phase1-applications/georgia.pdf

7. Georgia Department of Education. (2010b). *Georgia Race To The Top assurances* (CFDA No. 84.395a). Retrieved November 13, 2011 from http://scsc.georgia.gov/sites/scsc.georgia.gov/files/related_files/site_page/RT3%2

0FY%2014%20Grants%20to%20LEAs%20and%20RESAs-SLOs%20Assurances.pdf

These documents comprise Georgia's Race to the Top application. They details the processes, systems, and operations, and organizations that Georgia will put in place in order to meet all the criteria set out in the federal governments Race to the Top executive summary and signed assurances from the Governor, State Superintendent and State School Board Chair.

8. Common Core State Standards. (2010a) *About the standards*. Retrieved November 13, 2011 from http://www.corestandards.org/about-the-standards

9. Common Core State Standards. (2010b). *About the standards: Myths and facts*. Retrieved November 13, 2011 from http://www.corestandards.org/about-the-standards/myths-vs-facts

These documents give the details of the new common core standards currently adopted by over 40 states (Georgia included).The standards are linked to Race to the Top through the Race to the Top assessment created to assess these standards. Georgia was successful in their bid for Race to the Top funding and as a consequence are mandated to use the assessments that are linked to these common core standards. Document e is intended to inform the general public about the standards and clarify any misunderstandings regarding them.

10. Georgia Department of Education. (2010c). *Georgia's Race to the Top (RT3) plan*. Retrieved November 13, 2011 from http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/DMGetDocument.aspx/RT3%20Plan%20Overview.pdf?p=6CC6799F8C1371F669389230EDB1B9C428F0BF0F66C5721F12F34D8771DEFD77&Type=D

11. Georgia Department of Education. (2011, September). *Georgia's Race to the Top monthly newsletter*. Retrieved November 13, 2011 from http://archive.constantcontact.com/fs011/1105202030182/archive/1107401181098.html

12. Link that provides for members of the public to sign up for newsletter emails, retrieved November 13, 2011 from http://visitor.r20.constantcontact.com/manage/optin/ea?v=001l3cLBhqUqd-PhdQ9nZ8-Eg%3D%3D

13. Georgia Department of Education. (2011). *Race to the Top (RT3) June 2011 committee overview final*. Retrieved November 13, 2011 from http://gadoe.org/RT3.aspx

These documents/artifacts are available on Georgia's Department of Education website and provided as a source of information to the local community. Document k is a publicly available power point detailing the work and objectives of Georgia's Race to the Top Steering Committee.

14. Council of Chief State School Officers. (n.d.). *Principles and processes for state leadership on next-generation accountability systems*. Retrieved November 13, 2011 from http://www.ccsso.org/Resources/Publications/Principles_and_Processes_for_State_Leadership_on_Next-Generation_Accountability_Systems.html

15. Council of Chief State School Officers. (2011, June). *Roadmap for next-generation state accountability systems* (Working Draft, 1st ed.). Retrieved November 13, 2011 from

http://www.ccsso.org/Resources/Publications/Roadmap_for_Next-Generation_State_Accountability_Principles.html

16. U.S. Department of Education. (2010a). A blueprint for reform: The reauthorization of the elementary and secondary education act. Retrieved November 13, 2011 from http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/blueprint/blueprint.pdf

Preliminary Patterns from Document Analysis

Preliminary analysis of the initial documents selected for this project identifies the legislative, political, and economic structures that were used to promote the implementation of federal education policies in states generally and in Georgia schools in particular.

Documents c, d, and e set the framework for the RT3 federal educational policy initiative. They provided the basic facts, purposes, and goals of RT3 to the general public (c), an executive summary for educational organizations/foundations and departments of education (d), and a very specific set of criteria for bidding states to adhere to if they wished to be successful in receiving federal funds for the initiative (e). These documents promised states a sizeable amount of federal funding (Georgia received $400 million) if they agreed to comply with the specific set of requirements.

These requirements gave states the opportunity to bid for federal funds. States were not mandated to apply. But, this situation needs to be considered in the context of the current economic climate where state revenues have declined and remain at much lower levels than in previous years. This is further compounded by the federal government assertion that states not complying with RT3 program requirements will be responsible for the design, creation,

implementation and ensuing costs of their own set of standards together with an assessment system that must be aligned with the college and career ready standards of the Common Core.

Documents h and i detail the content of the Common Core State Standards while documents a, and b detail the specifics of standardized test requirements aligned to those standards.

The combination of these documents describe a situation where states may feel compelled, due to the economic climate, to bid for the federal funds attached to RT3 in order to meet the costs of adopting the Common Core State Standards with the associated, nationally-standardized testing system or face the prospect of having to design, and implement an equitable system of standards and assessments at their own cost.

Georgia's successful application for RT3 is detailed in documents f, and g. Other Georgia Department of Education documents, which are designed to provide information to district and building level personnel and members of local communities, include documents j, k, l, and m.

The combination of these documents set up an educational policy implementation process where financial decision may have played a large part in decisions regarding the direction of state educational policy.

The current educational policy making landscape, where increased federal involvement appears to be subsuming power from local communities, is further compounded by the last three documents I have currently selected for this project. Documents n, and o both detail how the Council of Chief State School Officers wish to go forward with the next-generation of education accountability systems. Their design reinforces the goals and purposes of RT3, the Common Core Standards and its associated standardized tests. Document p, which is the Obama administration's Blueprint for the re-authorization of ESEA, reiterates the same specific

educational goals as RT3. In analyzing these documents it is important to remember Prior's (2008) advice that documents frequently contain pictures, diagrams, and emblems but could also include sound (p. 5).

Risks and Benefits

The primary benefit to the participants will be their service to the profession. The information they provide will improve knowledge and understanding of the educational policy processes to policymakers and other stakeholders in the educational field. The primary benefit to society is the clarification of the educational policy process and the identification of opportunities for societal participation in that process. Benefits specifically include the clarification of the RT3 educational policy implementation processes in Georgia with transparent and open descriptions of the organizations, policy actors, and decision making processes involved being provided to a wider audience in general and local communities in particular. This study will also identify the extent to which local communities were informed and involved in this policy implementation, and propose a framework that provides for and encourages future public discussion and debate in the educational policy arena.

The participants in this study are all public figures who are selected for their particular roles in state educational policymaking. In participating in this study they are reasonably operating in their public and professional function as part of the race to the Top initiative. Therefore, the concern of anonymity is a minor one.

Validity and Reliability

To maximize the validity of this research the following elements, derived from Glesne (2011, p. 49), have been built into the study.

- Review of the theoretical and methodological literature conducted

- Time in the field is maximized for data collection and review of methods
- Interview data collection is supported by a variety of documentation
- Final member checks are scheduled
- Write up of analysis is checked with the committee
- Key informants have been identified and selected
- Political dilemmas are anticipated and planned for

Internal validity comes from the rigor of the data collection and analyses processes and the replication of the interview protocol (Yin, 2009). External validity is reflected in the generalizability of the findings outside of this study but within the domains to which they are related.

Reliability is evident in that a researcher using the same methodology would return the same conclusions. For this study, a consistent interview protocol, defined sites of data collection, and an analytical framework for data analysis provides high levels of reliability.

Reflexivity

A researcher can bring their own experiences, values, and possibly assumptions to a study. That the researcher becomes a part of what he/she is studying is what Hammersley and Atkinson (1995, p. 16) called 'reflexivity'. As Maxwell suggests (2005, p. 102), you can try to minimize your influence by not asking leading questions but the more important issue is that you understand how you are influencing the informant and how this affects your inferences. This approach relates to data collection though interview or document analysis.

Roulston (2010, p. 118) informs us that experienced researchers cannot agree on the nature and practices of reflexivity and that novice researchers may be tempted to ignore the

concept. This researcher intends to follow her advice and allow an awareness of the concept to guard against presuppositions and assumptions regarding the data and informants in this study.

Representation

The audience for this research study is primarily my dissertation committee. But, the hope is that the field of educational policy, in which the federal government is taking an ever increasing role in making policy, will benefit from a better understanding of how federal policies are reconciled with state policies and subsequently translated into locally implemented educational reforms.

There is also the hope that the role of minor actors in the educational policy making process such as administrators, teachers, parents, and students are afforded greater understanding and participation in the design and implementation of those policies, given the crucial role they have in their success or failure of those policies. Their participation may well depend on the knowledge and understanding of the processes involved in educational policy implementation. This paper hopes to address, for these minor actors, any lack of information in that regard.

Limitations of the Research

The research has identifiable limitations as to its generalizability. The research focus is on a time-limited federal education reform initiative that is funded by a competitive grant process. The findings will only apply to states that have similar characteristics to Georgia and have organizational structures and systems in place that would allow for a fast track implementation of a major educational reform.

In addition, policymakers and legislators may find some themes and patterns in the data that could be transferred to other public policies or arenas of public administration. But, given

the variability in state and local infrastructures across the country, any opportunities for this is unlikely. A framework for democratic public deliberation and debate may be identified but variables of time, money, and civic response in municipal and urban settings may make it difficult to replicate.

Chapter Summary

In 2015, at the end of the implementation of RT3, Georgia will have participated in its most expansive reform of education ever. The $400 million grant from the federal government allowed the state to implement reforms that it was already planning to make. The federal funding just provided the means to allow the reforms to occur at a faster pace and larger scale than would otherwise have been possible. The success, or otherwise, of the reforms with respect to its prime motivating factor, student achievement, will not be known for some time. The conceptual frameworks used in this research to analyze the implementation processes will perhaps help clarify the reasons behind the outcome of this reform initiative whatever those outcomes may be.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH DATA AND FINDINGS

Introduction

The primary purpose of this study was to clarify the RT3 educational policy processes in Georgia with the aim of providing a transparent and open description of the organizations, policy actors, and decision making systems involved to a wider audience in general and local school communities in particular. This study also intended to identify the extent to which local communities were informed and involved in the RT3 policy processes.

Supplemental goals for this study included an analysis of the implementation of Race to The Top with a view to identifying which policy elements may or may not result in changes in institutional trends, and the proposal of a deliberation framework that aims to provide for and encourage wider public participation in the discussion and debate of educational policies that impact local schools and communities.

The analyses will identify themes and patterns that emerge from the data and allow for initial theories to be proposed regarding contemporary educational policymaking, policy design, the roles of policy actors in decision making, and the future involvement of local communities in the education of their children.

Chapter Overview

The chapter opens with the research questions, followed by a brief overview of Race to the Top in Georgia, the rationale for the study, and the data sources. Four data sets are then presented for analyses. The four sets are categorized as follows:

1. An overview of the actual, and proposed, timelines of political, organizational, and community activities associated with the implementation of RT3 in Georgia.
2. A chart that illustrates the various partnership organizations, state agencies, task forces, and RT3 policy piloting districts that have been employed, created, or volunteered to implement RT3.
3. A decision making database that illustrates what decisions were/will be made, who the decision makers are, and how local communities were involved and/or informed.
4. The first two annual reports from Georgia's Department of Education to the U.S. Department of Education.

The chapter continues with the application of the three theoretical constructs employed as frameworks for analysis of the key research questions below.

1. How did the Governor's Office of Georgia manage the communication of macro-level expectations/requirements of RT3 policy design with the micro-level conditions of RT3 policy implementation?
    a. What structures were established to manage the policy processes?
    b. What were the stages of development and implementation for RT3?
    c. What were the roles and contributions of departmental policy actors?
    d. What were the roles and contributions of policy actors external to the department?

Framework: Implementation Regime Framework of Stoker (1989)

2. From the point of view of the state and district officials charged with RT3 policy processes, to what extent were local communities informed/involved in this implementation process?
    a. What forums were established to inform/involve local communities?
    b. What was the value to the policy implementation process of either of these forums?
    c. What was the nature of the federal/state and state/local relationships?

Framework: Advocacy Coalition Framework of Sabatier (2007)

3. How does Race to the Top implementation in Georgia reinforce, or conflict with, previous cycles of educational reform initiatives?
    a. What similarities/differences with previous educational reforms exist in the RT3 design?
    b. What outcomes for this policy can be anticipated from these similarities and differences?
    c. What elements of RT3 design could impact classroom practices?

Framework: Policy Cycles and Institutional Trends of Tyack & Cuban (1995)

This chapter concludes with the findings from the four data sets, the three analytical frameworks, and identifies some of the barriers to public participation. One of the supplemental goals of this research study was the proposal of a deliberation framework that aims to provide for and encourage wider public participation in the discussion and debate of educational policies that impact local schools and communities. A discussion of theoretical models of public participation, and the presentation of a framework, that the Georgia Department of Education

may have considered, for increasing public deliberation and debate in this particular education reform initiative is provided in the concluding chapter.

Race to the Top in Georgia: An Overview

In the Fall of 2009, as part of The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act 2009, the Obama administration promoted a competition amongst states to bid for over $4 billion of federal grants. The educational grants were to be awarded under their "Race to the Top" (RT3) initiative. This initiative was intended to support new approaches to school improvement. The funds were to be made available in the form of competitive grants to encourage and reward states that were creating conditions for education innovation and reform, specifically implementing comprehensive plans in four key education reform areas:

1. Recruiting, preparing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals, especially in districts and schools where they are needed most.
2. Adopting standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace and to compete in the global economy.
3. Building data systems that measure student growth and success, and inform teachers and principals about how they can improve instruction.
4. Turning around the lowest-achieving schools.

Georgia was successful in its grant application and was awarded $400 million to implement its Race to the Top plan. Georgia's application was prepared through a partnership involving the Governor's Office, the Georgia Department of Education, the Governor's Office of Student Achievement, and education stakeholders. The State Board of Education has direct accountability for the grant. Georgia is partnering with 26 school systems around the state. Half

of the awarded funds will remain at the state level and half will go directly to partnering local education authorities (LEAs)/school districts via their Title I formula. All funds are to be used to implement Georgia's RT3 plan.

Race to the Top (RT3) in Georgia: Rationale for the Study

Georgia's successful proposal for federal RT3 grants, and hence the adoption of these federal policies, originated at state department level, primarily from the governor's office with some involvement of local school boards. Current federal and state educational policies have a major impact on the lives of individuals who, it could be argued, have the least influence and the least input in the process – the parents, students, teachers, and other members of the local school community. I argue that for any public educational policy, which has a critical influence on how K-12 education is reformed, there should be some framework for public deliberation and debate, following a democratic process, which will allow all stakeholders to have a voice.

Race to the Top (RT3) in Georgia: Data Sources

Data Sources: Informants and Document Analysis

Following preliminary document analysis, interview participants were identified based on their formal positions and their role in the implementation process of Georgia's RT3 reform program. These preliminary findings detail the data collected from semi-structured interviews with two government officials. One informant worked at the Governor's Office for Student Achievement during the time that Georgia's application for RT3 funds was being assembled and submitted. The second official holds the federally funded position of Race to The Top Director for Georgia.

The interview conducted with Georgia's RT3 Director was convened with the purpose of identifying answers to the two research questions above. This was intended as a preliminary

interview designed to gather a foundational knowledge of RT3s implementation in Georgia. After an analysis of this interview data, follow up interviews will be scheduled with the RT3 Director and the RT3 implementation teams to provide opportunities for more in depth research on specific aspects of the RT3 implementation process and identify how and when local communities were involved. The interview conducted with the state official from the Governor's Office for Student Achievement provided initial background information of the Governor's Office of Georgia's application proposal. The following analyses are presentations of data from an interview with the Georgia RT3 Director together with the supporting documentary evidence previously listed. Several future interviews were conducted with state and district officials as well as a more comprehensive search of a wider scope of documentary evidence.

Beyond the interview data, this research draws on additional sources of data to inform the data analysis process. Documents used for analysis include but are not limited to: the U.S. Department of Education's RT3 Executive Summary (U.S. Department of Education, 2010d), the federal government's Notice Inviting Applications for RT3 Assessment Program (Duncan, 2010), Georgia's RT3 Application (Georgia Department of Education, 2010b), RT3 Assessment Program Frequently Asked Questions (RTTGFAQ, 2010), and Georgia's RT3 Scopes of Work (SOW) that were produced as part of the application process. In addition to these data, the Georgia RT3 official website www.rt3ga.com provided further documentary evidence.

Analysis of Group Activities

Figure 1 provides an overview of the proposed and actual timelines of key political, organizational, and community activities associated with the implementation of RT3 in Georgia. The timeline of implementation is divided into three sections to allow for clearer interpretation of

the significant events that were occurring across several layers of government during the implementation of RT3 in Georgia.

Data Set 1: RT3 Georgia - Overview of Timelines

Year	Major Federal and State Political Activities	Georgia RT3 Planning and Implementation Activities	Local Community Activities
2009	**July 2009:** President Obama announces $4.35 Billion RT3 Initiative **Nov 2009:** Notice Inviting Applications for state grant bids is posted by the federal government	**August 2009:** Georgia Governor Perdue instigates RT3 application bid **November 2009:** RT3 Guidelines Notice Inviting Applications issued	
2010	**May 2010:** Georgia Governor Perdue submits RT3 Application **August 2010**: RT3 "Winners" announced **November 2010:** Nathan deal elected as new Governor of Georgia	**Fall 2010/Spring 2011:** Georgia implementation of RT3 'stalls' as new Governor and new State Superintendent are appointed, settle into new jobs, and restructure their organizations	
2011	**January 2011:** John Barge appointed as new State Superintendent for Schools in Georgia	**Spring/Summer 2011:** Amended RT3 "Scope of Work" for Georgia implemented	Local Community members active in RT3 Task forces
2012		**January 2012:** 5 month pilot study of Georgia's RT3 policies implemented in 26 partnership school districts begins **Summer 2012:** Review of 26 District Pilot Study **August 2012:** Staggered Implementation of RT3 policies across pilot districts and 'volunteer' districts begins	**January-May 2012:** 26 of 186 school districts active in piloting RT3 policies **April 2012:** Local Community access official RT3 website **Summer 2012:** Task Forces review data
2013		**August 2013:** Implementation of RT3 policies across further 'volunteer' districts continues	
2014	**August 2014:** All RT3 states to fully implement all RT3 policies combined with Common Core State Standards (CCSS)and common assessments matched to CCSS	**August 2014:** Implementation of RT3 policies across all remaining Georgia districts together with full implementation of CCSS and the associated common core assessments mandatory for school year 2014-2015	All local school communities participating in all RT3 policy implementation activities

Figure 1. RT3 Georgia – Timeline of events

The time limits, of the entire implementation process, are bounded at the beginning by the July 2009 announcement by President Obama, that launched the RT3 initiative, and at the

end by the August 2014 'absolute' deadline where all RT3 grant winning states have to have fully implemented all RT3 policies and combined them with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and the common assessments that were designed by either the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career (PARCC) or the Smarter Balance group that are aligned to the CCSS. For Georgia, given their selection of the PARCC assessment group, this means fully implementing the RT3 policies, and ensuring that the policies are alignment with the Georgia Common Core Performance Standards (GCCPS) and the associated assessments created by PARCC. An analysis of the three categories of timeline now follows.

Major federal and state activities. Apart from the President's announcement of the RT3 initiative and the deadline for implementation there are five other significant activities in this category. The first is the November 2009 posting of the federal governments Notice Inviting Applications. This document sets out the detailed requirements and scoring rubrics for States that wish to submit bids for these competitive grants. The initial deadline for the submission of applications was March 2010. This was later extended to May 2010 following protests from states regarding the lack of time available in which to complete a comprehensive application.

The second significant activity was the May 2010 submission of Georgia's grant application by Governor Perdue. This activity is significant as it illustrates: Georgia's clear intent to meet the directives and goals of the RT3 education reform; that Georgia was able to complete its successful application in the time available; and, less obviously, that the time constraint may not have allowed for widespread consultation during the construction of the application bid.

The third major activity in this category was the announcement of the RT3 'winning' bids in August 2010. The announcement of Georgia receiving a $400 million grant initiated a flurry

of activities at the Governor's Office and the State department of Education. The activities were all directed to setting up the infrastructure and organizational systems to begin the scope of work that Georgia agreed to implement in its application.

Activities four and five in this category created a stumbling block for these initial preparations. The appointment of the new Governor (Deal) in November 2010, and a new State Superintendent (Barge) in January 2011 caused a major time delay in the implementation timetable of RT3. Given their relatively prominent positions on the RT3 organizational structure and their desire to set up their new staffing, communications, and departmental systems, many scheduled RT3 activities had to be placed on hold. This is significant due to the 'end' deadline being an immovable target and subsequently around 6 months were 'lost' in the implementation timetable.

The most immediate effect of this was the delay in beginning the 26 district pilot study which will be discussed in the next category.

Georgia RT3 planning and implementation activities. The activities analyzed in this category relate directly to actions taken by the RT3 Director and the RT3 implementation team.

Following the Fall 2010 and Spring 2011 political appointments, the new appointees were focused on organizing and restructuring their staffing, departments, and communications systems. This prevented any significant progress being made in the RT3 implementation as they also wished to evaluate the Scopes of Work for Georgia's RT3 plan that was prepared by their predecessors. Throughout Spring and Summer of 2011, Georgia's RT3 Scopes of Work were amended and submitted to the U.S Department of Education for approval. The most significant impact of this 'delay' was the planned start of the 26 district RT3 policy pilot studies had to be moved from August 2011 to January 2012.

The RT3 district pilot study was designed to be implemented over the 2011-2012 academic school year. The rationale behind this decision is that the policies would be given a reasonable amount of time to be trialed and the likelihood of obtaining good quality data was enhanced. With the shift of the start date from September 2011 to January 2012, and the same completion date of May 2012 being kept, the time for trialing the RT3 policies was cut in half. The end date for the pilot was maintained at May 2012 due the subsequent issues that could have been raised by delaying scheduled activities later in the RT3 implementation process and the 'danger' of not meeting the absolute deadline of August 2014 for full implementation. The results of the pilot study are due to be evaluated and validated during Summer 2012. Following this evaluation, and an approval of the recommendations drawn from these evaluations, the full implementation of RT3 policies into statewide school districts begins at the beginning of Fall semester 2012.

A potential difficulty will arise if the data collected from the shortened pilot study is invalidated due to quality concerns, or if there is insufficient data for the RT3 Implementation Team to make recommendations to the State Board of Education. If this is the case, the pilot study would have to be extended into the Fall semester 2012, giving rise to the delays that the Implementation Team were trying to avoid. The decision, therefore, to adopt the timetable of a shortened pilot study was a calculated risk.

If RT3 implementation does maintain the schedule set out in the Scopes of Work, the complete policy will be fully implemented in the 26 piloting school districts in August 2012 together with as many of the remaining 160 state-wide districts that choose to be a part of the implementation at this time. The RT3 Implementation Team expressed a hope that at least 60 other school districts will be ready for implementation at this time. By August 2013, further

requests for school districts to implement RT3 policies will be made. This will be the last opportunity for the remaining school districts to opt out of the implementation. August 2014 sees the mandatory implementation of RT3 policies for any school districts who have not yet adopted them.

Local community activities. From the data set it is possible to observe that local community involvement in RT3 activities did not really begin until January 2011. Some local community members were involved in each of the four Task Forces set up as a discussion forum for each of the four policy goals of RT3. How decisions were made regarding the composition of each of the task forces and how members became involved are not part of this data set. Further research will need to be conducted to close these gaps in the data set.

The most significant involvement from community members to date comes as a result of the current participation of the 26 school districts involved in conducting pilot studies (see Figure 2 for a comprehensive list). The specific aims, number of community members, funding resources, and roles of community members are all identified in the individual district 'Scopes of Work'. That data is not part of this data analysis but will need to be analyzed to fully identify the extent of community involvement in the pilot programs.

A key element in the general public being kept informed is the launch of the official Georgia Race to the Top website (www.rt3ga.com). This website provides an overview of Race to The Top as well as the 'Scopes of Work' for the State of Georgia and for the 26 partner districts. It shares information on seven initiatives associated with RT3 in Georgia: Great Teachers and Leaders, Data Systems to Support Instruction, Standards and Assessments, Turning Around Lowest Achieving Schools, Improving early Outcomes, Innovations Fund, and the

Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) initiative. News updates, links to partnership organizations, and contact information is also provided on this public website.

Georgia's official RT3 website is designed to fill the communication gap between state officials and the general public. According to the RT3 Director, there is much support for the RT3 program from the local business community and that any negativity coming from the teaching community arises mainly from miscommunication of the initiatives aims. The Director considers that the negativity stems from teachers' apprehension with regards to the use of student surveys in their evaluation but, according to the RT3 Director, the research supports the use of this strategy. The Professional Association of Georgia Educators (PAGE) and the Georgia Association of Educators (GAE) have been "great" to work with, in the RT3 Director's opinion, as they have been participating in discussion and debate and understand that this implementation process is currently in a 'pilot' stage.

In trying to get the "message out to the general masses", the RT3 Director and her team meet, when opportunities arise, with Regional Education Service Agencies (RESAs), and Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs). The RT3 Director concedes that the team is small and so it is a "challenge to keep everyone informed". The impression given by this message can be that the RT3 Director sees the general public as anonymous, large groups of people rather interested individuals.

Also the "challenge to keep everyone informed" suggests that it is the Implementation Teams responsibility to provide information rather than generating community opinion and input and as such a top-down model of implementation seems to be modeled here. A further detailed analysis of documents and interview data needs to be conducted to identify how community members are characterized.

Emerging Themes from Data Set 1

The 'core' of RT3 implementation in Georgia comes from the Georgia RT3 Planning and Implementation Activities category. Of the groups either side of this category it is only the federal and state activities that, so far, were significant factors in influencing aspects of the implementation. Admittedly, the local communities are now just beginning to have an influence on RT3 implementation through the school district pilot studies.

The discussion on whether this influence turns out to be significant will have to wait until the results of the pilot study data review over Summer 2012. At that time, an analysis of the extent to which the local community recommendations were incorporated into the RT3 Director's final recommendations to the State Board of Education will reveal the real influence of local communities in this policy.

Given the mandated timescale of RT3 implementation, the short length of time states had to put together an application bid, the very strict criteria used to judge applications, and the federal requirement that winning states had to tie in their applications to the Common Core State Standards and the associated national standardized tests, RT3 can clearly be seen as a top-down implementation of policy. All major aspects of the policy are controlled by the federal requirements set out in the four policy goals and by the state officials charged with implementing them. States have been given some flexibility in the implementation as long as any changes still fall within the federal requirements. The current input of local communities, at present, is to contribute opinions and enter into discussions during the pilot studies. These opinions and discussions are limited to the finer details of the RT3 policy but not whether the policy itself should be implemented.

Data Set 2: RT3 Georgia - Organizational Chart

Data Set 2 is an organizational chart that illustrates the various partnership organizations, state agencies, task forces, and RT3 policy piloting districts that have been created, co-opted, or requested to pilot and implement RT3 policies. It also establishes a 'chain of command' when it comes to decision making, accountability, and responsibility regarding policies, personnel, and resources.

Analysis of Organizational Structure

This data set in figure 2 clearly illustrates a hierarchical structure which reflects the top-down model of the federal to state RT3 application and implementation. The level of responsibility, decision making, extent of program influence, and utilization of resources diminishes as we move down through the organizational structure. The vital component, in the way this structure has been set up, is the RT3 Director and her RT3 Implementation Team. Everything passes through this centrally functioning system, in both directions. The ultimate leader of the organization is the Governor of the State of Georgia. It was the previous Governor that pushed for the RT3 application and his successor has promised to continue with that work. The Governor has sole responsibility for the final policy recommendations, following the RT3 implementation pilot studies, made to the State Board of Education. The advice of the RT3 Director will, nevertheless, have a major influence on those recommendations.

The RT3 Director was an appointment of the Governor of Georgia. Prior to this appointment the RT3 Director was Deputy Director in the Governor's Office of Planning & Budget. The RT3 Director created the positions of Implementation Project Manager, Communications Director, and a Teacher/Lead Advisor who would provide advice and guidance on implementation from the teaching perspective.

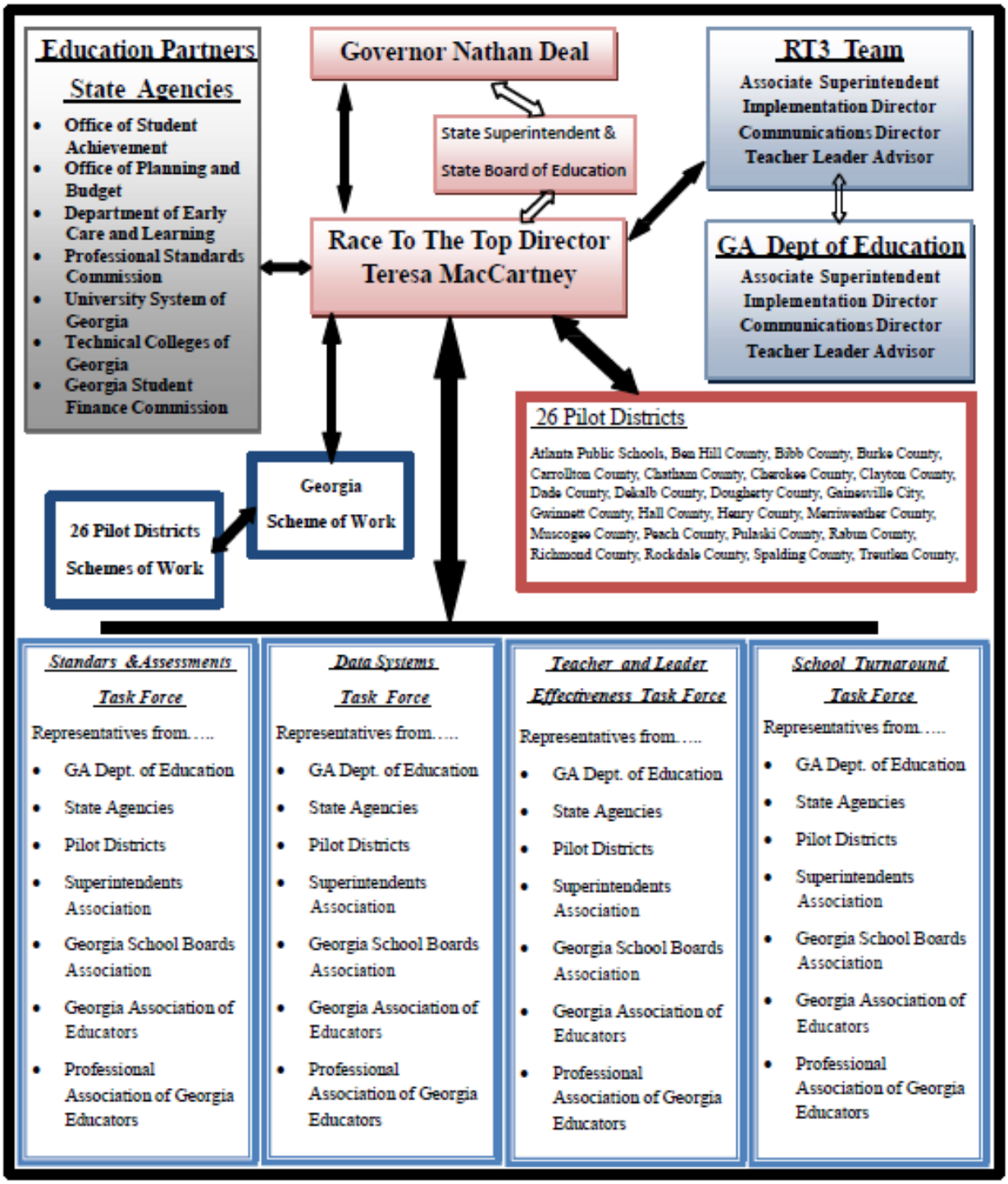

Figure 2. RT3 Georgia – Organizational Chart by author

The RT3 Director's role is to oversee the 100+ activities associated with Georgia's 'Scope of Work' (SOW). The SOW contains the state's plan for meeting the requirements of the

federal grant funding. It outlines the agencies and officials responsibility for each area of the policy reform and the funding mechanism used to fund each element of the plan.

While keeping track and evaluating these activities, the Director communicates with the United States Department of Education regarding any modifications to the SOW, and provides a rationale for those changes prior to those changes being sanctioned. The RT3 Director was explicit in stating that the RT3 funding "…will be used to implement reform initiatives that Georgia had already been planning to implement. The grant now provides the funding mechanisms for those planned reforms" (RT3 Director, personal communication, 12/12/11).

The RT3 Implementation Team created task forces to address the four key goals of RT3: Standards and Assessments, Data Systems, Teacher and Leader Effectiveness, and School Turnaround. Each task force includes representatives from Georgia's Department of Education, the seven statewide education agencies, and the 26 pilot districts. The four task forces also have representatives from The Georgia Educators Association (GAE), Professional Association of Georgia Educators (PAGE), the superintendents association, and the Georgia School Boards Association. From this data set it is unclear who made the decisions regarding the composition of each of the Task Forces and how members were selected. Further research into these areas will provide clarity as to the purpose and rationale of these groups.

In the application proposal, Georgia had provisionally set aside $7.5 million which was allocated for a contract to bring an external, private, consultant group to manage the implementation of RT3. This decision was altered in such a way that existing departments within the Department of Education and other state education agencies would work with the newly appointed RT3 team in the Governor's Office to manage the implementation instead. The rationale behind this choice related to the nature of the grant. It is a 4 year time-limited grant and

it was considered beneficial to set up the implementation through existing departments and agencies so that when the RT3 team was disbanded after the 4 year term, the existing departments would be in place to continue with the work.

From the RT3 organizational structure, it can be seen that the 26 piloting school districts are accountable to the RT3 Implementation Team. It is unclear, however, how that relationship has been set up and how the groups interact. It is also unclear how the individual district's Schemes of Work relate to the Georgia Scheme of Work. Again, this is another area where further research will be necessary to fill in the gaps in this organizational structure.

There is clear evidence that the RT3 Implementation Team is using established educational organizations and agencies to promote greater efficiency in the implementation of the RT3 reform initiative. The inclusion of the 7 state education agencies and Georgia's Department of Education allow for a comprehensive approach to the implementation of RT3 policies. Each agency or organization has its own particular area of expertise, and control, as well as community links and resources that can be used to support the aims of the RT3 Implementation Team. More research will need to be conducted though to establish the exact nature of these relationships.

Emerging Themes from Data Set 2

The top-down model of policy implementation implicated with the first data set is very well supported by the evidence from this second data set. The centrality of control provided by the RT3 Implementation Team, led by the RT3 Director, is clearly illustrated by the organizational chart. There are clear lines of authority and the 'locus of power' can certainly be located at the office of the RT3 Director. As a central hub for all critical decision making, and given the wide remit of the RT3 Director to oversee all aspects of this $400 million project, the

RT3 office is clearly at the top of this top-down model in Georgia. The model of the organizational structure places Georgia's Governor at the head of the organization and the State Superintendent with the State Board of Education as secondary 'pathway' between the RT3 Director and the Governor. This could be misleading.

It could reasonably be argued that Georgia's Governor is at the summit of this organizational structure, and, theoretically and figuratively, he is. The Governor is the individual who delivers the final RT3 policy recommendations to the State Board of Education for approval and state-wide implementation. But, it is the RT3 Director that provides those recommendations for the Governor based on the results of the pilot studies and discussions with her implementation team. Given the RT3 Director's intimate working knowledge of every aspect of the initiative it would be unusual for the Governor to challenge or question the recommendations that he is provided with. This would indicate that the RT3 Director is the de-facto leader of this organizational structure.

As for the State Superintendent, theoretically this role is currently super-ceded by the RT3 Director during the implementation stage of RT3. Although, the Superintendent may argue that they are working in partnership alongside of each other and that he has responsibilities for all other educational programs outside of RT3. It would make rationale sense that when the RT3 team is disbanded, after the 4 year grant expires, the State Superintendent would revert back to being the sole connecting office between the Governor / State Board of Education and the 186 school districts in Georgia and their superintendents. It remains to be seen if personnel are to be appointed to continue to oversee the reforms initiated by RT3. The only addition to the current responsibilities of the State Superintendent would be the maintaining, monitoring, and evaluation of the RT3 policies as they continue to be implemented.

Data Set 3: RT3 Georgia - Key Decision Making Database

Data Set 3 is a 'Key Decision Making Database' that is designed to illustrate what key decisions were made in the application for, and implementation of, RT3 in Georgia (see Figure 3). It also identifies the policy actors who were involved in making those decisions and how local communities were involved and/or informed of those decisions.

Analysis of Key Decision Making Database

These decisions are categorized as policy decisions, organizational decisions, and funding/resourcing decisions. The following analyses will only discusses 'key' decisions made – these are decisions that have or will have a major impact on the RT3 implementation processes.

Policy decisions. These decisions are largely set out in chronological order. The decision to actually submit an application for RT3 federal funds came directly from Georgia's Governor at that time, Governor Perdue. In collaboration with the State Superintendent and the State Board of Education it was agreed that an application should be submitted although the main impetus behind the decision came from the Governor. There was press coverage of the decision and it was also posted 'online' but no local community members, or school district members were involved in making that decision.

The actual design and contents of the RT3 application resulted from a partnership between the Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA), Georgia's Department of Education (GDoE), and the remaining 6 state education agencies (Office of Planning and Budget, Dept. of Early Care and Learning, Professional Standards Commission, University System of Georgia, Technical Colleges of Georgia, and the Georgia Student Finance Commission).

RT3 Georgia - Key Decision Making Database

	Decision Making Areas	Policy Actors Responsible						Local Information			Local Involvement		
	Policy	**GO**	**RT3D**	**GDoE**	**EP**	**SB**	**LDC**	**Web**	**TV**	**Press**	**Yes**	**Partial**	**No**
1	Making the RT3 Application	*		*		*		*		*			*
2	The Application Design (Parthenon)	*		*	*			*					*
3	Application Working Groups	*		*				*					*
4	Ga Scheme of Work	*	*	*				*					*
5	Pilot District Schemes of Work		*	*	*		*	*				*	
6	Task Force Roles & Responsibilities	*	*	*	*			*					*
7	Timeline for Implementation	*	*	*				*					*
8	RT3 Pilot Study Revisions/Amendments	*	*	*				*?			*		
9	Adoption of Pilot Recommendations	*	*			*		*?	*?	*?	*?		
	Organization	**GO**	**RT3D**	**GDoE**	**EP**	**SB**	**LDC**	**Web**	**TV**	**Press**	**Yes**	**Partial**	**No**
10	Appointment of RT3 Director	*						*	*?	*?			*
11	Creation of RT3 Team	*	*					*					*
12	RT3 Organizational Structure		*	*	*			*					*
13	Task Force Composition		*	*	*		*	*				*	
14	Connections to Educational Agencies		*	*	*			*					
15	Selection of Pilot Districts		*	*			*	*		*		*	
16	*Districts Restructuring Post Pilot Study*			*	*		*	*?	*?	*?	*?		
	Funding/Resources	**GO**	**RT3D**	**GDoE**	**EP**	**SB**	**LDC**	**Web**	**TV**	**Press**	**Yes**	**Partial**	**No**
15	RT3 Application Budget Plan	*		*	*			*					*
16	RT3 Implementation Personnel Pilot	*	*					*					*
17	District Funding Allocations	*	*	*				*				*	
18	Materials/Personnel for Pilot Studies		*	*			*	*				*	
19	RT3 Communications/Website		*					*				*	
20	*State-wide Implementation of RT3*		*	*	*	*	*	*?	*?	*?	*?		

Codes Used

GO Governor / Governor's Office for Student Achievement
RT3D RT3 Director and/or Implementation Team
GDoE Georgia Department of Education and/or State Superintendent
EP Education Partnerships - 7 State Education Agencies
SB State Board of Education
LDC Local School Districts and/or Communities

Figure 3. RT3 Georgia – Decision making database by author

Support for compiling the application came from a private education consultant group – Parthenon, and working groups that were set up to 'attack' smaller sections of the application. The completed application is available online but would require a very determined effort to locate it. Therefore, the decision to apply for RT3 federal funding, the design of the application and the people putting the application together were all made at the state education official level with some support from a consulting group. Very little information was provided for the general public, aside from the announcement that an application was being made, and there was certainly no local community involvement in any of these aspects of the application. This could be attributed to the idea that it would be "…just one more group to appease" (anonymous state employee, personal communication, 10/12/11).

Once the Governor made the appointment of the RT3 Director, the decisions regarding the creation of Georgia's Scope of Work (SOW), the pilot districts SOW, the Task Force roles and responsibilities, and the timeline for implementation were taken at the state level and were mostly led by the RT3 Director. Local communities did have some involvement in the pilot districts SOW but that was almost certainly because they would be responsible for carrying out the pilot studies.

Again, communication of decisions and actions by state officials were most often conducted by the provision of information online. This, of course, requires community members to have internet access, to know where to look, and to understand the complex language and detailed plans set out in the SOW.

After completion of the RT3 pilot studies the local communities have responsibility to communicate their opinion on the strengths and weaknesses of the RT3 policies they were piloting and provide recommendations for revision or amendment (see Decision 8). This is why

you will see local involvement identified, in the database, as part of making this decision. I have placed a question mark next to the involvement as it is unclear, as yet, whether any recommendations from the local community would be taken up by the RT3 Director. If any local community recommendations are ignored, then a debate could be had as to whether the local communities were truly and positively involved or whether the pilot study was merely a public relations exercise.

Decision number 9 is a crucial one. Only 26 out of 186 school districts throughout Georgia are piloting RT3 policies. The outcome of these pilot studies will shape the final design of RT3 in Georgia. The decision as to whether RT3 is adopted statewide is ultimately taken by the State Board of Education but they will strongly be guided by the recommendations put forward by the Governor and the RT3 Director. The decision is crucial because you will have the remaining160 school districts throughout the state of Georgia being compelled to adopt a policy that they had no input in applying for, designing, or testing.

The federal funding for RT3 is split evenly between the state level organizations implementing the reform and the districts piloting the reform. There will, therefore, be no federal RT3 funds available should any districts need financial support in any restructuring or reorganizing of their districts in order to comply with the newly mandated RT3 policies. This may sound familiar. One of the major complaints, from states and school districts, of the No Child Left Behind Act (2002) was the financial burdens bestowed on tight state budgets of the unfunded mandates of this federal education policy.

For decision number 9 in the database I have identified that there will be local information and involvement and placed a question marks next to them. The question mark signals a dependence on how controversial any mandated RT3 policies may be. If the mandated

policies are not very controversial then there will be some public communication but not in the form of a 'major' news item and community involvement will just be by virtue of the policies being implemented in schools. If the policies are controversial you may well see much more local community action and greater news coverage.

Organizational decisions. For organizational decisions, the pattern of decision makers and community involvement/information follows a very similar path as the policy decisions. Unlike the policy decisions, where it could be argued that local communities should have been able to make a significant contribution, most of the organizational decisions were made entirely at state level. This would seem reasonable given that the decisions were made with respect to the appointment of the RT3 Implementation team and the organizational structure at 'state official' level. Local community involvement in the organizational decisions was restricted to activities related the composition of the task forces and the decision of local districts whether to become pilot districts for RT3.

Decision number 16, italicized as it is a decision yet to be made, regarding possible restructuring in districts as a result of mandated RT3 policy implementation, can be explained in much the same way as decision 9 – the adoption of RT3 pilot recommendations. Local involvement and information with respect to this decision will, again, depend on the amount of controversy or disruption that may occur. It is entirely possible, of course, that all policies will be accepted without complaint, smoothly implemented, and lead to dramatic increases in student achievement.

Funding/resource decisions. The evidence for the decisions in this category can primarily be found in the Georgia and pilot district's SOWs as well as Georgia's RT3 application proposal. These data sources have presently only received minimal analysis but some key

decisions can be identified. The patterns identified in the policy and organizational decision categories are repeated here.

Three key aspects of financial decision making need much further research. 1) A detailed analysis is required to identify the rationale behind the different allocations of resources (funding) to each of the pilot school districts. 2) Analysis is required to identify whether the funding allocated is actually appropriate to achieve the policy goals or whether the degree to which the policy goals are achieved is dependent on the amount of funding available. 3) Questions related to the full implementation of RT3 statewide have to been answered. Has a cost analysis for implementation been conducted for each school district? Will the cost be equitable across all districts? What are the consequences for school districts that are financially unable to implement the mandated RT3 policies?

Emerging Themes from Data Set 3

The decision making processes involved in all three categories identified a clear top-down model of implementation. With organizational and funding/resourcing decisions it would be relatively easy to make a case for a hierarchy that encompasses an accountability system with checks and balances, and a distribution of responsibilities. These criteria would seem to benefit from an organizational structure based at the state level. For educational policy decisions though, there is much more scope and levity for arguing the inclusion of the local community members, who will be most impacted by these decisions, into the policy decision making arena. This could be counter-argued with the idea that the remarkably quick turn-around from the federal Notice Inviting Applications to the application deadline precluded any widespread consultation on the matter and that a small, select group of state officials was the only possible way of submitting an application by the due date.

Given that the application and initial implementation of RT3 is complete, what are the key decisions still to be made and do local communities at least have some contribution to those decisions? The optimal theory is that the pilot studies prove to be really successful, and they reveal significant information to ensure the efficient and effective implementation of RT3 across the state, and these statewide implementations result in much improved student outcomes. As ever, the problems occur when theory meets practice.

Several difficulties could arise, over the next few months, as the pilot studies are completed and evaluated and as final recommendations are made to the State Board of Education. What happens of the pilot studies are shown to be inconclusive as to the effects of the policies? Or worse, show that the policies are not working? What if the State Board rejects the recommendations? What if the State Board accepts them but several school districts reject them or are unable to implement them?

It would seem reasonable to expect that, for an educational reform policy that directly impacts every local community in Georgia, a forum for widespread consultation would and should have been established. Even though the decision to apply for the RT3 federal grant was made by a select few people, could the decisions regarding implementation have provided an opportunity for wider consultation? With a $400 million federal grant available for use, you would have thought this was possible.

Dataset 4: RT3 Georgia – Annual Reports

One of the requirements of RT3 states is to provide updated progress reports to the U.S. Department of Education's Implementation and Support Unit (ISU). The ISU produces annual reports that set out a state's progress towards meeting reform 'milestones' in each of the four

reform areas on the way to full implementation of the RT3 educational reform initiative. ISU has currently produced two annual Georgia reports. A third annual report is imminent but is not available at the time of this paper. The analyses of this data set will be based on the contents of two key documents. The Implementation and Support Unit's first two Georgia reports are…

RACE TO THE TOP Georgia Report: School Year 2010-2011 (ISU, 2012)

RACE TO THE TOP Georgia Report: School Year 2011-2012 (ISU, 2013)

Four areas of RT3 reform, highlighted at the outset of this chapter, were identified as…

1. Recruiting, preparing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals, especially in districts and schools where they are needed most.
2. Adopting standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace and to compete in the global economy.
3. Building data systems that measure student growth and success, and inform teachers and principals about how they can improve instruction.
4. Turning around the lowest-achieving schools.

Great Teachers and Leaders

In the year 1 Georgia report the state Department of Education identified the need for comprehensive systems of educator effectiveness by developing and adopting ways of measuring student growth, and an effective evaluation system. The evaluation information would be used to inform professional development, compensation, promotion, retention, and tenure decisions (p. 12). A challenge identified in the report was the 'struggle' with identifying growth measures in non-tested grades and subject areas. Georgia also moved from contracting out project work to hiring in-house personnel to ensure successful implementation of the new evaluation system (p. 12). A task force was created that had 50 members drawn from a variety of education

stakeholders. These stakeholders included university and college representatives, superintendents, principals, and teachers.

Observation protocols were developed and implemented during the second year of the initiative. The Teacher Assessment on Performance Standards (TAPS) and Leader Assessment on Performance Standards (LAPS) provided ten performance standards and a rubric based evaluation of performance. The plan going forward from this was to provide a comprehensive evaluation system by including elements other than observations in the final assessment of performance.

Measures of student growth and student surveys were also planned to be implemented, in subsequent years, as additional components of TAPS and LAPS. Current information confirms that these components are a part of the evaluation system for the 2013-2014 academic year for most districts and becomes mandatory for all districts for 2014-2015.

Challenges, identified in the year 2 report, in delivering an evaluation system in a comprehensive and deliberate manner resulted in Georgia's RT3 grant being put on the high-risk status (p. 14). This ensured that further federal grant funds would be at risk if issues in the evaluation system were not fixed. The problems included the need for a structured process to incorporate feedback in the evaluation system, and a communications protocol that included all relevant stakeholders.

Standards and Assessments

The goal of this reform was to provide college and career ready standards and assessments that prepared students to be successful in college or career.

The Georgia Board of Education adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in English language Arts and Mathematics for grades K-12 in July 2010. Georgia also partnered

with Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and careers (PARCC). PARCC was one of the two consortia that won a competitive grant totaling over $300 million to create and develop assessments aligned to the CCSS. Georgia has recently dissolved the partnership with PARCC citing excessive costs associated with the new assessments as the most significant reason for the parting of ways.

Georgia plans to develop its own assessments aligned to CCSS but has, as yet, issued a timeline for identifying a vendor, or any piloting or implementation of the assessments. In the year 2 report, and prior to the dissolution of the partnership with PARCC, the state opted to delay work on benchmark assessments for fear of duplicating PARCC's work. The state reported that it needed to supplement existing professional development resources to improve transitions to the new standards. As with the teacher and leader reforms, the decision was made to hire staff with expertise to conduct the work rather than contract it out.

Data Systems

The goal of this reform was to provide a P-20 longitudinal data system that informs instruction and decision making. Georgia found it difficult to recruit personnel with the appropriate expertise. The Director for the state longitudinal data system was not appointed until near the end of year 1. The state remained in track by moving from using in-house personnel to contracting out project work. Georgia reported in year 2 that a robust K-12 data system was already in place and that many districts had in place their own longitudinal data system and/or instructional improvement system.

With this in mind, the state decided to create a state longitudinal data system that would allow districts a single single-in to access statewide data and permit districts to continue using

their own systems. The state would also continue to provide support for districts wishing to develop their own data systems.

Turning Around the Lowest-achieving Schools

This reform would allow districts to employ one of four intervention models to turn around low-achieving schools. A brief description of each model is provided here.

Turnaround Model: replace the principal and rehire no more than 50% of existing staff

Restart Model: convert a school or close and reopen it under a charter school operator

School Closure: close the school and enroll students in other schools

Transformational Model: replace principal, institute instructional reforms, increase learning times, and provide operational flexibility and sustained support

Georgia hired a Deputy Superintendent for School Turnaround and moved around forty five school improvement staff from the Governor's Office to the new Office of School Turnaround. Initially, forty schools were identified as needing turning around. After a diagnostic review districts selected a model for those schools. In 2010-2011 twenty schools began implementing measures with the majority opting for the transformational model. The remaining twenty schools were scheduled for intervention during 2011-2012. During Year 2 the state removed three schools from its list of low-achieving schools.

Executive Summaries

The summaries from the first and second year reports highlighted several challenges. Those challenges included; inability to maintain original schedules, hiring of appropriately qualified personnel, changes in leadership at state and district level, numerous adjustments to the schemes of work, concerns about the overall strategic planning, evaluation and project

management for various systems, difficulties in developing a comprehensive communications plan, and costs associated with the creation, and testing the new assessments.

Stakeholders

The year one report identifies that the RT3 management team engages with a variety of stakeholders. Included in the list are state legislators, business communities, educator associations, and local Parent-Teacher Associations. The report also highlights the fact that their attempt at outreach and communication has been, and remains, an ongoing challenge (p. 6). The state also planned to enhance its communication to help ensure all stakeholders are informed of the RT3 work. Georgia announced, in the year two report, its use of Sharepoint, a project management tool, as a primary source to share information and monitor RT3 initiative. District staff and principals have Sharepoint accounts. It also announced that it continued to find difficulty in implementing a comprehensive communications plan and had contracted a vendor to solve those issues for 2012-2013.

Emerging Themes from Data Set 4

It is evident from reading the first two annual reports from Georgia's Department of Education to the U.S. Department of Education that, despite numerous successes along the way, there have been many challenges. The major concerns appear to be the need to constantly adjust timelines of activities, the importance of hiring the correct personnel, the lack of stability in leadership positions, and the inability to communicate effectively. Throughout this reform implementation the RT3 management team has had to overcome numerous challenges and adapt to new and ever changing conditions. The RT3 team and Georgia's Department of Education worked together to establish a consistent path towards full implementation of RT3 milestones, and deadlines irrespective of the challenges on the way. This determination of purpose could be

attributed to the fact that state officials valued the reforms and were motivated to see the reforms succeed. Another factor, that may be relevant, is that staged payments of the federal grant were determined by states meeting implementation milestones and providing evidence of progress towards achieving RT3 requirements.

Given the remit of this study, one significant factor in the annual reports that stands out is the issue of communication and collaboration. Throughout both reports there is considerable mention of difficulties in communicating between state agencies involved in the implementation of RT3 and in the dissemination of information to the general public. It is significant that the identification of local community involvement, as opposed to local community information, is limited to the actions of a few members of parent teachers associations in each of the four task forces.

The contributions of those local community members to task force meetings and recommendations have not been identified. Given that each task force was comprised of professional educators from colleges, universities, and schools as well as local community members it is a reasonable question to ask how much value was placed on any contributions made by those from the local communities. Another area that needs further research is the extent to which the task force recommendations were taken up by the RT3 management team.

RT3 Georgia: Application of the Implementation Regime Framework (IRF)

Implementation Regime Framework

Stoker (1989) created a conceptual framework for analyzing the policy implementation process that combined key aspects of the top-down and bottom-up models of implementation analysis. The top-down/bottom up components incorporated into this framework makes it

appropriate for examining policy implementation across several levels of government. Essentially the framework assesses the likelihood of implementation success and proposes strategies for implementation participants to improve the prospects of that success. This framework was applied to this study as a means of analyzing RT3 in Georgia and establishing how state education officials managed the communication of the macro-level expectations and requirements of RT3 with the micro-level situational conditions of implementation. This framework allows for the management structures as well as the stages of development and implementation to be identified, and for the roles and contributions of policy actors within and external to the State Department of Education to be established.

As discussed in chapter two, the IRF acknowledges that there can be conflicts between contradictory or competing values when implementing policies across several levels of government. Certain levels of cooperation and compromise of values may be required, dependent on implementation model, for a successful implementation of the policy. It is important to note here that success in the implementation of the policy does not necessarily indicate success in the overall goal of the policy. In relation to RT3 in Georgia, and the application of IRF to that reform, the element of 'success' discussed and analyzed is related to the implementation of the policy rather than the desired outcomes of the policy i.e. improvements in curricular instruction and in student achievement.

Top-down models of implementation rely on compliance of participants rather than cooperation whereas bottom-up models value diffused leadership and local knowledge that make federal or state initiatives more tuned to local conditions. The IRF identifies key characteristics that promote successful implementation of policies when competing values require a compromise. These characteristics include an organizational framework that has an agreed set of

norms, rules, and procedures. When applying this framework to RT3 in Georgia certain conclusions may be drawn.

An organizational framework was clearly evident for the implementation of the policy. This framework was essentially already in place. The original plan of the RT3 management team was to set up a new and original structure to manage all the processes of RT3 implementation. This idea was revised as time factors and post implementation factors were considered. As RT3 was a time limited grant, any new organizational structures set up just for this initiative would then be disbanded leaving the current state educational organizations to subsume roles and responsibilities within their own organization. The decision was made to utilize existing organizational structures and systems to allow for a smoother transition post-implementation.

The concept of an agreed set of norms, rules, and procedures directed towards a common goal, in this particular implementation regime, had limited flexibility given the constraints in which they had to be established. The requirements of the original RT3 application essential set out a very clear framework, with significant objectives and milestones linked to staged funding, that focused all organizational elements towards a common goal. Any agreed norms, rules, and procedures were very strongly influenced by the need to achieve the clearly defined objectives set out in the policy initiative.

A key element of the IRF, leading to implementation success, is the cost/risk analyses. If the cost/risk of cooperation was low, and the cost/risk of defection was high the likelihood of policy implementation success was high. With RT3 in Georgia the state received a $400 million grant to implement specific policies. Georgia stated that these were policies that were already planned to be implemented but that the funding would allow them to be implemented more

effectively and with a reduced timeline. The cost/risk therefore of cooperating was low given that federal funding would continue and Georgia's policy goals, aligned to RT3 goals, would likely be achieved. The cost/risk of defecting was high given the educational policy goals Georgia was striving to achieve combined with the significant benefits of receiving federal funding and the reduction in state funding sources as a result of the economic situation at the time of the application process. Both these elements, in line with IRF characteristics, would suggest a very strong likelihood of success of Georgia implementing RT3 reform initiative policies.

RT3 Georgia: Application of the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF)

In applying Sabatier's (2007) revised and updated Advocacy Coalition Framework to RT3 in Georgia, this study will identify the informal coalition groups within the federal/state policy subsystem and within the state/local policy subsystem. The coalitions are identified as 'informal' for the purposes of this paper because the groups did not make a deliberate decision to coalesce to achieve a common goal. The groups were brought together as a necessary means of implementing this particular educational reform initiative, and therefore their motivation for working together as a coalition was motivated more by necessity and circumstance than a common desire to achieve a common ideological goal. Foundational elements of both subsystems will be clarified and an understanding of RT3 policies with respect to beliefs, strategy, resources, policy outputs, and impacts will be developed. Policy actors will be identified as well as their level of involvement and participation in RT3 policy implementation processes in Georgia. Data from this analysis will be employed in the identification of a

framework for deliberation and debate that provides opportunities for effective participation in educational policy formulation.

The following documents provide supporting visual representations of the elements, organizational structures, institutions, policy actors, and relative power distributions discussed in the following application of ACF to RT3 in Georgia:

Appendix A: Schematic of the ACF (Weible, Sabatier, & McQueen, 2009).

Appendix B: RT3 Power Distribution Model

Figure 2: Organizational Structure of RT3 in Georgia

The application of ACF to RT3 in Georgia will be conducted in four sections. Section 1a & 1b will apply the ACF 'policy subsystems' to RT3 and will be conducted as two separate case studies - 1a) The Federal and State coalitions policy subsystem and 1b) The State and Local Community coalitions policy subsystem. Section 2 will illustrate the application of ACFs Relatively Stable Parameters to RT3, Section 3 will apply ACFs External Subsystem Events, and Section 4 will apply ACFs Long-Term Opportunity Coalition Structures.

Section 1: ACF Policy Subsystems and RT3

Federal and state policy subsystem in Georgia. Coalitions: These can be temporary, or long-standing, partnerships between discrete individuals and/or organizations for the purpose of creating, promoting, influencing, or eliminating public policies. The coalitions are bounded together by common aims and beliefs. The coalitions involved in RT3 can be divided into two distinct groups. At the federal level, the Obama administration and the Department of Education worked in close partnership to design and promote a competitive grant-funded policy reform directed at achieving four specific goals: recruiting, preparing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals; adopting standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in

college and the workplace; building data systems that measure student growth and success; and turning around the lowest-achieving schools.

At the state level in Georgia, the coalition for the RT3 grant application was led by the governor at that time (2009), Governor Perdue. The other partners in the coalition included the State Superintendent, the State Board of Education, district superintendents and Georgia Department of Education officials.

Policy beliefs. The application process for RT3 recommended that states tailor their bids in alignment with the criteria set out in the federal notice inviting applications if they wished to submit successful bids. From this document, federal educational policy beliefs can be clearly identified. The federal coalition believed that: standards in student achievement had to be raised across all sub-groups; the achievement gap between sub-groups had to be closed; principal and teacher effectiveness had to be judged against student performance; data systems should be developed and used to inform instruction; and the lowest performing schools had to be identified and forced to improve of close.

It would be reasonable to observe that the state level coalition's beliefs had to be reasonably, if not perfectly, aligned with these federal beliefs. If the state's beliefs were radically different from the federal stance, it would seem irrational to submit a bid for funds that were tied to promoting beliefs that did not match their own, although the sizable funding that was available may influence motives for bidding. It would also seem very unlikely that state bids would have be successful if they did not fulfill federal application requirements.

Resources. At the federal level, the resources were substantial to say the least. The Secretary of State for Education, Arne Duncan, was given discretionary powers to distribute over $4.35 billion federal dollars. This enabled him to create the infrastructure required to manage all

the logistics associated with the allocation, distribution, and monitoring of these funds, and to promote the RT3 competition to the states with the promise of sizable federal grants for winning bidders.

For states bidding for these federal funds, the resources needed for a successful application included time, money, and personnel. One significant criterion in the bid evaluation process assessed a state's capacity to deliver on their application promises. Although winning states would receive substantial federal funding for their reform initiatives, they were more likely to be successful in their bid if they already had in place organizational structures, systems, and institutions that would ensure a more efficient and effective use of any awarded funds. Georgia was particularly well placed in this respect as many of the reform goals identified in the notice inviting applications were already underway in the state. A winning grant bid would just provide the necessary funding mechanisms to expedite those reforms.

Strategy. Three key strategies can be identified from the federal coalition perspective. First, the very specific success criteria for state bids was released in advance of the application deadline presumably as a means of encouraging the direction and content of state applications. These bid requirements promoted federal policy goals. Secondly, in a time of economic instability and large reductions in state tax revenues, the substantial federal funding available to winning states could reasonably be described as a convincing argument for states to apply whether they agreed with the federal policy directives or not. Thirdly, there clearly was not enough federal funding to substantially finance all states. Therefore, an announcement from the Secretary of State for Education, Arne Duncan, informing all bidding states that not everyone could win provided an incentive for states to 'tailor' their bids to more accurately reflect the policy goals of the federal government.

From the state coalition perspective, Georgia's bid was indeed written to accurately reflect the requirements of the success criteria set out in the federal government's notice inviting applications. To improve the state's chances of submitting a winning bid, Georgia contracted the help of a consulting group, Parthenon, to help prepare their RT3 grant application. These consultations were funded through a grant from the Gates Foundation.

Policy outputs. As a result of round 1 and 2 of the RT3 competitive grant bidding process, the federal government now has 14 states implementing their policies goals. This does not mean that all the winning states have had to radically alter their own state education policies to comply with the funding requirements. In fact it is extremely likely, based on the bid evaluation processes, that the winning states already had in place polices, programs, and initiatives that were already closely aligned with federal policy goals. The 'shift' in the area of policy output is the perception, or reality, that educational policy output at the state level is now directly under the auspices of the federal government. You could now argue, with some legitimacy, that federal control over local community schools has dramatically increased.

Policy impacts. It is certainly way too early to discuss the policy impacts as it relates student achievement. Sabatier (2007) stated that one of the reasons behind the development of ACF was to produce a framework that allows for the analysis of policy impact over greater periods of time (decades). The impact on student achievement will, just as with NCLB, only be revealed after several years of implementation.

Rather than discuss policy impacts we could refer instead to impact on policy. Georgia is currently piloting RT3 policies, in the four specific areas mentioned previously, in 26 of the 186 school districts across the state. Once the results of those pilot studies have been collected and evaluated, Georgia's Director of RT3 will present policy recommendations to the State Board of

Education. If these recommendations are accepted by the board they will be implemented state-wide over the within the next 3 years. Therefore, a policy formulated by a few federal government officials can, eventually, significantly impact policy at every local community school in Georgia. This leads me nicely to the power distribution model.

Power distribution model (Appendix B). In an attempt to provide a visual illustration of the element of 'power' in this analysis a power distribution model (PDM) has been created. 'Power' in the context of this model is simply being used as an indication of the relative level of control or authority over processes and procedures that one entity has over another. In this section of the policy subsystem we will only refer to the federal / state element of the PDM. The state/local element will be discussed at the end of section 1 b.

The PDM looks at two perspectives between the competing coalitions – policy design and policy implementation. As you look at the federal / state section you can see that the federal government has considerable control over the policy design of RT3. RT3 was formulated by a few select members of the federal government and promoted the policy beliefs of that politically elite group. The design of the grant bidding process from the announcement, through the notices inviting applications, to the evaluation of the bids was under the control of the federal government. Even though the evaluators came from more diverse range of organizations the rubric, that detailed the distribution of the 500 points available, was one that they were compelled to use and that was weighted in a way that reinforced federal priorities. For instance, states whose bids included strong policies towards charter schools (47 points) faired far better than states whose priorities ignored those policy directions but focused more on vouchers (8 points).

When it comes to the implementation of RT3 the balance of power shifts, significantly, towards the states. States could work within the policy goals but had greater flexibility on how to achieve those goals. States did not, however, have full control over implementation. States have to regularly consult with the federal government about any alterations to their original plans and to submit progress reports. Federal funding is linked to the states plans and to meeting 'milestone' events along the implementation process. Therefore, with respect to implementation of RT3 at the state level, the federal government has to put a certain amount of trust in states doing what they said they would do and only has the 'sanction' of withdrawing further funding, important in itself, for states non-compliance.

State and Local Community Policy Subsystem in Georgia

Coalitions. The coalitions for the state remain the same as for the federal/state coalition dichotomy. Georgia's RT3 Director, in partnership with the seven state education agencies and several departments in Georgia's Department of Education, is working with the Governor and his Office for Student Achievement to promote the policies set out in the RT3 Notice Inviting Applications and Georgia's successful application proposal. This relatively macro-level coalition of groups oversees all aspects of the RT3 implementation in Georgia and are the prime actors in any policy decision making.

At the local community (micro-level) there has been very little, if any, advocacy coalescing in support or challenging any of the RT3 polices. Several factors are currently influencing this situation. First, the public awareness of RT3 and its implementation in Georgia is low. Apart from the initial high profile announcements of Georgia's winning bid very little information has been broadly distributed to the general public. Stakeholders are able to visit the Georgia Department of Education website and find links to news and documents related to RT3,

and even sign up for emailed newsletters. In March 2012 the official, dedicated Georgia RT3 website was launched, although this has drawn very little or no media attention. These methods of communication do, of course, exclude any member of the public who does not have access to the internet or an email account. For those people that do have access, it is unlikely that they are aware of the websites and the information available.

Secondly, the implementation of RT3 is still in its very early stages and as such policy impacts have not really been experienced by local communities, except perhaps those in the 26 pilot districts. As the implementation plan for RT3 moves from the piloting of policies to the state-wide mandatory policy implementation stage, and as stakeholders are directly impacted, we may see a rapid growth in advocacy groups challenging the policies.

Another factor in the lack of local community coalition building could be the public perception of RT3. As far as the general public is concerned, Georgia has beaten out several other states to receive $400 million of federal funding to improve student achievement, close the achievement gap, and improve failing schools. There does not seem to be much to protest about with that. But, what the public is less knowledgeable about are the policies that will employed to achieve those goals. It is unlikely that any stakeholder in the Georgia education system will object to the goals of RT3. What is less clear is whether those stakeholders will agree with the implementation of the RT3 policies that are used to achieve those goals. Possible issues that may develop with this aspect of RT3 may be exacerbated with the knowledge that the policies are grounded in very little research and the research that is available is contradictory.

A third, meso-level, coalition can be identified. This coalition has a foot in both state and local community camps. The four Task Forces, set up to consult on the four key policy areas identified on the goals for RT3, are under the auspices of the RT3 Director, and contain members

of state agencies but, they also include representatives of local communities and school districts. Data on the operation, discussions, and decision making processes within these coalitions is currently unavailable at the moment. When it does becomes available, after further interviews are conducted, it will be of much interest to examine the coalition dynamics with respect to policy directions of different groups within the task force and whether their relative positions to the state or local community has any bearing on their positions regarding RT3 policies.

Policy beliefs. An interview conducted with the RT3 Director revealed that the $400 million RT3 federal grant money that Georgia received will just provide "…the funding mechanism for reforms that Georgia was already in the process of implementing". From this statement we can reasonably come to two conclusions regarding policy beliefs at the State level. First, we can conclude that raising student achievement, closing achievement gaps, identifying and turning around low performing schools are key educational priorities. We can also conclude that the adoption of common core standards with their associated standardized testing regimes, longitudinal data systems, and teacher / principal effectiveness tied to student performance are the best methods for achieving those educational goals.

Any local community coalition has yet to materialize with respect to RT3 but it would be safe to assume that raising student achievement, closing achievement gaps, identifying and turning around low performing schools are also key educational priorities and part of their core policy beliefs. The No Child Left Behind Act (2002) (NCLB) resulted in some positive but also many negative consequences to the implementation of its policies. Given that RT3 is also grounded in standards-based reform, replicates the educational goals as NCLB, and is also strongly reliant on test data for evaluations of individual teachers, principals, and schools, a

reasonable assumption can be made that negative consequences may also result from the RT3 polices and that local advocacy coalitions may be stimulated into action as a result.

Resources. The State level coalition can boast significant resources that include personnel, funding, and legislative support. It is not surprising what you can do with $400 million. It also benefits from the existing infrastructure of Georgia's educational system with the department of education and seven other state agencies lending support to the RT3 initiative. The legislative and political support of the Governor and his Office of Student Achievement also provides significant resources for this educational reform initiative.

Although a part of the pilot study for the RT3 Director and the RT3 program, the 26 piloting districts could be described as representing local communities in that they will provide feedback to the Director as to what worked or did not, what was popular or not and so on. The resources for these districts are also significant as half of the $400 million was to be used to provide funding for piloting districts to carry out the 'test' implementation of the policies. This funding will allow many districts to carry out reforms they may not necessarily have been able to fund without taking part in the piloting program. These funding resources, however, do not guarantee that recommendations made by the piloting districts will be taken up by the RT3 implementation team.

Strategy. From the State coalition perspective, three key strategies can be identified. Embedding the RT3 implementation team into the existing state level educational departments and agencies ensures that policies, systems, and procedures are more likely continue seamlessly when the federal funding ends in 2015. The original plan was to create an entirely new self-contained department but logistical issues would have been created when funding stopped and positions/responsibilities had to be transferred to other departments. A second strategy was the

creation of Task Forces to promote deliberation and consultation on the four key areas of the RT3 reform. The creation of the task forces allowed for a distribution of responsibilities, greater efficiency of implementation plans, and a forum to include a much wider representative body of local stakeholders. A third strategy was the practical evaluation of RT3 policies through the use of a 26 district pilot study. Districts were invited to join the study rather than being compelled. As with the task forces, this approach allowed for broader consultation and stakeholder involvement.

From the local level perspective the lack of coalitions has already been discussed but an examination of the motives behind district's participation in the pilot study can be made. For most, if not all, districts the economy in recent years has forced severe budgetary concerns. Instructional, athletic, and extra-curricular programs have been reduced or lost altogether. Staffing furloughs and layoffs, at all levels, have been necessary. The replacement of worn out, or the purchase of new, textbooks, computers and other school materials has had to be delayed. Class sizes have increased and schools closed. Given the current situation, it is surprising that only 26 districts volunteered to be a part of the RT3 pilot study and receive desperately needed funding. A second perspective on districts taking part in the study is the desire of those districts to shape the final implementation of the RT3. The thought being that it is far better to be a part of the pilot and have some influence. The alternative would be not to be involved and have to accept policies that you had no control over when it mandatory implementation takes place after the piloting period.

Policy output. The policy outputs from this subsystem is closely related to the outputs from the federal/state policy subsystem in that they will be very closely aligned to the policy directives in the original federal document. The outputs at the local level may well have some

minor variations based on feedback from the local district pilot studies but they must still come within the parameters of the original federal policy goals.

Policy impact. In this subsystem policy impact is dependent upon your perspective. At the State level it has had a major impact on the operations, organizations, and long-term educational policy direction of the State. At the local level, the impact is currently very insignificant. In fact, after to speaking to several teachers, there is little or no knowledge or understanding of RT3 policies with many confusing it with NCLB. It is unlikely that parents and students are more informed than their teachers. At the meso-level, the task forces, the impact is more noticeable as the members are actively involved in discussions and evaluations of different aspects of the policy. Even so, the numbers involved are so small, around 40 members per task force, that it could hardly be claimed that the impact is widespread. Again, once the policies have been piloted, evaluated, and the recommendations sent to the State Board of Education for approval we should see greater impact and, presumably, more advocacy coalition action.

Power Distribution Model (Appendix B). The PDM for the state/local policy subsystem shows less of a disparity in the power (authority and control) distribution in policy design and implementation than the federal/state policy subsystem. Several factors indicate why this power differential has closed.

With respect to the state level RT3 policy design, the State agencies lead by the Governor's Office and the RT3 Implementation team created the structures, systems, and processes for how RT3 will look locally. Even though they were constrained by the overarching goals of the federal RT3 policies, they still had enough flexibility, in how the goals were met, to allow local community stakeholders contribute to debates and discussions. The local influence over the design of State RT3 policy is represented by the Task Force groups and the 26, out of

186, districts that are involved in piloting the various policies. This arrangement allows for a more even balance of power than the state/federal policy subsystem with the state still having a significant power advantage when it comes to decision making and summarizing the pilot study findings in recommendations for the State Board.

With regards to the policy implementation, it is reasonable to register an increase in local levels of power. The State exerts control over local implementation with a statewide accountability system that will tie teacher and principal evaluation, promotion, retention, and salaries to student performance on standardized tests. Even though local control will be restricted and dependent on the accountability and evaluation models created after the pilot studies, local community stakeholders will be the ultimately deciders of whether the policy is a success or not. A significant difference between NCLB and RT3 is identified in the level of accountability of individual teachers.

Under NCLB, accountability for poor student achievement at any given school was dissipated to the school building level. Under the new RT3 policies, individual teacher effectiveness will be directly evaluated, with the associated rewards and sanctions, while Principals will be held directly accountable for the poor performance of teachers. It is possible that this 'fear' of individual accountability may improve teacher performance but you have to question if this is the best method to raise performance levels.

Section 2: ACF Relatively Stable Parameters and RT3

In the earlier description of the ACFs relatively stable parameters, three key elements, that were not likely to change over the course of the policy cycle, were identified. 1) Basic attributes of the problem area and the distribution of natural resources. 2) Fundamental sociocultural values and social structure. 3) Basic constitutional structure. It is possible, from

these definitions, to identify the stable parameters over the policy cycle of RT3 (currently 2010-2015).

The basic attributes of the problem areas, student achievement, achievement gaps, poor performing schools and teachers, are likely to remain stable. The policy will not be fully implemented until mid-2015, even then the policy has to be given time to have an effect. The earliest that we can reasonably expect to see steady and significant improvements in the problem areas will be several years after the policy is fully implemented.

The fundamental sociocultural values and social structure is not likely to change in the next few years. Public schools will still be the dominant provider of education services. A good education will still be seen as a valuable commodity to possess and the organizational structures that are in place to provide those services are very unlikely to change in any significant way in the short life cycle of the RT3 policy.

Minor changes in school choice provisions such as vouchers or increased charter school provision may introduce some instability in the system but will surely affect only a small minority of stakeholders. Given the long standing legislative, political, and economic institutions and structures that are in place for education in Georgia, basic constitutional changes are improbable.

Section 3: ACF External Events and RT3

Broad negative changes in socioeconomic conditions have had many negative effects but given the substantial federal funding for the 4 years of RT3 implementation it would seem unrealistic to expect the policy would fail through lack of funding. On the contrary, the security of the federal funding enhances the attractiveness of the policy. This has been apparent in the number of states that applied for the grant even though they were told many would fail. In

Georgia specifically, the funds attached to the pilot study must have played some part in districts agreeing to be a part of the implementation testing. It would be difficult to conclude that individual's beliefs were shifted but they have been compromised by the promise of budgetary security. The availability of these federal funds may also have impacted the power balance in coalitions. When tax revenues drop and funding sources dry up, coalitions may lack the resources to sustain their efforts to influence policy and modify their efforts to areas that require less resources.

Until RT3 is being fully implemented state-wide it would be reasonable to state that public awareness and therefore public opinion will remain inconsequential. Dependent upon how the policies are broadly received, public opinion may be able to influence aspects of the policy.

Section 4: ACF Long-Term Coalition Opportunity Structures and RT3

This extension of the ACF adds a new variable to the framework, one that mediates between the stable parameters and the subsystems. Two key subsets of variables within the long-term coalition opportunity structures strongly affect the resources and behavior of advocacy coalitions (Sabatier, 2007) – degree of consensus needed for policy change and the openness of the political system. Currently RT3 is not a particularly open political system. There are task forces and pilot studies but, when they are compared to the whole body of interested education stakeholders they are a very small minority. Again, when the policy is implemented statewide and public impact and awareness is greatly increased this may be an important factor in opening up the political system but it does not guarantee it.

Greater public awareness would certainly introduce the necessary conditions for a high degree of consensus but only if public opinions, of perceived benefits or deficits, were strong

enough to compel individuals to act. It is difficult to see this aspect of ACF being relevant for several years.

Limitations to the analysis. The developmental evolution of ACF, and the causal factors behind those developments were omitted from this paper as well as an identification of its strengths and weaknesses. Their inclusion may have provided a deeper understanding of the dynamics, inter-relationships, and process within the ACF and where it may develop in the future applications.

The analysis is also limited by the data that was currently available. As RT3 policies move further along the implementation processes in Georgia, a more detailed and comprehensive analysis should become possible, especially in the policy subsystem of the state and local community coalitions when RT policies are rolled out state-wide.

Appropriateness and utility of applying ACF to Georgia's RT3 policy subsystems. The ACF made possible the identification of two coalition groups within the federal/state policy subsystem and three groups within the state/local policy subsystem. Foundational elements of both subsystems were clarified and an understanding of RT3 policies with respect to beliefs, strategy, resources, policy outputs, and impacts was developed. The inter-relationships between coalition groups within a subsystem were challenging to quantify for a variety of reasons.

In the federal/state policy subsystem the coalition groups were not competing with each other so much as bargaining with each other, with the federal coalition holding all the major cards. The state coalition members worked together to produce an application that was designed to meet the federal requirements without compromising their core policy beliefs. The mobilization of resources and coalition members actions were less directed to influencing policy change than they were to meeting the federal policy goals. Therefore the federal/state coalition

subsystem did not produce a clear and comprehensive vehicle for a demonstration of the key aspects of the ACF and likely will not in the future.

More promise for a good application of the ACF is held by the state/local advocacy coalitions groups. Here the meso-level group of task force members can be described as being in a position to challenge the state on policy directives, even though final decision making would be out of their hands. Nonetheless, the opportunity to coalesce into an advocacy group for particular aspects or elements of the policy is available to this group.

The best outlook for a good comprehensive illustration of the ACF at work comes from much further down the RT3 implementation plan. When the recommendations from the 26 district pilot study is presented to, and approved by, the State Board they will be rolled out all 186 districts in the State. This is the point where we should see the clearest opportunity for advocacy coalition groups to gather, mobilize, and be active in influencing educational policy. This is because, all of a sudden, the policies will be directly impacting every school in the State. Unlike the current situation, there will be broad public awareness of the policy directives and widespread public debate will be possible because a far greater number will be informed on how the policies will affect their own local school and their child's education. This would be the point at which a re-application of ACF to RT3 would produce more obvious and clearer results.

The ACF is about coalitions advocating for a cause that they believe in. The coalitions and their core/policy beliefs are subject to the various components of the framework – stable parameters, external events, resources, strategies, and their political, economic, and legislative powers. With an increase in the number and diversity of policy actors in educational policy over the last twenty years we will surely see more advocacy coalitions supporting each other in the 'battle' for educational policy direction at all levels of government.

RT3 Georgia: Application of Policy Cycles and Institutional Trends

Policy Cycles and Institutional Trends

Tyack and Cuban (1995), in attempting to reconcile the conceptual contradictions between the apparent linearity of educational progress and the repeating and cyclical nature of educational reforms, proposed a framework to explain the relationship between policy cycles and institutional trends. The authors provided an interpretation of how 'policy talk' can sometimes result in 'policy action' and then, occasionally, 'actual implementation' of policy reforms that lead to institutional trends. This 'policy cycles and institutional trends' framework will be applied to the design and implementation of RT3 in Georgia as a method for describing how this new reform policy conflicts with or reinforces previous cycles of reform, the outcomes that can be anticipated from these similarities and differences, and what elements of RT3 will actually impact classroom practices and evolve into institutional trends.

Georgia's reform plan, laid out in Georgia's Race To The Top Assurances (Georgia Department of Education, 2010b), is organized into the four key education reform areas: Great Teachers and Leaders, Standards and Assessments, Data Systems to Support Instruction, and Turning Around our Lowest Achieving Schools. This framework will be applied to those four key reforms areas in an effort to identify how this particular initiative is reinforcing or conflicting previous reforms, the expected outcomes that may be expected, and which, if any of RT3 reforms have impacted classroom practice. A summary of the policies for each reform area follows, coupled with the application of the policy cycles and institutional trends framework.

Reform Area 1: Great Teachers and Leaders Policy Outline

Teacher, leader and district effectiveness measures. Georgia will create a single Teacher Effectiveness Measure (TEM), Leader Effectiveness Measure (LEM) (for school

building leaders—principals and assistant principals) and District Effectiveness Measure (DEM). There are four components of TEMs and LEMs.

The first component is a qualitative, rubric-based evaluation tool with multiple rating categories to give educators constructive feedback as opposed to the current satisfactory v. unsatisfactory rating. This tool will be based on a number of inputs, such as classroom observations, walkthroughs, teacher artifacts (lesson plans) for teachers, and a quality of school improvement plan and student/staff/parental feedback for administrators.

The second component is a value-added score. Georgia will contract with a value-added provider to develop a statewide value-added model (VAM) to calculate value-added scores at the teacher level. VAMs are a collection of complex statistical techniques that use multiple years of students' test score data to estimate the effects of individual schools or teachers on student learning. These scores will be calculated based on standardized tests currently available in Georgia, such as Criterion Referenced Competency Tests (CRCTs) in Reading, English-Language Arts, Mathematics, Social Studies and Science for grades 1-8 and End of Course Tests (EOCTs) in high school courses. Only teachers in tested subjects (about 30% of teachers) will have value-added scores. Georgia does not plan to create new summative tests in non-core subjects. The state will develop measures to assess student engagement and achievement. The quantitative VAM component will constitute at least 50% of overall TEM for teachers in tested subjects and at least 50% of LEM for all school building leaders.

The third component is the reduction in the student achievement gap at the classroom/student roster level for teachers and the school level for principals. The final component includes other quantitative measures, to be developed, tested and evaluated by the state in collaboration with participating LEAs, such as: Student surveys (grade 4 and up) Parent

surveys (pre-K-3). Core subject teacher evaluations will comprise: 30% qualitative, 50% value added, 10% achievement gap reduction, 10% other quantitative measures (e.g., surveys). Non-core subject teacher evaluations will comprise: 60% qualitative (evaluation), 40% other quantitative measures (surveys).

Performance-based Talent Management

TEM/LEM will be used to inform all talent management decisions: professional development, compensation, promotion, retention, recertification, interventions and dismissals and effective teachers will have higher earning potential under this system. The plan outlines that salary schedule step increases will be tied to performance for all teachers and leaders. Georgia will make career ladder opportunities available for all teachers (Master Teachers and Teacher Leaders) allowing teachers to take on additional responsibilities for additional pay, while remaining in the classroom. Individual performance salary increases will be awarded to all teachers on the basis of TEM and all school leaders on the basis of LEM to recruit, reward and retain Georgia's most effective educators. In order to attract effective teachers to the state's lowest performing schools, additional bonuses will be available to core teachers in high needs schools if they reduce the achievement gap.

Georgia will create an Induction Certificate (3-year, non-renewable certificate for those who have completed an initial prep program) and teachers must reach a threshold TEM by the end of his or her third year to advance to a career teacher certificate. Teachers must achieve a required threshold TEM to be recertified every five years

Ensuring Equitable Distribution of Effective Teachers

To encourage effective teachers to teach in high needs schools, Georgia will provide achievement gap reduction bonus for teachers in high needs schools that are successful in closing

the gap between high-performing subgroups and low performing subgroups, and provide signing bonuses for teachers who choose to move to rural high needs schools, contingent on meeting a high threshold TEM during each year of service. Georgia is entering into partnerships with external organizations with proven records of recruiting and training effective teachers in shortage areas. Teach for America (TFA) will expand in metro area. The New Teacher Project (TNTP) will serve four regional clusters and UTeach will be used to strengthen the pipeline of science and math teachers from IHEs.

Improving Teacher and Leader Preparation

The state will use TEMs and LEMs to guide broader policy decisions, tying results back to teacher and leadership preparation programs. Summer Leadership Academies will be mandated for teams of teachers and administrators from the state's lowest achieving schools. Alternative preparation routes for principals (open to non-educators) will be provided.

In applying this framework to the 'great teachers and leaders' reform area, we see, by far, the clearest interpretation of how 'policy talk' can result in 'policy action' and then, how 'actual implementation' of policy reforms can lead to institutional trends. This reform area, and the policies related to it, delivers a very significant system of accountability at the school building level given that promotion, retention, certification, and salary decisions will be directly linked to an individual's performance and the level of their student achievement.

Elmore (2004) in discussing accountability under NCLB stated that stakes for teachers were diffused into the organization in which they work and as such the consequences were also diffused (p. 292). With the implementation of RT3, teachers and school leaders will be more directly accountable for student achievement and as such any consequences are less likely to be diffused. Given that teacher's behaviors in the classroom, their students' achievement levels,

and their students' opinions of their teaching are all considered elements of the new evaluation system it is difficult to see how these policies would not impact classroom practice and result in institutional trends.

Reform Area 2: Standards and Assessments Policy Outline

Common core state standards. The Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSS) is a state-led process to develop common standards in English language arts and Mathematics for grades K-12 which are internationally benchmarked and aligned to college and work expectations.

Georgia educators have worked to merge the current K-12 Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) curriculum with the CCSS to produce the CCGPS, which will be fully implemented at all grade levels in 2012-2013. The common standards are well aligned to the GPS. Achieve, a national organization that helped write the CCSS, provided states that have adopted CCSS a tool for alignment between the current curriculum and CCSS. The tool revealed a 90% alignment between our GPS mathematics curriculum and CCSS mathematics, and an 81% alignment between GPS English language arts curriculum and CCSS English language arts. Through RT3, the state will provide face-to-face training to teachers on the CCSS through regional meetings, develop new formative and benchmark assessments to provide teachers with critical feedback so they may improve their instruction throughout the course of the school year, and create proficiency-based pathways for Georgia students to waive seat-time requirements and advance upon mastery of subject material.

Georgia had applied for additional RT3 funds as part of an assessment consortium to develop a common assessment aligned to the CCSS. These new assessments were to be available to all states in the 2014-2015 school year and will allow the state to measure the

"college and career readiness" of Georgia students compared to their peers across the nation and globe. Since their initial alignment with an assessment consortium, Georgia has opted to withdraw from a common assessment, produced for twelve partnership states, and decided to produce its own assessments aligned to the CCGPS. The primary reason cited for this decision was the cost of the new assessments. Additionally, timely, formative assessments that measure growth over time will be available as a tool for teachers to inform their instruction and improve student outcomes.

Although this reform area is still in its initial stages of implementation, we can identify that the elements of this policy will also impact classroom practice and likely result in institutional trends. Teachers will be required to teach to the designated standards and students will take assessments aligned to those standards. With evaluations of teachers and schools based on student performances in those assessments it is rationale to assume that teaching students to master the standards and learn material tested in the assessments will directly impact classroom practice and develop institutional trends.

Reform Area 3: Data Systems to Support Instruction

This work will be led by a newly created position at Office of Student Achievement, the State Longitudinal Data System (SLDS) Director. Georgia's vision for its data system is one that provides seamless data access to all users: students, parents, teachers, administrators and researchers. RT3 funds will be used to complete Georgia's longitudinal data system. The plan, for RT3 improvements in Georgia's longitudinal data system, is that teachers will be able to use 'real-time' student-level performance data to inform and improve their instruction.

The SLDS is designed to support the first two reform areas. A major focus in Georgia and in school districts in particular, is the use of data to drive decision-making at all levels of

educational administration. RT3 funds will allow Georgia to develop a more comprehensive data system that allows teachers, administrators, and district officials to track individual student academic performance, discipline reports, and attendance patterns throughout their school career. Data is currently used at all levels of administration in school districts. At the school building level, administrators and teachers are increasingly gaining easier and more comprehensive access to a wide variety of individual, class, and whole school data. With the new accountability requirements under RT3, and the specific elements of the new evaluation system in Georgia it is again a rationale assume to consider that access to, and use of data, in Georgia classrooms will be commonplace.

Reform Area 4: Turning Around our Lowest Achieving Schools

Georgia will employ one of the four intervention models below, as prescribed through Race to the Top, in turning around the state's lowest achieving schools:

Turnaround Model: replace the principal and rehire no more than 50% of existing staff

Restart Model: convert a school or close and reopen it under a charter school operator

School Closure: close the school and enroll students in other schools

Transformational Model: replace principal, institute instructional reforms, increase learning times, and provide operational flexibility and sustained support.

The appropriate model for each school will be selected by the state in collaboration with the Local Education Authority based upon the local context and need, including such factors as 1) the level of Needs Improvement status, 2) geographic location, 3) the strength of the local teacher and principal pipeline, 4) the feasibility of enlisting Education Management Organizations and Charter Management Organizations. In applying the policy cycles and institutional trends framework to this reform area it is reasonable to state that these turnaround

policies will directly impact relatively few schools in Georgia in comparison to the first three reforms which will likely have a much more widespread impact. As such, any institutional trends resulting from these policies would be limited and particular to individual schools.

Findings: Data Sets

All four data sets provided supporting and corroborating evidence that the implementation of the federal Race to the Top educational reform initiative was significantly a top-down model.

With the mandated timescale of RT3 implementation, the minimal length of time states had to put together an application bid, the very strict criteria used to judge applications, and the federal requirement that winning states had to align their applications to the Common Core State Standards and the associated national standardized tests, RT3 can clearly be seen as a top-down implementation of policy. A key characteristic of the policy, that reinforced, or encouraged compliance with the federal requirements, were the staged grant payments and the need for states to maintain deadlines and meet milestones. All major aspects of the policy were controlled by the federal requirements set out in the four policy goals and by the state officials charged with implementing them. States seeking flexibility in meeting the requirements of federal policy needed to seek permission from the U.S. Department of Education and were not guaranteed those flexibilities.

The 'core' of RT3 implementation in Georgia, highlighted in data set one, came from the Georgia RT3 Planning and Implementation Activities category. Of the groups either side of this category it is only the federal and state activities that, so far, were significant factors in influencing aspects of the implementation.

The top-down model of policy implementation implicated with the first data set was clearly supported by the evidence from this second data set. The centrality of control provided by the RT3 Implementation Team, led by the RT3 Director, is clearly illustrated by the organizational chart. There are clear lines of authority and the 'locus of power' can certainly be located at the office of the RT3 Director. As a central hub for all critical decision making, and given the wide remit of the RT3 Director to oversee all aspects of this $400 million project, the RT3 office is clearly at the top of this top-down model in Georgia.

It could reasonably be argued that Georgia's Governor is at the summit of this organizational structure, and, theoretically and figuratively, he is. The Governor is the individual who delivers the final RT3 policy recommendations to the State Board of Education for approval and state-wide implementation. But, it is the RT3 Director that provides those recommendations for the Governor based on the Director's own intimate working knowledge of every aspect of the initiative. It would be unusual for the Governor to challenge or question the recommendations that he is provided with. This would indicate that the RT3 Director is the de facto leader of this organizational structure.

The decision making processes involved in all three categories in data set three identified a clear top-down model of implementation. With organizational and funding/resourcing decisions it would be relatively easy to make a case for a hierarchy that encompasses an accountability system with checks and balances, and a distribution of responsibilities. These criteria would seem to benefit from an organizational structure based at the state level. For educational policy decisions though, there is much more scope and levity for arguing the inclusion of the local community members, who will be most impacted by these decisions, into

the policy decision making arena. The prevention of widespread public debate in this process could be attributed to several mitigating factors which will be reviewed shortly.

Even so, it would seem reasonable to expect that for an educational reform policy that directly impacts every local community in Georgia a forum for widespread consultation would and should have been established. Even though the decision to apply for the RT3 federal grant was made by a select few people, could the decisions regarding implementation have provided an opportunity for wider consultation? With a $400 million federal grant available for use, you would have thought this was possible.

It is evident from reading the first two annual reports from Georgia's Department of Education to the U.S. Department of Education that a major focus of state officials was to ensure compliance with federal requirements and to avoid any situations that would put them at 'high-risk' of losing further funding. This provides further evidence that the top-down model was employed with compliance and cooperation as the expected norms. This expectation is applicable for the federal/state policy subsystem as well as the state/local community subsystem.

Given the remit of this study, one significant factor in the annual reports that stands out is the issue of communication and collaboration. Throughout both reports there is considerable mention of difficulties in communicating between state agencies involved in the implementation of RT3 and in the dissemination of information to the general public. It is significant that the identification of local community involvement, as opposed to local community information, is limited to the actions of members of parent teachers associations acting in a minority role in each of the four task forces. The actual implementation of RT3 in Georgia can therefore be summarily described as a heavily top-down model of education reform that utilizes the processes

of ‘tight-loose’ coupling between federal/state policy actors and between state/local community actors.

Findings: Theoretical Frameworks

The implementation regime framework identifies key characteristics in improving the likelihood of a successful implementation of a policy as agreed sets of norms, rules, and procedures. This would naturally appear to imply that there was some form of collaboration between actors, or groups, in coming to a mutual agreement in setting out working practices. With RT3 there was a mutual agreement but it was through compliance not collaboration. States complied with federal norms, rules, and procedures. While local communities did the same with state norms, rules, and procedures which were framed by federal requirements.

The reasoning behind this compliance could be another factor or characteristic in the implementation regime framework. The concept of cost/risk analyses applied to this situation indicates that Georgia had little to lose by complying whereas non-compliance, or defection, could prove very costly. The ‘costs’ here refer to several factors that include, but are not limited by, time, funding, resources, and credibility. By applying for the competitive federal grant Georgia made very public the state’s intentions regarding the future of its educational policy in the state. Once committed to the initiative any defection would necessarily incur extensive costs in the time invested in RT3 and time lost in losing traction in implementing its own plan for Georgia. The ‘cost’ in funding, or rather losing funding, would be difficult to publicly justify especially given the size of the grant and the current slow-down in state tax revenues.

These factors combine to conclude that there is a strong likelihood that the RT3 reform initiative in Georgia will be implemented successfully. This does not mean, of course, that we

can apply a similar correlation to successfully raising student achievement in Georgia or that any improvement in teacher or student performance can be solely attributed to this new policy.

The advocacy coalition framework (ACF) allowed us to analyze in detail the elements, roles, relationships, and characteristics of policy actors in the federal/state policy subsystem and the state/local policy subsystem. Although the application of the ACF has traditionally been in fields such as health and environment, where coalitions between advocacy groups are more common and formalized, the characteristics of the framework make it a very useful tool to analyze the elements of several layers of government working together to implement a policy in what could be described as coalitions of some sort.

These are not the formal coalitions usually exhibited when diverse groups come together, side-by-side, to achieve a common goal against a common 'adversary'. The coalitions in this case study are working in what I have called informal coalitions. They are a part of what could be described as a production line, one after the other, each responsible for their part in keeping the process going. Each group in this informal coalition has its own separate part to play in the process. With the traditional side-by-side coalition, if a group drops out of the process the remaining group(s) can keep on with challenging their 'adversary'. With the informal coalitions in the two RT3 policy subsystems, if one group elects to not participate in the implementation of the reform the initiative does not continue and implementation is stopped.

The ACF analyses also supported the view that RT3 in Georgia followed a top-down model of implementation. The strategic planning, policy direction, policy resources, expected policy outputs, and levels of policy impacts of the implementation were either directly or indirectly guided by the framework of the federal requirements then by state requirements to local communities as the state pushed locals to keep within the federal parameters. Over the

policy cycle of RT3 (2010-2015), there will likely be relative stability in measurable factors such as student achievement, student achievement gaps, and low-performing schools and/or teachers. The policy is not fully implemented until mid-2015, and even then the policy has to be given time to take effect.

In using the ACF to analyze external events that may have impacted the prospects of the RT3 initiative in Georgia, we identify the broad negative changes in socioeconomic conditions in the state at the time of the RT3 application process. That is not to say that the state only applied because of the reduction in state revenues, and the attractiveness of substantial federal funding for policies that were already planned, but the security of obtaining that funding could have a been a contributing factor in the decision to apply for the competitive grant.

The fact that other states may also be applying for the grants could also have provided an external influence in directing Georgia's application so that it more closely mirrored the criteria set out in the federal notice for applicants. As the policy becomes fully implemented and the policy impact becomes more fully realized we may see more of the traditional advocacy coalitions gathering to present their objections to elements of the policy.

In applying the policy cycles and institutional trends framework, the focus was on identifying elements of RT3 policy that would directly impact schools, and classroom instruction in particular, and which elements were likely to develop as institutional trends. The four areas of reform were analyzed using this framework and the first three, great teachers and leaders, standards and assessments, and data systems all gave indications that they will have significant impacts on school practices and on teacher behaviors in particular. The fourth reform area of turning around low-performing schools may develop practices that result in institutional trends

but this would be limited to those relatively few schools identified as such (in 2011-2012 forty schools in Georgia were identified as low-performing).

A critical factor in concluding that the first three reform areas would result in significant impacts on schools was their close ties to the new evaluation system for teachers, administrators, and district officials. The new evaluation system compels educators to be more directly accountable for their own performance and the performance of students in their schools.

By tying promotion, retention, certification, and salary decisions to improvements in student achievement this particular reform policy encourages, or compels, educators to instruct based on standards, to prepare students for the standards-aligned assessments, and to use the local and state data systems to inform instructional practices. There is no judgment here about whether this policy will succeed in raising student achievement or indeed if this is the right way to approach this issue. What is clear from this policy design is that the interlinking of these elements combined to promote a high probability that the policy will be implemented with fidelity.

Findings: Barriers to Public Participation in RT3 Georgia

Analyses of the research data provided evidence of the extent of public participation and indications of possible causes for areas of implementation where public participation was challenging, if not impossible. There is no doubt that there was some public participation in the early RT3 implementation processes. This participation was limited to memberships, for a few local community members, on advisory task forces.

Several factors provided barriers to more extensive local community involvement in the process and are highlighted here.

Time

The short turn around between the federal notice inviting applications for the competitive grant and the deadline for applications was relatively short. This meant that decisions and discussions had to be made quickly thus preventing the opportunity for widespread discussion and debate. The milestones and deadlines within the framework were rigorous and provided little flexibility in delaying aspects of the policy in order to gain extensive input from local communities.

Events

The election of a new state Governor and State Superintendent of Schools in the early implementation resulted in significant loss of leadership and direction at a crucial time in the implementation process as the new leaders settled into their new positions and positioned their own personnel. The added stress to time deadlines was also significant as personnel efforts were focused on the maintenance of policy deadlines rather than finding effective ways to involve the public in debate.

Organizational Structure and Processes

Even without these other factors, the organizational structures and processes that were already established were not set up to deliver or provide for a program of widespread public discussion and debate. The RT3 team reported challenges in just attempting to inform stakeholders of what was going on. This was without the added challenge of trying to garner input from a diverse range of stakeholders.

Established Norms

Public participation in discussion and debate has previously been focused more on the level of deciding which textbook the state or district should purchase or making changes to the

school calendar. Apart from listening to education policy proposals from candidates wishing to get elected to official positions, the general public has little or no opportunity to become involved in providing input to local and state policy issues. The lack of an established framework within the state and local communities to discuss major educational issues, apart from elections, provides an established norm that denies the public easy access to participate in educational debates.

Motivation

With the successful bid for RT3 funds, the state was provided what could be considered a 'public relations win'. The state was receiving federal funding, not state or local money, to implement policies that it had already planned to implement and the full impact of RT3 policies was, and still is, yet to be realized. Given this scenario it could be concluded that there was little motivation on either the state or general public's part to get involved in a debate that would be costly in terms of time and money.

This concludes the presentation of research data and findings. Chapter five provides a summary of the findings identified in Georgia's RT3 policy implementation processes. It then discusses theoretical models of public participation before proposing a framework for RT3 implementation in Georgia that is designed to increase public participation in that process. Post implementation opportunities for local community involvement are then suggested followed by the identification of the limitations of this research and the presentation of recommendations for further research. The chapter concludes by providing the implications of this research to state legislators and educational policymakers.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The primary purpose of this study was to clarify the Race to the Top (RT3) educational policy processes in Georgia with the aim of providing a transparent and open description of the organizations, policy actors, and decision making systems involved to a wider audience in general and local school communities in particular. This study also intended to identify the extent to which local communities were informed and involved in the Georgia's RT3 policy processes.

Supplemental goals for this study include an analysis of the implementation of Race to The Top with a view to identifying which educational policy reform elements may or may not impact classroom practices and therefore result in changes in institutional trends, and the proposal of a public deliberation and debate framework that aims to provide for and encourage wider public participation in the discussion and debate of educational policies that impact local schools and communities.

This chapter will provide: a summary of the major findings, a review of the barriers to public participation identified in this particular educational reform initiative, a discussion of theoretical models of public deliberation and a proposed model for RT3 in Georgia that is designed to increase public participation, suggestions for possible future opportunities for local community involvement in RT3, the limitations of this research, and recommendations for further research. The chapter concludes with the significance and implications of this study for state legislators and educational policymakers.

Summary of Major Findings

The answers to this study's research questions have produced many responses but we can identify four significant answers that stand out as major findings:

1. Race to the Top in Georgia presents as a very strong example of the top-down model of policy implementation irrespective of the fact that states had to voluntarily bid for the federal grants through the competitive process.
2. The framework and characteristics of this particular reform initiative have, currently, produced high levels of fidelity between policy design and policy implementation in Georgia.
3. Significant barriers to public participation and debate included key aspects such as time constraints, major political activities such as changes in state Governor and State Superintendent for Education, the existing organizational structure employed for the implementation, the established norms within existing state educational agencies which precluded substantial public participation, and the lack of motivational factors that may have encouraged greater public debate.
4. Three of the four key areas of reform (great teachers and leaders, standards and assessments, and data systems) are having an impact at the classroom level and are likely to develop into institutional trends.

The following section provides a brief discussion on models of public deliberation and participation and a proposal of how local communities could have been given the opportunity to be more involved in the RT3 implementation processes despite the barriers and constraints already identified.

Theoretical Models of Public Participation

Two models, which have their own place in raising public awareness of issues, but which do little to promote public participation are described by Pouliot (2009). First, the deficit model, where the exchange between the considered 'experts' and citizens is unidirectional and where the 'experts' primarily inform a public that is considered as having a deficit of knowledge needed to contribute to the issues being debated and as such can provide little value or contribution to the collective knowledge base of the issue (p. 52). This model creates an image where a panel of experts, policymakers, or researchers disseminates information to a public body with little or no contribution being expected or desired. I have attended several forums presented just like that.

The second model described by Pouliot (2009) is the public debate model. This model reconfigures the playing ground in terms of the right to express one's view (p. 53). Here, the public can express their opinions and challenge the positions of the 'panel', but there are no guarantees that any public opinion expressed will add to or contribute towards the knowledge base. Many town hall meetings or public hearings seem to follow the deficit or debate model.

Other models of participation that provide similar opportunities for limited contribution are opinion polls and surveys. They generally do not require a two-way collaboration to provide new knowledge. Again, as with the deficit model, the information is only travelling in one direction, albeit in the opposite one.

Whereas the deficit and public debate model do not recognize citizens' competency in the respect of knowledge production, the co-production model ascribes to citizens the cognitive and discursive competencies required for the creation of useful knowledge (Pouliot, 2009, p54).

A co-production model could be simply described as one that brings together a range of policy actors that have an equal standing in making contributions, though not necessarily equal

responsibilities, and whose purpose is to identify common ground in finding solutions to an issue. This involves a deliberative set of actions as opposed to a passive involvement.

Efforts to define public deliberation have received much attention over the years. Although use of the term has become widespread, deliberation lacks a coherent conceptual definition (Burkhalter, Gastil, & Kelshaw, 2002, p. 398). Public deliberation is defined as the process through which deliberative democracy takes place. A specific, important, and idealized category within the broader notion of what we call discursive participation (Delli Carpini, Lomax Cook, & Jacobs, 2004, p. 318).

I prefer a much simpler and easier to remember definition. Public deliberation is the deliberate action taken by members of the public that allows them to come to a considered, well-informed decision or opinion regarding issues of public concern. Deliberative actions involve more than just giving an opinion. Information needs to be gathered and analyzed, options for solutions sought and evaluated, and decisions are made only after deliberating the body of knowledge relevant to the issue. This assumes, of course, that the opportunity to do all this has been made available.

Deliberative polling is a model where a representative sample of citizens from the population is selected, provided with balanced, accessible briefing materials that help inform them and give them opportunity to think more seriously about the same subjects. The representative sample of citizens are then transported to a single site where they can discuss issues in small groups, and then, in larger groups, question a carefully balanced panel of policy experts and leaders (Luskin, Fishkin, & Jowell, 2002). The model of deliberative polling is remarkably similar to the one described by McCoy and Scully (2002).

McCoy and Scully (2002) present a structure and guiding principles that endeavor to encourage public involvement in democratic decision making with a view to influencing public policy. They highlight two key "marriages". First, dialogue and deliberation, as usually understood need to be combined. This deliberative dialogue creates a more holistic form of communication that acknowledges the importance of building community connections and of collective action and shared work (p. 130).

Second, community organizing and deliberative dialogue must be combined in an effort to bring everyone to the table and to create a true public context for public conversation (p. 130). The authors, quite rightly, clarify who should be involved – "everyone" (p. 129). They promote the concept of study circles where a diverse group of people from all sections of the community share their concerns and connections to the issues. They determine what is important to them, consider each other's views, and find common ground. They find ways to address the issue as well as how they want to get involved and make a difference (p. 119).

The authors' detailed ten key principles that the most successful public engagement processes embrace (p. 120-128). They are listed as: encourage multiple forms of speech and communication to ensure that all kinds of people have a real voice, make listening as important as speaking, connect personal experiences with public issues, build trust and create a foundation for working relationships, explore a range of views about the nature of the issue, encourage analysis and reasoned argument, help people develop public judgment and create common ground for action, provide a way for people to see themselves as actors and to be actors, connect to government, policymaking, and governance, and create ongoing processes, not isolated events.

Elements of the study circle model are also evident in another model for public deliberation put forward by National Issues Forums (NIF). The NIF is a nonpartisan, nationwide

network of locally sponsored forums for the consideration of public policy issues. Organizers select a national issue that has been framed by the National Issues Forums (NIF), like health care, energy, or the education gap. All members of a community or communities are invited to deliberate in a forum. Those who convene the forum also work to actively recruit diverse participation - political affiliation, race, gender, age, class, etc.

Forums are structured so that citizens can come together to discuss three framed options in resolving the problem on the table. The goal of the discussion is not to choose an option from among the three, but to use the wide range of the three options -- all with their own set of values and insights about the problem -- to better reveal the thoughts, feelings, concerns, and desires of the public. Key leaders are identified on the issue and reports are sent to local and national leaders. On the national level, the reports are sent to the Kettering foundation and compiled into a national report which results in Washington D.C. dissemination activities (Center for Public Deliberation, 2013).

A final report would need to be produced that accurately reflected the public's judgment and areas of common ground on the issue. As with any model of public deliberation, we consider the extent to which the public has a voice in issues that concern them. It is another concern entirely how we judge whether that voice has been heard. The theoretical models of public participation provided here are used with the clear purpose of illustrating that examples of public deliberation forums are available.

Proposed Model for Public Participation in RT3 Georgia

One of the supplementary goals of this research was to develop a framework for public deliberation and debate, following a democratic process, and written for the Georgia State Board

of Education, which will provide opportunities for all stakeholders to have maximum voice in the policy process with regards to the Race to the Top (RT3) implementation on Georgia. This framework and its recommendations cannot be developed in isolation.

It is necessarily subject to the limitations and constraints, controlled by external forces, which impose restrictions on what may be possible to achieve. These restrictions include, but are not limited to: the federal requirements in the RT3 grant application process, the capacity of state organizations to disseminate information and facilitate public discussion and debate, the mandatory timeline of implementation processes set by the federal government, the lack of flexibility in how grant funding can be utilized, and the need to align several inter-governmental organizations into a common framework for implementation that allows for the diversity inherent in a statewide program. Any recommendations to the GA State Board of Education would have to comply with federal requirements and state/local districts capacity to implement them.

In order to submit any recommendations to the State Board of Education we would first need to identify where, if at all, there are any possible opportunities within the implementation process for public deliberation. By looking at the application process, the possibility for flexibility in state and district scopes of work, and capacity within the implementation timeline we can explore where, if any, opportunities for public voices to be heard and maximized appear.

The Application Process

The Obama administration announced the Race to the Top (RT3) reform initiative in November 2009 with an initial deadline for applications to be received of March 2010 (later extended to May 2010 following complaints by states). This incredibly quick turnaround made extensive, or even minimal, opportunities for collaboration between state agencies and public forums for deliberation and debate virtually impossible. As such, the decision to push ahead and

compile the application was made at the state level with the only input, outside of governmental agencies, coming from Parthenon, a consultation group. A mitigating factor for the application to go ahead without consultation or approval by the general public was the state Department of Education's contention that the federal funding was just going to provide finance for reforms that the state has already planned to implement.

Flexibility in Scopes of Work

All bidding states had to submit a Scope of Work (SOW) which detailed how every aspect of the reform initiative was to be implemented in that state. With the announcement, in August 2010, of Georgia as one of the states with a winning bid, the federal reform objectives now legitimately became the state's reform objectives. This raised the question of whether Georgia's SOW was 'set in stone' or if any flexibility would or could be granted by the U.S. Department of Education. If flexibility was possible this would provide an opening for the public to contribute to discussions that was denied them during the application stage. Events later that year confirmed that flexibility in amending SOW was a possibility.

The appointment of the new Governor (Deal) in November 2010, and a new State Superintendent (Barge) in January 2011 caused a major time delay in the implementation timetable of RT3. Given their relatively prominent positions on the RT3 organizational structure and their desire to set up their new staffing, communications, and departmental systems, many scheduled RT3 activities had to be placed on hold. Both appointees wanted time to review the original application bid and make their own amendments. This work was completed over Fall/Spring 2010/2011 and the amendments submitted to the U.S. Department of Education for approval (which they were). What this meant was that from August 2010 to the summer of 2011 a sizable window of opportunity was created where the public could be involved in deliberations

over changes that they wished to make to the original application bid. The recommendations for this window of opportunity will be made later in this document after a discussion of the capacity within the implementation timeline for public deliberation. This discussion establishes if the window of opportunity would be large enough to allow for extensive public deliberation.

Capacity within the Implementation Timeline

There are two absolute deadlines with the RT3 initiative. At the beginning, we have the November 2009 announcement of the competitive grant bidding process. At the end, we have the 2014-2015 academic school year where full implementation of all RT3 policies has to be in place in all school districts across all winning states. Within those time constraints certain milestones had to be met for states to receive the next stage of RT3 funds. With the appointment of a new governor and state education superintendent a delay was introduced into the implementation plan of RT3 in Georgia.

The most significant impact of this 'delay' was the planned start of the 26 district RT3 policy pilot studies had to be moved from August 2011 to January 2012. The pilot study was designed to be implemented over the 2011-2012 academic school year. The rationale behind this decision is that the policies would be given a reasonable amount of time to be trialed and the likelihood of obtaining good quality data was enhanced. With the shift of the start date from September 2011 to January 2012, and the same completion date of May 2012 being kept, the time for trialing the RT3 policies was cut in half. The end date for the pilot was maintained at May 2012 due to the subsequent issues that could have been raised by delaying scheduled activities later in the RT3 implementation process and the 'danger' of not meeting the absolute deadline of August 2014 for full implementation.

What this manipulation of the implementation timeline illustrates is that there was indeed capacity for an approach in the SOW to include some model of public forum that allowed local communities to have a voice. In essence, from the appointment of the new State Superintendent for Education in January 2011 to the beginning of the pilot studies in January 2012 there was a considerable amount of time where public forums could have been held. The following recommendations detail what could have been implemented in that time to allow the maximum voice for local communities.

The State Department of Education had comprehensive plans for reform already in place. The reforms were remarkably similar to the application requirements set out in the federal governments RT3 application success criteria which hinted at the likelihood of a successful bid. Without the massive influx of funding that a successful bid would bring in, the state reforms would almost certainly have to be implemented over a much longer timespan.

It is also unclear whether the state would be financially secure enough, given the dramatic downturn in revenues during the economic recession, to divert sufficient funds for a comprehensive public deliberation of its own reform plans. By bidding for the RT3 federal grant program the state had nothing to lose, and it could be argued that a successful bid would indeed provide the necessary funding for a public consultation process.

The state had to hastily write the scopes of work (SOW), its plan for implementation, without public input due to the short application deadline. This SOW was not 'set in stone' as evidenced by an amended SOW submitted and accepted by the U.S. Department of Education over summer 2011. What this clearly shows was that the SOW in the original application submission was open to review and amendment and a public consultation program could be utilized as part of the review process.

Given the parameters and discussion set out above, I propose that the state should have applied for the RT3 federal grant initiative given several factors: state reforms would be implemented at a faster pace, funding would allow for capacity building at state and local levels, funding could be used to provide for a public deliberation program that would inform an amended state SOW and subsequently the 26 districts' SOW.

Georgia's State Education Department Scopes of Work (SOW)

The State SOW submitted in the original application were clearly not 'set in stone'. Given this flexibility in how the state could meet the federal priorities set out in the RT3 application requirements, a window of opportunity for reflection and wider consultation opened up once the successful bid was announced in August 2010. Allowing for the appointment of a new governor and state superintendent for education, the spring and summer of 2011 provided an opportunity for public deliberation on how the reforms were to be achieved. This would still allow time for the feedback from public consultation to be evaluated and inform SOW for the state and the 26 district pilot program to begin in January 2012.

With this in mind, I propose that the National Issues Forum (NIF) model of public deliberation could have been used to gain public feedback on the plans and options for the state's SOW in implementing the RT3 reform initiatives. This could have been achieved using a five stage plan.

Stage one. The four Task Forces set up in the original SOW (Standards and Assessment, Data Systems, Teacher and Leader Effectiveness, School Turnaround) have expert representatives from a wide cross-section of educational organizations (see Appendix C). Each of these task forces is charged with producing a policy brief for their specific area of expertise. These policy briefs will follow the NIF format (as illustrated in Appendix C) where the issue is

placed in context, options are offered with pros and cons, further sources of information identified. These policy briefs will form the basis for discussion and not an absolute range of choices.

Stage two. The four policy briefs will need to be widely circulated. They can be made available on all seven state educational organization websites and all 186 school district websites. Individual schools will have paper copies available and electronic copies can be emailed to all parents that receive electronic communications from the school. This method of disseminating the policy briefs will be fast, relatively inexpensive, and allow for all stakeholders to receive copies in a timely and convenient manner.

Stage three. Public deliberation forums, following the NIF model, will need to be held throughout the state. The RT3 Implementation Team will conduct a review of potential sites for these forums to take place. RT3 Implementation Team members and task Force members will moderate the forums. The priority will be to allow as many stakeholders as possible to participate. Using local high schools in rural as well as metro areas should provide appropriate facilities and capabilities. Forums can be broadcast live and recorded through webcasts for those unable to attend. Recorded sessions can be made available digitally to all schools to allow for repeated viewings. Those unable to attend forums can provide feedback through their local school after watching recordings.

Stage four. Task Force team members will review all feedback and produce a written report for their particular area. This report will again be made widely available to the public in the same manner as the policy briefs. This will allow for any further feedback from the public.

Stage five. RT3 Implementation Team in conjunction with Task Force members will use public feedback in all four reforms to inform revisions to the state and pilot district SOW.

The proposed model given here reflects what was possible rather than perhaps what should be done. As ever in education, we have to balance ideology with reality while attempting to implement practices designed to provide the best educational experiences we can for our children.

Potential Legal Opportunities for Local Community Participation

The US Constitution does not explicitly grant citizens a right to an education nor does it establish a national school system. The 10th Amendment specifies that "…powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people". The effect of the absence in the Constitution of a proclamation of express national responsibility for education and schooling, when coupled with the language of the 10th Amendment, is to cede plenary legal authority for public education to state government (Guthrie, 2007). Given the absence of any direct authority, the federal government's Constitutional authority to finance and regulate education is derived from implied powers contained in several sections of the U.S. Constitution.

The 1st Amendment – Article 1, Section 8, clause 1 states "The Congress shall have power to levy and collect taxes, duties, imposts, and excises, to pay the debts and provide for the common defense and general welfare of the United States". Commonly known as the "general welfare" clause, it has been used as the basis not only of NCLB but also for most federal education policies, including those that prohibit discrimination – Title VI, Title IX, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (Guthrie, 2007). This clause is used to provide for the "general welfare" of all students, in particular for students who are lacking in equity or access due to discrimination, poverty, or disability.

So the federal government has many Constitutional powers of authority over the U.S. education system. The federal government can make a case, although this does not always mean a good one, for almost any educational reform it may wish to undertake using an appropriate clause of the Constitution. RT3 is another federal education policy initiative, albeit promoted in a competitive grant process, and voluntarily entered into by states.

RT3 has come in for much criticism since its launch. RT3 criticisms include: It is profoundly flawed (Onosko, 2011), there was lack of differentiation in scoring rubrics (Learning Point Associates, 2010), selection of some states were subjective and arbitrary (Peterson & Rothstein, 2010), and that it is not research-based (Mathis, 2011). For those not involved in the policy implementation process an alternative form of participation often presents itself in the form of a legal challenge post-implementation.

Sometimes, for local communities to participate in the policy implementation process, their only recourse is to make a legal challenge to all or some parts of a policy after it has been implemented. An analysis of the details of Georgia's plans for the four key areas of RT3 reform identify areas where questions are raised, and possible opportunities to participate through legal action may appear. These few examples are provided more as a discussion point but there is the possibility that as RT3 becomes fully implemented and its impact more evident in local communities that these discussion points may become real legal issues.

Reform Area 1: Great Teachers and Leaders

Teacher, leader and district effectiveness measures: High quality administrative training would be needed on implementing the new observation tool given the new higher stakes. Given the amount of subjectivity inherent in administering the tool, what measures will be put in place to ensure commonality and agreement of standards across schools and districts? Is it

possible to appeal any evaluations? Will identification of areas for improvement incur funds for professional development? Who is liable for poor performing teachers if funds are not available for improving performance?

Value-added model for evaluations: Will the Value-Added Model (VAM) adopted be one that has been well researched and used successfully in other states? If so, did the research methods include testing the growth model on all sub groups of students? In other states where value added models have been used teachers have been publicly labeled as effective or ineffective. How will this affect teacher rights? A VAM used in the Los Angeles Unified School District was discredited by a research study which concluded that in some cases ineffective teachers were labeled as effective and vice versa. This must surely leave the district/state open to a broad scope of litigation with possible punitive damages. The whole issue of publicly ranking teachers could have the consequence of placing their students indirectly into the public eye and give the public an awareness of the performance of those students irrespective of who was to blame for that performance. Would that not cause issue with parents?

Reduction in the student achievement gap: In the face of it, this seems a very straight forward objective. Performance related pay for closing the achievement gap. What if the school demographics precluded teachers/principals from receiving this because they were one student short of the required number? If only one class in a grade level had the demographics of students that would allow for a performance related pay bonus for reducing the achievement gap, which teacher gets assigned to that class? Will it be the one most likely to get the Principal their bonus? Would this encourage teachers to focus on a particular group of students to the detriment of others?

Other quantitative measures: Student and parent surveys. What safeguards are in place to maintain the integrity and validity of the surveys? From current research it is apparent that the quality of instructional practice plays a major part in student achievement. It is also clear that 'out of school' influences have some influence over student achievement. A class teacher has no control over whether a student has breakfast before they come to school, or whether there is one or two supportive parents at home or having to work two jobs, or whether the student has to share a room with a baby that keeps them up most of the night, or whether they have books, paper, or pencils at home.

Would it be legal and appropriate to make teachers 100% responsible for student achievement when they may only have control over a smaller percentage of the influences on the student's level of achievement? Will that teacher be labeled ineffective and have decisions regarding promotion, retention, and salary based on the student making great progress but still failing?

Performance-based talent management: With salary step increases tied to student performance, does this create unfair working conditions with many teachers judged on test scores, and those teachers not having test classes being judged just on observations? What implications will this have for contracts? Does signing a contract mean you agree to the conditions regardless of any apparent inequities? With performance related pay, what happens if state funds are insufficient to pay salary increases? Is it breach of contract? Would the district be open to litigation for not meeting contractual obligations?

Ensuring equitable distribution of effective teachers: Will financial incentives for closing the achievement gap disadvantage students in a particular class if they are not in a particular sub-group because the teacher focuses more time and effort supporting the group that

may provide financial rewards? Could this lead to segregated classrooms to avoid this type of discrimination? This may seem a stretch of the imagination, but all policies have intended and unintended consequences. This situation is more likely to be exaggerated when salaries and promotions are included in the equation.

Improving teacher and leader preparation: The concept of alternative routes for principals must certainly be worth considering. The idea of a principal being a non-educator does raise a couple of questions. Can a non-educator have credibility in evaluating instructional practices, with the attendant consequences for promotion, salaries, and retention? How can the principal create and implement a vision of academic excellence for a school if there is little or no understanding of pedagogy of education? Having attended a hospital does not mean you can successfully perform operations. Consequently, having attended a school does not mean you can successfully lead a school.

Reform Area 2: Standards and Assessments

Common Core State Standards (CCSS): Thinking in a logical manner, the new assessments will be correlated to the CCSS. If the GPS, which provides the tested curriculum in Georgia, only aligns with 90% of the CCSS, does that mean students will not be taught 10% of what will be on the new assessments? If so, how will that impact teacher, school, and district evaluations?

Reform Area 3: Data Systems to Support Instruction

Considering the pure mathematics of a longitudinal data system, does the student achievement model project, with appropriate accuracy and validity, the expected progress for a particular student for the next 6 months or year or longer? Is it assumed that a student's previous

rate of progress will continue at the same rate and is this a reasonable assumption given that students growth rate in most things is rarely linear?

Reform Area 4: Turning Around our Lowest Achieving Schools

Intervention models: With the current changes in accountability, there is a move to use staff evaluations rather than longevity as a form of making staff reductions. By removing 50% of a staff in the turnaround model there would be a reasonable likelihood of several staff members having equitable evaluations. How would you decide which faculty members leave? This could easily create a complex situation that may quickly turn into a legal minefield.

RT3 provides the most comprehensive reform of Georgia education since NCLB. So many unintended consequences and legal issues have been raised as a result of the NCLB legislation. It would be difficult not to come to the same conclusion as a result of the implementation of RT3.

Limitations of the Data Sets/Recommendations for Further Research

Although the data collected so far has enabled some basic conclusions to be drawn and theories to emerge, it is apparent that in all four of the data sets there are major 'gaps' that require further investigation.

The timeline of activities in data set one gave an indication of who the policy actors are, the roles they play, and the relative power they might have. This data set would benefit from: detailed analyses of Georgia's Scope of Work to identify policy, financial, and program priorities; analyses of pilot school districts Scopes of Work to identify particular aspects of RT3 policy being tested in each district, scope and characteristics of community involvement, and

mechanisms for community information and involvement; analyses of the four Task Forces to identify nature, number, and characteristics of members and their role within the task force.

From the second data set it is unclear who made the decisions regarding the composition of each of the Task Forces and how members were selected. Further research into these areas will provide clarity as to the purpose and rationale of these groups. It is also unclear, however, how the relationships between the partnership agencies have been set up and how those interactions occur. The relationship between the individual district's Scopes of Work and the Georgia Scope of Work needs to be revealed. Again, this is another area where further research will be necessary to fill in the gaps of this organizational structure.

Each agency or group in the RT3 organizational structure has its own particular area of expertise, and control, as well as community links and resources that can be used to support the aims of the RT3 Implementation Team. More research is needed though to establish the exact nature of these relationships.

With data set three, the decision making database, the financial decision processes require a much deeper level analysis. Three key aspects of financial decision making would benefit from this deeper research:

1. A detailed analysis is required to identify the rationale behind the different allocations of resources (funding) to each of the pilot school districts;
2. Analysis is required to identify whether the funding allocated is actually appropriate to achieve the policy goals or whether the degree to which the policy goals are achieved is dependent on the amount of funding available;
3. Questions related to the full implementation of RT3 statewide have to been answered. Has a cost analysis for implementation been conducted for each school

district? Will the cost be equitable across all districts? Has school districts capacity to absorb the costs of implementation been evaluated? What are the consequences for school districts that are financially unable to implement the mandated RT3 policies?

Following the financial pathways in a large scale educational reform initiative, such as RT3 in Georgia, can reveal, to some extent, the educational priorities, the policy core beliefs, and the ethical and moral values of the state officials charged with implementation of the policy. Following this data analyses, patterns have begun to develop and theories are emerging. Quite clearly though, much broader and deeper research will be required to find the answers to so many questions and fill so many gaps in our knowledge.

Data set four highlights the significant limitations of local community involvement as well as a lack of evidence of what their contributions were. It is also unclear as to the level of influence local community input had on the final recommendations of the RT3 management team. Given that each task force was comprised of professional educators from colleges, universities, and schools as well as local community members, it is a reasonable question to ask how much value was placed on any contributions made by those from the local communities. Another area that needs further research is the extent to which the task force recommendations were taken up by the RT3 management team. It is unclear whether the recommendations to the debate from these teams were adopted, modified, or left out of the final decision making process altogether and the extent that local community policy actors influenced those recommendations.

The discussions, findings, conclusions and recommendations drawn from this study are critically limited by key characteristics of this particular study and as such, general applications across the field of educational policy and educational policy implementation must reflect those

limitations. RT3 is a federally funded competitive grant initiative where states competed to obtain significant funding over a limited time period to implement a range of reforms that were outlined by rigorous parameters. The unique political, economic, geographical and social composition of Georgia also places limits on the applicability of these findings to other educational policies implemented in other states. The specific Georgia state educational agencies that were in place at the outset of the implementation of this reform initiative combined with the organizational structure that was utilized further emphasized the unique nature of this study. With those limitations being identified, the following provides some general implications that may be transferred to the educational policy arena.

Implications for State Legislators and Educational Policymakers

First, in the current arena of educational reform, policy actors are emerging from an increasingly diverse array of institutions, foundations, organizations, interest groups, and advocacy coalitions (DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009). This increased level of complexity in the educational policy arena may require a higher level of understanding and expertise from policy actors to participate in the policy process.

It is unclear whether policy actors at the local community level have the required knowledge of policy processes or systems to participate, or even if forums for participation are available and/or adequate. It could be argued that policy actors, at the local level, are either uninformed of the policy design and implementation processes, are unaware of forums for their participation, or both. It should be important for policymakers and legislators to consider policy designs that allow for transparency, that provide a framework for widespread public participation, and that would attempt to remove any barriers to that participation. This would

indicate that a combination of top-down and bottom-up models of implementation would be a clear objective for policymakers. The use of the implementation regime framework would provide a pathway towards that goal, and applications for discussion and debate, as exhibited by the National Issues Forum, should provide for greater local community participation.

Secondly, it is hoped that the field of educational policy, in which the federal government is taking an ever increasing role in making policy, will benefit from a better understanding of how federal policies are reconciled with state policies and subsequently translated into locally implemented educational reforms. Much of the existing literature on educational policy implementation looks at categorical, regulatory, or distributive programs rather than policies that utilize competitive programs based on incentives. This study provided an opportunity for policymakers and legislators to gain insight into the use and effectiveness of large scale incentivist reforms, rather than mandates, as a means of influencing state/local educational policies as well as allowing consideration of the efficiency and fidelity of this method of policy design.

The design of RT3 created a tight set of criteria for successful applicants bidding for the federal grants. The flow of federal funding was predicated on specific targets and 'milestones' being met by the implementing states. This tightly controlled framework has produced high levels of fidelity in the implementation of this reform in Georgia. The advantage of this incentivist policy design is that it allows higher levels of government to have tighter control over what actually gets implemented and greater confidence in the resulting policy outcomes. Another advantage of this type of competitive grant program is the political cover it provides for both levels of government. At the federal level, positive policy outcomes can be attributed as a success while criticisms for negative outcomes could be allayed by stating that it was the states

choice to bid for the grant and thereby states should take any blame for failures. At the state level, any challenging or politically sensitive issues addressed by the policy, such as performance-related pay, could be afforded political 'cover' with state pointing to the federal requirements as a compelling factor for implementation of those policies.

Finally, the President's goal of having the highest number of students, in competing nations, graduating from high school by 2020 must surely receive comprehensive support. The RT3 policies and its assessment initiatives are major components of the federal educational policy created to support this goal. Through this federal funding initiative, state educational policies have been directly influenced, or strongly leveraged depending on your perspective. The Georgia RT3 plan is currently in its early stages of implementation and the implementation could reasonably be said to be successful given the impact it is having in the classroom.

This apparent success in implementation should not be confused with the success in meeting the policy goals – increases in student achievement. It will be some years before we will see the real effects of this policy. Even then, it may be difficult to be able to attribute any future gains in student achievement solely to this policy. But, if it is possible to correlate performance increase with the implementation of this policy, then it may be deemed a success in Georgia. Given the diverse nature of various factors such as demographics, economies, and school districts, it would be difficult to categorically state that what worked in Georgia would necessarily work in other states.

Conclusions

As stated in chapter one, federal and state educational policies can have a major impact on the everyday lives of individuals within local school communities. For any public

educational policy, which has a critical influence on how K-12 education is reformed, a framework for public deliberation and debate that allows all stakeholders to have a voice in educational policy decisions should be available. For stakeholders to participate in any democratic process they first have to have an understanding of how that process works. Thus, for policy actors within local school communities to participate in the educational policy process they too must have knowledge and understanding of how that process works.

As stated in chapter two, Vinovskis (2008) tells us that the public is neither very knowledgeable about national educational reforms nor personally involved in educational reforms. Given the myriad and complex changes, across many dimensions, in the American education system over the last fifty to sixty years, it is easy to see how the public can become isolated, marginalized and even ignored in a system that they fund and which plays a very large part in most of their lives.

The crucial questions for the public to answer now include: Are they satisfied with their current knowledge of, and involvement in, educational policymaking? Are opportunities for public participation in democratic deliberation adequate? What format of citizen participation will provide their best opportunity for influencing changes in educational policy? These are challenging questions, and the answers to these questions should surely be what shapes the future of the educational policy arena and educational policy debate and should include all stakeholders.

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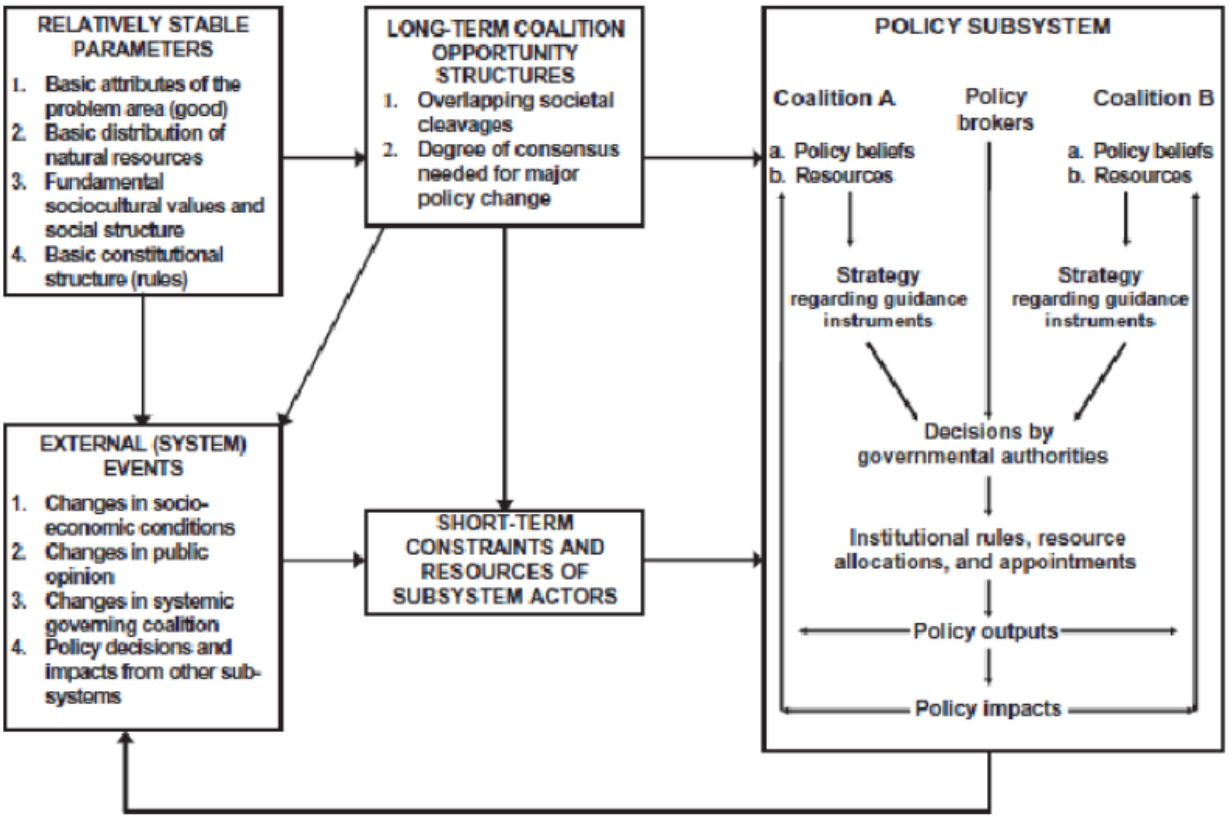
APPENDIX A

SCHEMATIC OF ADVOCACY COALITION FRAMEWORK

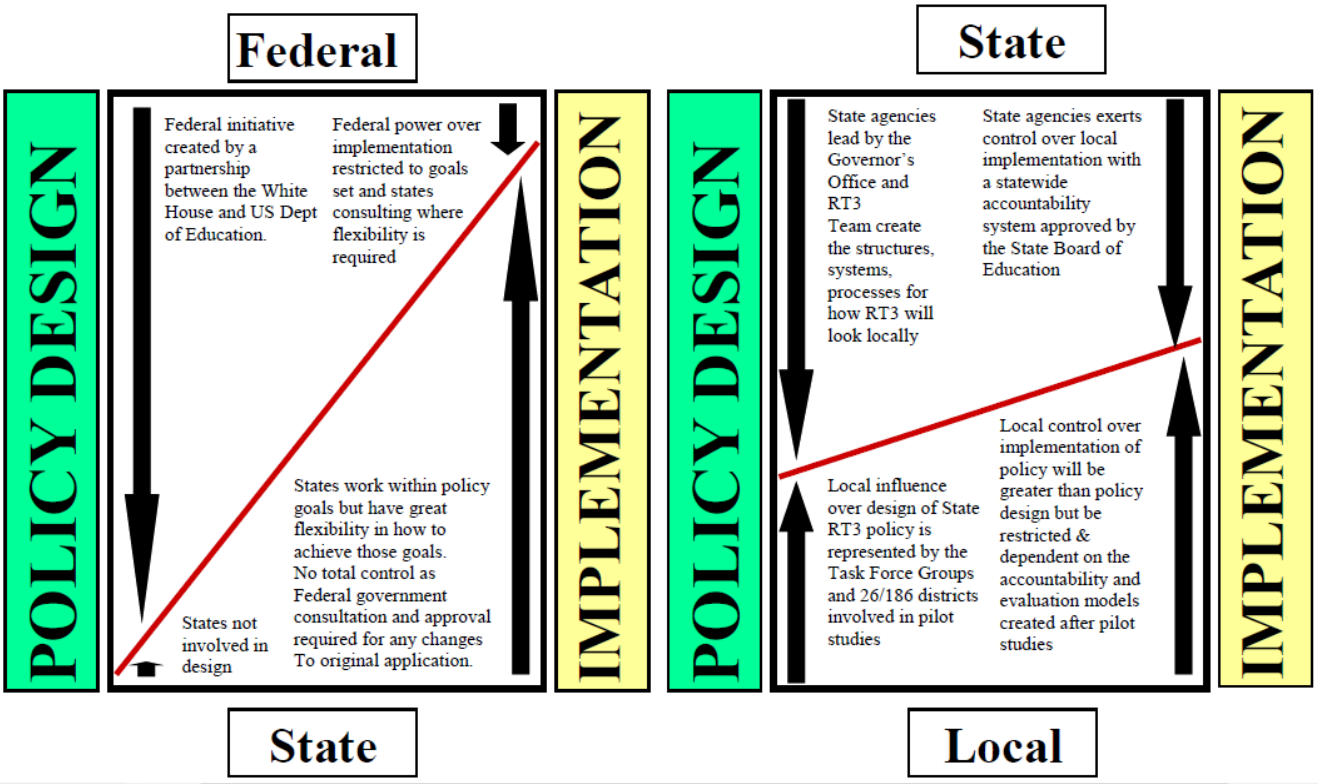
(Weible, Sabatier, & McQueen, 2009)



2007 Advocacy Coalition Framework Flow Diagram

APPENDIX B

POWER DISTRIBUTION MODEL: ILLUSTRATIVE MODEL OF RELATIVE LEVELS OF AUTHORITY AND CONTROL BETWEEN FEDERAL/STATE POLICY SUBSYSTEMS AND STATE/LOCAL COMMUNITY SUBSYSTEMS



APPENDIX C

IRB INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
CONSENT FORM

Race To The Top in Georgia: Examining the role of local communities in the early implementation of the federal Race to the Top grant in Georgia, 2009-2013

Researcher's Statement

I am asking you to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is designed to give you the information about the study so you can decide whether to be in the study or not. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent." A copy of this form will be given to you.

Principal Investigator: Dr. Elizabeth Debray
Department of Educational Administration and Policy
706-542-4244

Purpose of the Study

This is a case study research examining the implementation of Race To The Top in Georgia. The study aims to identify the policy actors, systems, organizations, and protocols involved in the implementation of this federal policy and the opportunities for local communities to be involved in the implementation. You have been selected because of the official position you hold and your involvement in the implementation of this educational policy.

Study Procedures

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to …

- Participate in an interview regarding your role, in your official position as a state official, in the implementation of the Race to the Top educational policy.
- The interview will be audio taped.
- The interview can be face-to-face or over the phone dependent or your preference or convenience.
- Your time commitment would be 45 minutes to an hour.
- A draft of the paper will be sent to you for your feedback, comments and fact checking.

Risks and discomforts

The participants in this study are all public figures who are selected for their particular roles in state educational policymaking. In participating in this study they are reasonably operating in their public and professional function as part of the race to the Top initiative and just being asked to share their thoughts, reflections, and opinions and as such any information obtained through interview is likely to produce no foreseeable risk to the participants. Additionally participants may review a draft of the case study after the interview upon request and may withdraw their participation at any time.

Benefits

The primary benefit to the participants will be their service to the profession. The information they provide will improve knowledge and understanding of the educational policy processes to policymakers and other stakeholders in the educational field.

Audio/Video Recording

Interviews will be recorded by an audio device for the sole purpose of accurately recalling interview information. The audio recordings will be retained for a maximum or 36 months and then destroyed.

Please provide initials below if you agree to have this interview audio recorded or not. You may still participate in this study even if you are not willing to have the interview recorded.

_____I do not want to have this interview recorded.
_____I am willing to have this interview recorded.

Privacy/Confidentiality

When the data is published, the results will identify the participants by their official position in working for the state. While the information will easily be able to be identified as yours, the publications will not include individual names or contact numbers or email addresses.

Taking part is voluntary

Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

If you decide to withdraw from the study, the information that can be identified as yours will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed, unless you make a written request to remove, return, or destroy the information.

If you have questions

The main researcher conducting this study is Elizabeth Debray, a professor at the University of Georgia. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Elizabeth Debray at *edebray@uga.edu* or at 706-542-4244. If you have any questions or

concerns regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706.542.3199 or irb@uga.edu.

Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:
To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. Your signature below indicates that you have read or had read to you this entire consent form, and have had all of your questions answered.

___David Goldie_____	_____	_____
Name of Researcher	Signature	Date
_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Signature	Date

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

APPENDIX D

NATIONAL ISSUES FORUM RT3 EXEMPLAR

US EDUCATION?

Where do we go now?

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (2002) was a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). NCLB had instigated passionate discussion and debate in the years since its implementation. The widely accepted view was that the relatively few positive outcomes of NCLB had been far outweighed by an overwhelming majority of negative effects on the US education system.

With the current federal **Race to The Top** initiative, many states have been awarded hundreds of millions of dollars to implement a federal educational policy that puts even greater emphasis on raising student performance on standardized tests and even stricter accountability measures for districts, schools, and individual teachers. This has resulted in an even greater narrowing of the curriculum than was produced by NCLB, larger class sizes, the high stakes associated with standardized tests have become even higher with their use to promote, retain, reward or release educators. The federal funding for this policy is about to expire and federal and state legislatures are beginning discussions as to the future direction of educational policies.

NCLB and Race to The Top were both federally mandated policies that have had major influences on our education system and our children's experiences at school. These policies were formulated and implemented with virtually no input from the general public.

It is now time to decide on the future of our educational priorities and our educational goals. Every individual in the United States has a stake in the future of our education system and this time your voice should be heard. Be a part of the national debate by using this framework to deliberate about public schools with friends, neighbors, and work colleagues to ensure that your voice will be heard.

Choice 1: Race to the Top Policy

What can be done?

Continue with the implementation of the current policy.

In support

- Greater accountability for teacher / school performance
- Fairness of rewarding "good" teachers and releasing "poor" teachers
- Educational goals are reasonable and appropriate
- Maximizes efficient and effective use of educational funds

In opposition

- Concerns over student growth models providing inaccurate data
- Complexities in assessing teachers of non-tested subjects
- Financial incentives imply teachers could and should work harder
- Increased stress levels for educators dependent on students for salary, promotion, retention and certification decisions

A likely tradeoff

An increase in teacher turnover, and possibly class sizes, may be acceptable to the public if student achievement on tests scores increase.

Choice 2: Improved School Choice

What can be done?

Allow greater school choice for parents through charter schools or voucher systems.

In support

- Parental option to choose a school that meets their child's needs
- Parental option to remove their child from a poor performing school
- School performance improves in the competitive environment
- Greater parental control over child's education
- Curricula are designed and created to meet the needs and wishes of the school community
- Increased ability for innovation and creativity

In opposition

- Longer term strategic planning in schools and districts becomes impossible with the uncertainty of student numbers and their associated funds
- Increased transportation costs create a disadvantage for poorer families
- Standardization and conformity of curriculum may be compromised
- Inconvenience of travelling to distant "choice" schools

A likely tradeoff

The increase in flexibility of choice creates more of a market place in education where customers can choose where they wish to spend their educational dollars. But it may lead to a decentralization of accountability and standards and produce a system that only provides benefits to those parents who can afford the extra costs of transportation.

Choice 3: Inspectorate system of school accountability

What can be done?

A new accountability model, based on the inspectorate system in the United Kingdom which is very similar to the accreditation process in the United States, could be utilized.

In support

- A broad assessment of school performance
- Strengths and weaknesses in all areas are identified
- All teachers, departments, and administrators are assessed in several areas
- Inspection Report is a public document
- Timeframe is established and mandated for the improvements to be made
- Students and parents contribute to the school assessment

In opposition

- Frequency of inspections
- Cost of inspections
- Stress of school community in the lead up to and during the inspection

A likely tradeoff

The inspection creates a great deal of stress prior to and during the inspection week but it then produces a very accurate and detailed report of all aspects of the school. These inspections are expensive but they do provide a very comprehensive report. The inspection team's report provides such specific details of the quality of the school, that are accessible to the general public, that property values could easily be positively or negatively impacted.

Why should you get involved?

Every individual in the United States is, in some way, a stakeholder in the K-12 public education system. This system is providing for the future foundations of American society and citizenship by ensuring that our children receive the highest quality education possible. It also receives substantial public funding and its administration needs to be effective and efficient.

A well informed public can promote deliberations on the future of our educational system that will to be productive, purposeful, and reflect the combined wishes of the citizenry of the US.

Choice 4: Additional Programs

What can be done?

The implementation of smaller reform packages that utilize effective research-based practices to create programs that target identified issues in local school districts.

In support

- Less capital outlay coupled with greater financial flexibility
- Closer monitoring of programs to allow for revision or redirection
- Smaller local issues are easy to identify and target compared to general issues that may be difficult to clarify and finance
- Local issues can be dealt with in a shorter timespan

In opposition

- Reliance on quality research on issues that directly correlate to the local issues
- Deciding priorities for funding
- Continued funding of programs may negate funding opportunities for other programs

A likely tradeoff

Smaller programs require less funding, can directly target local issues, and increase efficiency and effectiveness but benefits are provided to a smaller group than perhaps a more general program.

What to consider:

In your deliberations you may wish to consider these aspects of the debate.

- What, in **your opinion**, should be the purpose of schools today?
- If **you** had the choice, what would you include in your child's curriculum?
- What criteria do **you** use to judge the quality of your local school?
- What do **you** consider to be the strengths and weaknesses of the current policy?
- As a taxpaying stakeholder, what educational programs are **you** willing to fund?

Finding out more: Information on these choices and the US educational system are available from a multitude of sources that include, but are not exclusive to, government white papers, op-ed columns in local and national newspapers, radio and television reports/discussions/debates, books, research papers, opinion polls, policy statements, policy briefs, school board meetings, a visit to your local school and word of mouth. For anyone interested in finding out about educational issues the difficulty is not in finding enough information but finding the relevant information. The following websites/blogs will also provide extensive resources/material.

www.edweek.com www.ed.gov www.uscharterschools.corg
www.educationbug.org/a/school-vouchers www.ofsted.gov.uk
www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/index.html www.nhsa.org
www.education.com/blog www.nces.ed.gov