Nebraska public school superintendents' perceptions of Nebraska's assessment/accountability system's effect on high schools

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NEBRASKA PUBLIC SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF
NEBRASKA'S ASSESSMENT/ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM'S
EFFECT ON HIGH SCHOOLS

by

Wanda M. Clarke

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Education

Major: Educational Administration
Under the Supervision of Dr. Gary Hartzell

Omaha, Nebraska
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DISSERTATION TITLE

Nebraska Public School Superintendents’ Perceptions of Nebraska’s Assessment/Accountability System’s Effect on High Schools

BY

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Completion of this dissertation would not have been possible without the help and assistance I received from my friends and family. I recognize that everything I have accomplished thus far is because there has been someone who has supported and believed in me.

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DEDICATION

I would not have completed this dissertation had it not been for the care, support, and friendship I received from the doctors, nurses, and the support group "gals" at the Creighton Medical Center. This book is dedicated to them and to all the cancer patients I have met who decided to keep their heads up because they didn't want to miss the next rainbow.
ABSTRACT

NEBRASKA PUBLIC SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS’ PERCEPTIONS OF NEBRASKA’S ASSESSMENT/ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM’S EFFECT ON HIGH SCHOOLS

Wanda M. Clarke

University of Nebraska, 2005

Advisor: Dr. Gary Hartzell

The purpose of this study was to determine superintendents’ perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability reporting system (STARS) as they effect high schools. Data measuring the superintendents’ perceptions of the STARS program included how they perceived the STARS program’s effect on teachers, instructional practices, students, building principals, and resources. Demographic information was collected to determine if differences existed between subgroups based on the superintendents’ district size, superintendents’ years of experience, the district’s free/reduced lunch percentage, the district’s 11th grade portfolio rating on communication, the amount of STARS funding, and the financial support required from the district.

Data were gathered using an on-line survey developed from instruments originally created by Weichel (2002), Duke, et al., (2000) and Johnson (1981) and modified for use with superintendents. Electronic mail requests were sent to 259 public school superintendents in Nebraska asking them to complete the
survey. The response rate was 50% (129/259). Statistical analysis included the use of descriptive statistics and analyses of variance (ANOVAS).

Three main themes emerged from the data: 1) Overall, superintendents perceive STARS as having had no significant effect on high school teachers, instruction, students, or resource allocations; 2) Overall, superintendents perceive STARS to have had a positive effect on high school building principals’ leadership practices (M=3.78, SD=.60), and; 3) Specifically, superintendents in districts with student populations that range between 100-1000 (81% of respondents) perceive what effect STARS has had on high school teachers and on instruction as less positive than do superintendents in school districts that range between 2000-5000 students (10% of respondents).

The impact for practice points to the need for increased state funding to STARS, and for a more detailed look at assessment literacy in Nebraska. The results from this study show research is needed to 1) show the effect of state assessment reporting on elementary versus secondary schools, 2) analyze assessment needs of small versus large districts, and 3) conduct assessment development comparisons across districts.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

As the 49th state to adopt an assessment/accountability system, Nebraska is unique. Its 517 school districts range in size from one to more than 46,000 students. These districts cover a combined area of over 77,000 square miles. More than 300 are elementary-only districts, while approximately 400 have a population of less than 100 students. Sixty percent of the students in the state are enrolled in the 20 largest school districts (Nebraska Department of Education, 2002b).

Nebraska is progressive. As a result of Nebraska Legislative Bill 812, passed in the spring of 2000, the state developed and implemented an assessment/accountability system that defined content standards in the areas of communication (reading, writing, listening, and speaking), mathematics, science, and social studies/history. These content standards are to be assessed at the end of four grade divisions: (1) Kindergarten-1st grade; (2) 4th grade; (3) 8th grade; and (4) 11th grade (Christensen, 2001; Roschewski, Gallagher, & Isemhangen, 2001).

Nebraska is determined to work through the national standards and accountability movement in a unique and progressive manner that benefits its students. While other states are mandating state created-tests, Nebraska is moving educators to implement its own system of accountability called the School-based Teacher-led Assessment and Reporting System (STARS). This
system allows each district to generate its own unique assessments based on the state content standards for communication (reading, writing, listening, and speaking), mathematics, science, and social studies/history.

Standards and standards-based reform have swept through Nebraska and the nation (Brady, 2000; Falk, 2002; Fuhrman & Odden, 2001; Gandal & Vranek, 2001; Gratz, 2000; Jones, 2000; Marzano & Kendall, 2000; Popham, 1999; Reeves, 2001; Schmoker & Marzano, 1999), resulting in public demands for accountability and high scores on standardized tests (Angaran, 1999; Elmore & Fuhrman, 2001; Gratz, 2000; Knowles & Knowles, 2001; Main, 2000; McColskey & McMunn, 2000; Merrow, 2001; Scheruich & Skrla, 2001; Tacheny, 1999). As the standards-based movement continues to establish itself in education, debates continue over the benefits of using state-wide testing or high-stakes testing to ensure a student’s understanding of the standards (Bishop, Mane, & Bishop, 2001; Falk, 2002; Holloway, 2001a; Kohn, 2001; Linn, 2001; McColskey & McMunn, 2000; Merrow, 2001; Nathan, 2002; Olson, 2001; Schmoker, 2000; Thompson, 2001). State and local governments are also influencing educational policy in the era of standard-based reform (Christensen, 2001; Christie, 2002; Eisner, 2001; Gittell & McKenna, 1999; Hunt, 2002; Nebraska State Department of Education, 2002a; Reid, 2001; Roschewski et al., 2001; Spillane, 1999), while the federal government has imposed legislation regarding how states and school districts measure standards and accountability (Bush, 2000; Cohen, 2002;

The role of the superintendent is rapidly changing in the standard-based reform and assessment/accountability movement. Once considered the CEO of the educational community focusing primarily on fostering community support and developing and maintaining school and district staff, the role of the district superintendent is expanding to include a greater focus on teaching and learning (Corcoran, Fuhrman, & Belcher, 2001; Craig & Haycock, 2002; Ennis & Wood, 1998; Holloway, 2001b; Johnson, 2002; Kearns & Harvey, 2001; Kelleheer, 2002; Lunenburg, 1992; Miles, 2001; Riley, 1996; Wertz, 2002), within the confines of state and federal mandates and high-stakes testing (Andero, 2000; Bjork & Lindle, 2001; Craig & Haycock, 2002; Donlevy, 2000; Hsieh & Shen, 1998; Hunter, 1997; Johnson, 2002; Jones, 2001; Mackiel, 2000; Sergiovanni, 2000).

Research on superintendents' perceptions of state standards and assessment/accountability systems is limited. In 1981, two studies examined administrators' perceptions of standards and assessments. One focused on administrators' perceptions of mandatory evaluation programs in elementary and secondary schools in Washington State (Johnson, 1981) and the second focused on minimal competency standards in Illinois (Harris, 1981). More recently, a study investigated high school administrators' perceptions of an accountability system in Virginia (Duke, Tucker, & Heinecke, 2000).
Very little research has been conducted on Nebraska educators’ perceptions of the state’s assessment/accountability plan. Two recent studies have looked at Nebraska high school principals’ (Weichel, 2002) and Nebraska fourth grade teachers’ (Beran, 2003) perceptions of these recently adopted state content standards, but no information exists on the superintendents’ perceptions of the state’s assessment/accountability reporting program (STARS). The research proposed here will focus on superintendents of public school districts because they are the leaders of our public education systems in the state. They must take the challenge of reforming our education system, so their perceptions of the state assessment/accountability system are critical to the success of the assessment/accountability movement.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine superintendents’ perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability reporting system (STARS) as they effect high schools. The results were compared to the findings of other recent research conducted on Nebraska high school principals’ perceptions of state standards (Weichel, 2002), and to fourth grade teachers’ perceptions of state standards (Beran, 2003).

The study was limited to high schools for two reasons. The first was to avoid the confounding variables presented by the structural and operational differences between elementary, middle level, and secondary schools. The second was to allow the participating superintendents to focus their responses
and provide targeted and non-ambiguous information. It may be that they perceive the STARS program having a different impact at each level.

Research Questions:

Based on a review of the literature and my personal experiences with Nebraska's assessment/accountability system (STARS), this study was guided by the following questions:

1. What are the Nebraska public school superintendents' perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability system (STARS) in high schools?
2. Is there a relationship between district size and superintendents' perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability system (STARS)?
3. Is there a relationship between a superintendent's years of experience as a superintendent and his/her perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability system (STARS)?
4. Is there a relationship between the socio-economic status of a district and the superintendent's perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability system (STARS)?
5. Is there a relationship between the rating received on the district assessment portfolio for communications at the eleventh grade and the superintendent's perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability system (STARS)?
6. Is there a relationship between the amount of financial support provided by the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) and the superintendent's perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability system (STARS)?
7. Is there a relationship between the amount of financial support districts must provide in addition to the NDE funding and the superintendent’s perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability system (STARS)?

Definition of Terms

- **Accountability** involves the development of measurement systems that identify student progress toward identified standards and school districts toward identified goals (Tacheny, 1999).

- **Assessment** includes the process of gathering information about students in order to assist in determining various decisions and actions (National Forum on Assessment, 1995).

- **AYP** stands for adequate yearly progress. A measured used in the federal reporting of No Child Left Behind.

- **Content Standards** are clear specific descriptions of the skills and knowledge that should be taught and learned (Ravitch, 1995).

- **Criterion-Referenced Tests** give information about how well a student has performed on each of the educational goals or standards included on that assessment (Bond, 1996; Guskey, 2001a; McMillan, 2001).

- **High Schools** are schools that contain grades 9th through 12th.

- **High-Stakes Testing** includes the results of an assessment that determine to a great extent the future of students and teachers in terms of promotion, graduation, and job placement (Lewis, 1995; Popham, 2000).
• **Local Assessment Plans** describe the intended purpose, grade, subject, and types of assessments used in the district. The provide information on how student progress is measured (Nebraska State Department of Education, 2000a).

• **Nebraska L.E.A.R.N.S.** includes measurable academic content standards covering the areas of reading/writing/speaking/listening, mathematics, science, and social studies adopted by the State Board of Education (Nebraska State Department of Education, 2002c).

• **No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)** signed into law on January 8, 2002 (Public Law 107-110) amends the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965.

• **Norm-Referenced Test** is a test which measures a student’s knowledge and/or skills compared against a national sample of students of the same age or grade level (Bond, 1996; Guskey, 2001a; Popham, 1999).

• **Performance Standards** are the performance levels that students must reach to demonstrate mastery of a content standard (Reeves, 1998).

• **Rule 10** includes regulations and procedures for the accreditation of schools in Nebraska. This document, among other things, identifies and describes the required components of curriculum and standards. It also provides assessment and reporting schedules (Nebraska State Department of Education, 2002a).
• **Stakeholder** is any individual who may have an interest in the results of standardized testing, accountability, and school improvement (National Forum on Assessment, 1995). In this study, stakeholders will include teachers, parents, students, community members, and the media.

• **Standards-based reform** is the process of setting high standards and measuring the achievement of those standards over time as students progress through the school system. The performance of students will rise steadily as educators find ways to support students to proficiency of these standards (Wolf & White, 2000).

• **Standardized Test** is any examination that uses uniformed procedures for administration and scoring in order to assure that the results from different people are comparable (Popham, 1999; U.S. Congress, Office of Technology Assessment, 1992).

• **STARS Assessment System** is the Nebraska state assessment/accountability system called STARS – School-based Teacher-led Assessment and Reporting System. This system includes a statewide writing assessment, norm-referenced assessments conducted annually, and the assessment of content standards in reading, mathematics, science, and social studies (Nebraska State Department of Education, 2002b).

• **State of Schools Report** provides student and school information for each Nebraska district. The report includes state-wide aggregate information
based on state academic standards (Nebraska State Department of Education, 2000b).

- **State Standards** are a set of knowledge and skill statements adopted by a state to measure the ability of students in a subject area. Typically these are assessed at various grade levels.

- **Superintendent** is a head administrator who holds an administrative and supervisory certificate with an endorsement for serving as a superintendent for a Kindergarten through 12th grade school system. This full time administrator is directly responsible to a Board of Education established in the district (Nebraska State Department of Education, 2002a). The superintendents surveyed in this research study will include only those who manage districts with high schools.

**Assumptions**

The following assumptions were applied to this study:

1. Superintendents would accurately reflect their feelings as they complete the survey on their perceptions of Nebraska’s assessment/accountability system (STARS).

2. Superintendents in Nebraska would be interested in responding to this topic.

3. Superintendents would have a working knowledge of Nebraska’s state standards, assessment/accountability system (STARS), and processes and requirements for reporting student results.
Limitations

The following limitations were applied to this study:

1. Voluntary participation may influence the results, causing it not to reflect the overall population of Nebraska public school superintendents.
2. Some superintendents may not have sufficient knowledge of Nebraska state standards and the assessment/accountability system (STARS) to answer the survey effectively, thus delegating this area to subordinate staff members.

Delimitations

This research study was limited to public school superintendents since they are required by law to report levels of student mastery of the standards to the State. Parochial schools are not required by law to report student results. In addition, only superintendents with high schools were included in this research study, in part due to the emerging national attention to high schools, and to avoid confounding differences between the perceptions that superintendents may have in regards to elementary, middle or secondary schools.

Significance of the Study

Contribution to research. There is little research available on superintendents' perceptions of state standards and assessment/accountability systems, or how superintendents' views contrast with principals' or teachers'. This study contributes to the research literature on the superintendents'

Contribution to practice. The results of this study provide a variety of information regarding the implementation of assessment/accountability systems. First, the Nebraska Department of Education would have research on how the impact of the STARS assessment/accountability system as defined in Nebraska’s Comprehensive Plan for School Improvement will effect local school districts. Second, superintendents in Nebraska would be provided with information on how other superintendents across the state view their role in the standards-based reform and accountability movements. This may provide guidance for some superintendents and reassurance for others. Lastly, the study may help determine the financial impact placed on superintendents to guide standards-based reform and assessment/accountability measures in their districts.

Outline of the Following Chapters

Chapter 2 reviews the literature pertaining to (1) the historical background of standards and assessments, (2) the role of federal and state policy makers in standards-based reform and accountability, (3) the role of superintendents in standards and assessment, and (4) the perception of superintendents and other administrators toward state standards. Chapter 3 describes the research design of the study; including the survey, methodology and procedures that will be used to gather and analyze the data for the study. Chapter 4 statistically analyzes the
results from the survey and Chapter 5 provides a discussion on the results, some recommendations for research and practice, and a concluding summary.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

The review of literature in this chapter focuses on four distinct areas: (a) the background on standards-based reform and assessment/accountability movements, (b) the role of state and federal policies and mandates in standards-based reform and assessment/accountability movements, (c) the role of superintendents in the standards-based reform and assessment/accountability movements, and (d) the perception of administrators toward the standards-based reform and assessment/accountability movements.

Standards-based Reform and Assessment/Accountability Movement

Standards and assessments. Standards and assessments reflect the values of the local community. Parents and communities want standards that reflect educational excellence. Standards bring clarity and focus to student expectations, they identify what teachers should be teaching in the classroom, what and how it should be measured, and how teachers are evaluated (Harmon & Branham, 1999). Americans want students to be exposed to rigorous standards at every grade level. Rigorous standards mean high levels of expectation not minimum competencies (Gandal & Vranek, 2001; Ravitch, 1995). Americans believe that upon graduation, students should be prepared to go to college without remediation. Rigorous standards may make this possible.

Most standards can be described as measuring declarative or procedural knowledge (Marzano & Kendall, 2000). Declarative knowledge focuses on a
concept or specific idea, while procedural knowledge measures the ability of a student to complete a process or understand a procedure. Different subjects vary in the amount of standards that contain declarative or procedural knowledge (Marzano, 2000). These distinctions in how standards are written reflect the type of teaching and learning required for students to understand at a mastery level.

Standards define a proficiency that is standardized across a grade, school, district and state (Reeves, 2001). Student work is no longer compared to other students, but to a standard (Gratz, 2000). This philosophy rejects the idea that a bell curve of grades exists in every classroom. Every student has the opportunity and capacity to achieve the standard.

Standards are helpful because they provide expectations in advance (Falk, 2002). Teachers, students, and parents are aware of the criteria for meeting proficiency of a standard. Students understand what high-quality work looks like, how the performances in class will be assessed, and what constitutes exemplary work. Standard-based classrooms provide opportunities for continuous improvement (Gratz, 2000; Reeves, 2001).

Assessments are recognized as a universal measurement of standards and success in schools. Good assessment programs are diagnostic. The results of an assessment provide information on where students are struggling (Jones, 2000). Assessment results can verify accomplishments or endorsements on diplomas. According to the National Association of State Boards of Education (2001), assessments ensure that standards are taken seriously and ensure all
students have access to a quality education. They also provide guidance for teaching and learning. Although grades are still the primary source of measuring student growth and achievement in the classroom, standards and standard-based assessments have become the communicated source for measuring schools and what students are expected to learn (Koerner & Elford, 1999).

Standard-based assessments use both multiple choice test items and performance tasks to measure mastery of the standards. Although many districts are moving toward more performance tasks that measure a deeper understanding of students' ability, the multiple choice test is still predominantly used in schools to meet the standards (Reeves, 2000). Performance assessments pose problems for educators because setting cutoff scores for the levels of performance on an assessment is very difficult. Many find the definition of a student who is proficient in a standard is not clear (Guskey, 2001b). This forces teachers to use professional judgment in determining student proficiency, which goes against the nature of standardized scoring.

Standardized achievement tests are the primary source of measurement in schools today. Achievement tests can be used to measure a student's mastery over time, as well as compare one student's mastery with that of another. It is important for districts to match standardized tests to district or state standards. Districts that implement misaligned standardized tests can cause confusion in classrooms as to what should be taught (Jones, 2000).
According to Popham (1999), achievement tests can pose three problems if they are used to measure the quality of education. First they contain items that are not aligned with what's being taught in the classroom. Second, in order to achieve variances across scores, 40-60% of the test items chosen must be answered incorrectly by the students, which is contrary to a mastery test. Lastly, student performance is greatly effected by factors outside of the schools’ learning environment, such as a students’ socioeconomic status (Sheese & McDaniel, 2002).

Standards-based reform. Two theories exist in standards-based reform. The first is to bombard students with vast amounts of information with the realization that only some of it will be remembered. The other theory is the less-is-more approach (Brady, 2000; Marzano, 2000; McColskey & McMunn, 2000). In the later approach, districts adopt a rigorous curriculum that organizes fewer standards around essential ideas and concepts within a subject area. In both approaches, standards are the core curricula for the teaching and learning of all students.

According to Fuhrman and Odden (2001), for standards-based reform to be successful three basic changes must take place in education. First, standards must be clear and rigorous, leading to specific behaviors and performances. Second, instructional practices must change in the classroom to match the standard and the assessment method. Lastly, professional development and support for teachers in the form of time and money must be available to help with
the transitions that will come from a standards-based classroom. Standards-based reform has been criticized because it fails to meet these criteria. Many state standards are vague, lack rigor, and at the same time are too numerous to assess in the time available (Jones, 2000; Scherer, 2001). Standards typically are specific to a discipline, which fails to promote the integration of ideas or concepts across or between disciplines (Brady, 2000). Professional development opportunities required to meet the expectations of standards-based teaching are not challenging teachers to question their current pedagogical practices (Elmore & Fuhrman, 2001). The failure to meet the criteria necessary to support standards-based teaching and assessment has many doubting the success of the standards-based movement. Many believe the standards-reform movement will fail much like other reforms (Marzano & Kendall, 1996).

Despite whether states can meet the criteria necessary to support standards-based reform, local stakeholders are not convinced that standards-based reform will lead to higher student achievement (Schmoker & Marzano, 1999). On the contrary, some believe that holding similar standards for all students will encourage a narrowing of educational experiences for most students and lead many to failure. Expecting all students to achieve the same high standards under the same time schedule is a recipe for failure (Eisner, 2001; Linn, 2001).

**Assessment/Accountability systems.** Standards-based reform has swept the country with virtually every state developing an assessment/accountability
plan to meet the goals of high student achievement and school improvement. Accountability requires districts to develop clear and measurable goals of student progress and school-based plans for improvement. It is the measurement of these goals that is reported at the local and state level (Tacheny, 1999).

Defining a successful school is not an easy matter. As stated in McColskey and McMunn (2000), the National Research Council describes a successful assessment/accountability system as possessing clear expectations, the assessment of a few critical topics, and consequences for schools with rewards for meeting the goals and assistance for low-performing schools. As a result, schools must assess students differently. This new philosophy will require new things, new knowledge, and new expectations. This relates directly to internal accountability practices (Elmore & Fuhrman, 2001; Wolf & White, 2000).

Assessment/accountability systems used to be based at the district level. Districts were responsible for reporting compliance to regulations and providing sufficient reports on student progress based on sufficient inputs. Today, the assessment/accountability systems focus on schools themselves. In addition, significant consequences have been attached to insufficient growth by threats of closure and sanctions to remove leadership and teaching staff (Elmore & Fuhrman, 2001).

Assessment/accountability systems historically have fluctuated between being externally-based which tells the schools what they will be held accountable for, and internally-based which allows schools to build assessments for which
they will hold themselves accountable (Pearson, Vyas, Sensale, & Kim, 2001). State-wide testing and high-stakes testing are movements toward external accountability.

Some parents believe the move toward external accountability has forced schools to focus on student performance and achievement, and cut out time-wasting activities (Johnson, 2003; Main, 2000). Teachers pay more attention to skills and knowledge measured in state tests, and students are getting the benefits of raised expectations. Parents believe educators need to accept the truth that in the past they have not been held accountable for teaching and learning. Placing the blame of learning solely on the shoulders of the students is no longer acceptable. Instead of taking the initiative and holding themselves accountable educators have come to except that other forces outside education will hold them accountable (Hess, 2003; Merrow, 2001).

Standards, assessments, and accountability may change teaching and learning in classrooms (Gandal & Vranek, 2001). Teachers, given time, may modify their teaching to improve their ability to deliver content in ways to increase student understanding. It appears that the assessment/ accountability reform movement though, is not giving teachers enough time to practice new strategies for increasing student achievement and then to reflect on the results (Angaran, 1999). The idea that schools can make substantive changes in a year or two is unlikely (Gratz, 2000). Teachers should be provided with the skills and knowledge required to teach to high standards, and students should be provided
with multiple opportunities to achieve high standards before accountability measures are enforced (Duttweiler & McEvoy, 1999).

The biggest question stakeholders ask is whether the assessment/accountability movement has led to increased academic achievement. The Texas assessment/accountability system has pushed educators, the media, community stakeholders, and parents to pay attention to the test results of all students in the system, including the poor and those children of color (Scheruich & Skrla, 2001). “Low-capacity, low-performing schools often do not respond to student-and school-level consequences by improving their internal accountability and capacity for instruction. Instead, they often respond by doing the same things they were doing, only doing them harder” (Elmore & Fuhrman, 2001, p. 70).

Accountability systems fail to take into consideration that all children are not the same. The goal of most assessment/accountability systems is to measure all students against one measure of competence at one point in time. If students do not meet this level, they are considered failures. The attempt by federal and state mandates to require that all students achieve the same in all subjects is foolish (Knowles & Knowles, 2001). Skeptical observers say that evidence of improvement in student achievement can only be linked to the use of old norms, the repeated use of test forms year after year without revisions, the exclusion of low performing students, and the narrowing of the instruction being
taught in the classroom (Linn, 2001; McColskey & McMunn, 2000; Pearson et al., 2001; Scherer, 2001).

**State-wide testing and high-stakes testing.** The theory of high-stakes testing is based on the notion that measuring performance and attaching the results to rewards and sanctions will cause schools to perform at higher levels (Elmore & Fuhrman, 2001; Vaughan, 2002). As of the 2001 school year, 27 states are currently using or planning to implement high-stakes testing in order for students to graduate, and 45 states release a state report card on schools (Olson, 2001). In addition, 12 states are planning to tie promotion to a state-developed test (Merrow, 2001). Assessment as a means of measuring accountability is appealing to the public. It is relatively inexpensive compared to making program changes, it can be externally mandated, it can be implemented rapidly, and it offers visible results (Linn, 2001).

High-stake assessments have caused some districts to promote practices to improve test scores (Abrams & Madaus, 2003). "High-stake tests create intense pressure on teachers and administrators, and unfortunate decisions are being made as pressure for accountability overwhelms common sense" (Merrow, 2001, p. 655). In an attempt to focus on improving test scores, school districts have eliminated important classes in order to spend more time on the courses that are being tested (Kohn, 2001; Williams, 2003). Some school districts have required teachers to follow specific schedules that dictate what concepts (and pages in the text) each class should be focused on each day. This pacing guide
approach to teaching, according to Falk (2002), will lead to instruction based on district mandates, instead of in response to students' needs. Some surveys have shown that some teachers admit to teaching to the test (Merrow, 2001; Popham, 2004b). In addition, some districts are devoting up to a half a day per week to practice test-taking strategies with students (Falk, 2002). According to George (2001), one district in Florida spends the entire month of January in test preparation. Unfortunately, it is often only the teachers in the tested grades whose scores count in the school's accountability plan (Bruner & Greenlee, 2002). This has caused many teachers to request transfers to non-tested grades.

According to Reeves (2001), many high-stake tests do not provide a balanced assessment picture. Many high-stake tests tend to use predominantly multiple-choice items, which cannot exclude the possibility of student guessing. A single test in not an appropriate or accurate measure of student achievement (Falk, 2002; Kohn, 2001; Merrow, 2001; Pearson et al., 2001; Reeves, 2000; Riley, 2002; Schmoker, 2000; Thompson, 2001). There is also possible concern about the misuse of a single test (Holloway, 2001a; Schmoker, 2000; Thompson, 2001). It is better to collect a body of evidence over a student's entire educational career than to use one test. According to the National Association of State Boards of Education (2001), accountability systems should not be based on test results alone, but on the combination of other forms of school-based data, such as dropout rates, teacher attrition rates, attendance rates, financial
expenditures on professional development, and other variables that may affect teaching and learning. This approach is more labor intensive, but this is the only fair way to evaluate students when the consequence of inadequate evidence is to deny a student a diploma from high school.

High-stakes testing has had some positive results. Greater standardization of curriculum across districts and higher expectations for student performance (McColskey & McMunn, 2000) has been documented as positive trends in education. In addition, external exit exams that requires students to pass minimum competency standards, have generally shown a positive response from community stakeholders according to Bishop, Mane, and Bishop (2001).

The negative aspects associated with high-stakes testing have focused on how it impacts the classroom and students. What is often taught in schools is that test scores are what counts. As a result, teachers and students find ways to cut corners on high-stakes testing programs (Eisner, 2001). The frequent testing associated with high-stakes tests may be impeding the educational system because more time spent on testing takes away from the time spent on teaching and learning (Bishop, et al., 2001; Egan, 2003; National Association of State Boards of Education, 2001). The frequency of testing has some districts neglecting subjects or topics not tested and over-practicing test items found on state assessments (McColskey & McMunn, 2000). This has caused assessment/accountability systems to lose their credibility when high-stakes are attached to them.
State-wide tests describe students' strengths and weaknesses (Schmoker, 2000). This may seem helpful for state reporting, but for teachers who need information to assist students who lack proficiency, these tests lack the ability to diagnose. High-stake tests are designed to identify weaknesses but not explain why the student was weak (Merrow, 2001). “Yet what test scores predict best are other test scores” (Eisner, 2001, p. 369.) The ultimate impact of high-stakes testing has been its impact on the quality of instruction and the increase in dropout rates, especially with the most vulnerable students (Nathan, 2002; Thompson, 2001).

Summary. Standards and assessments are an integral part of the education system. They provide educators with a goal and a focus for teaching. Historically assessments have been used to measure student progress and to make changes in instruction to accommodate areas where students need additional support. The idea of combining standards and the results of assessments to measure the accountability of a school district or individual school has educators worried.

The implementation of statewide testing or high-stakes testing has taken the assessment/accountability movement one step further. The level of importance this test may have on the reputation of a school or a teacher has some educators and state education organizations questioning whether the assessment/accountability movement has the right to make decisions based on one test.
State and Federal Impact on Standards-Based Reform and Accountability

State educational policies. America is one of the few nations in which the responsibility of the schools is not controlled by a national ministry of education. According to Eisner (2001) the United States has 50 departments of education, overseeing more than 16,000 school districts that serve 52 million students in over 100,000 schools. State decisions regarding education are under the combined control of the state department of education and the state legislature.

State departments of education and the state legislature have implemented policies and mandates to guide educational practice in their state. State assessment/accountability systems are implemented to make sure all students study the same material, teach to defined levels of competencies, and then assess those students on those competencies in a standardized fashion (Sheese & McDaniel, 2002). Many states that have provided schools with monetary rewards for meeting accountability goals and applied sanctions to those who failed, have had significantly higher achievement levels and lower dropout rates (Bishop, et al., 2001; Linn, 2000).

Many state legislatures mandate that school districts develop a school improvement plan that includes stakeholder input (Holloway & Pearlman, 2001). The participation of stakeholders provides the school district with an opportunity to educate stakeholders on their assessment/accountability system. The plan they create is guided by the state and must include strategies for charting improvement and movement toward the standards. Some states though are
finding it difficult to oversee and monitor individual schools which must show improvement according to state mandates (Sheese & McDaniel, 2002).

Professional educational organizations, which once controlled decision making in a state, are now adjusting to the new interest in education by state governors (Hunt, 2002; Vaughan, 2002). Research conducted in a nine-state area from 1995 to 1997 observed governors playing a more active role in influencing educational policy and controlling the direction of educational reform. According to the study, although governors were eager to steer the direction of these reforms, it was noted that few of the governors showed interest in compensatory funding for schools (Gittell & McKenna, 1999).

Policies enforced at the state level have some schools, districts, and local education agencies scrambling to ensure that topics covered in their instruction matched the state's standards in the time allotted (Spillane, 1999). State-wide assessments to monitor student achievement on academic standards have been implemented across the nation except in Iowa and Nebraska (Christensen, 2001). This process of developing state-wide assessments is time consuming. According to the National Association of State Boards of Education (2001), the development of a statewide assessment system typically requires 6 to 7 years to complete. Trying to rush this process may prove to be a tremendous mistake in terms of costs and output. Assessment programs need time for development, implementation and evaluation.
State-wide assessments that have been used to categorize or rank schools on a yearly basis can create problems. According to Kohn (2001), state-wide testing should only be used to rate schools never to rank them. This is because the essence of state-wide testing is to provide useful information, not to determine winners and losers. According to Linn (2001), to increase the validity and credibility of a state assessment system, policymakers should place more emphasis on comparisons of performance from year to year instead of comparing school to school. This allows for differences in starting points among schools. Comparing schools across a state to one another only creates more divisiveness among educators. Most state systems do not take into account which students are being compared in their ranking. The students being tested in any given school differ from year to year (Hall, 2001).

There needs to be a balance between state and local assessments. Local assessments have the capacity to provide schools with diagnostic information that would not be available through state testing. Local programs can target instruction for individual students, incorporate authentic assessment tasks, and align to the values of the community. State assessment programs are designed to provide broad patterns of strengths and weaknesses across a group of students (Rabinowitz, 2001). State accountability policies generally have districts looking at dropout and graduation rates, data collection, professional development, and reporting scores both locally and state-wide (Christie, 2002). Both local and state programs are necessary because each has a specific role in
determining how students are achieving. To allow for only one type of assessment does not give a clear picture of student growth.

Nebraska educational policies. Nebraska is one of two states that has not implemented a comprehensive state-wide test, instead it has an assessment/accountability system for all school districts based on formative classroom or school-based assessments developed at the local level (Christensen, 2001). The system is called the School-based, Teacher-led Assessment and Reporting System, or STARS. Nebraska is asking its 534 public school districts to create their own assessment systems based on directions from the Department of Education and the state’s Commissioner of Education, Dr. Doug Christensen.

The statewide system for assessment is described in Nebraska’s Department of Education’s regulations and procedures for the accreditation of schools in Title 92, of the Nebraska administrative code, Chapter 10 (Rule 10). Rule 10 requires each school district to either adopt the state academic content standards or develop local standards that have been approved by the Commissioner as equal to or exceeding in the rigor of the state standards (Nebraska State Department of Education, 2002a).

In Nebraska, Rule 10 describes the statewide assessment/accountability system in which all school districts must align. Each school district develops an assessment plan, which includes a schedule and procedure for assessing state standards. This plan must be submitted annually and include assessments for
both norm-referenced and criterion-referenced tests. At the end of each school year, school districts must submit to the Department of Education an assessment portfolio that contains a collection of local assessments and documentation for meeting the six quality criteria for assessment development. Lastly, each school district must participate in an annual statewide writing assessment (Nebraska State Department of Education, 2002a).

Nebraska was evaluated on its academic content standards in 1998 and again in 2000 by the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation. Nebraska was given an overall grade of F in 1998, and a grade of C+ in 2000 on all of the content academic standards (Finn & Petrilli, 2000). While English and science were given high marks, and history and mathematics average marks, geography was given a failing grade.

In the spring of 2000, the Nebraska legislature passed L.B. 812. The legislature supported a phasing in of the requirements of the law which had one content area reported in three grade levels each year, in conjunction with a state-wide writing assessment (Roschewski, 2004; Roschewski, Gallagher, & Isernhagen, 2001). This state-mandated test in writing occurs at 4th, 8th, and 11th grade. Reporting began with reading and writing at 4th, 8th, and 11th grade in 2001. In 2002, mathematics (in 4th, 8th, and 11th) and writing in just 4th grade were reported. In 2003, reading and mathematics (4th, 8th, and 11th) and only 8th grade writing were reported. Both reading and math (4th, 8th, and 11th) were
reported again in 2004 along with all grades (4th, 8th, and 11th) in writing (Nebraska State Department of Education, 2002c).

Districts in Nebraska must create a local assessment plan that outlines how they will assess student learning based on the state standards. This plan is due to the Nebraska Department of Education by September 30th of each school year (Nebraska State Department of Education, 2000a). The plan must include a norm-referenced test that will measure some of the state standards and a plan for developing an assessment that will measure the remaining standards (Christensen, 2001). Norm-referenced tests included in the plan can be chosen from five approved by the Nebraska Department of Education. The Nebraska Department of Education hired the Buros Center for Testing at the University of Nebraska in 1998 to compare the five norm-referenced tests commonly used in the state to the state standards. They determined that only 35-40% of the norm-referenced achievement tests used in Nebraska matched what was being required of students in Nebraska (Roschewski, et al., 2001).

June 30th of 2001 was the deadline for submitting the first assessment reports from each district under the criteria for STARS. As required by legislation in the spring of 2001, school districts were supposed to submit their assessment portfolios for evaluation and the results of student achievement on the standards. The Nebraska Department of Education provided guidance on how to submit this information in a STARS update (Nebraska State Department of Education, 2000c). The State Department of Education was required to determine model
assessments based on those submitted so that other districts could adopt or adapt their process to more effectively improve their assessment development or measurement of student achievement (Nebraska State Department of Education, 2000c).

School districts have been given guidance from the Nebraska Department of Education through pamphlets called STARS Updates. The first Nebraska STARS update was provided to school districts in May of 2000. This update included a summary of LB 812 which amended state statute 9-760 related to standards, assessment, and reporting (Nebraska State Department of Education, 2000a). The Nebraska STARS updates, sent to district assessment administrators, provide information on how to assess special populations - STARS Update #1 (Nebraska State Department of Education, 2000a), or on how to prepare the district assessment portfolio - STARS Update #5 (Nebraska State Department of Education, 2001). Other STARS Updates include information on how to incorporate the state standards into the curriculum, how to develop instruction that focuses on the standards, and how to measure progress on student growth (Roschewski, et al., 2001).

The State of the Schools Report was summarized in STARS Update #9. This document provided definitions on how each district would be rated. Schools were given two scores, one rating on the district assessment portfolio, and one rating on students' mastery of the standards. Ratings on the assessment portfolio were based on alignment with the standards and the assessment
development process. The rating on student achievement was based on the percentage of students mastering the standards (Nebraska State Department of Education, 2002c).

Districts were held accountable for the quality of the assessment product and on how well students achieved the assessments at 4th, 8th, and 11th grades. The assessment portfolio submitted from each district was to document the assessment development process. The assessment portfolio was required to meet six quality criteria for assessment development as identified by the Buros Institute for Testing located in Lincoln, Nebraska (Plake, Impara & Buckendahl, 2004). The six quality criteria included: 1) Alignment to the Standards, 2) Opportunity to Learn, 3) Items Free from Bias, 4) Developmental appropriateness, 5) Score consistency, and 6) Development of mastery levels.

Portfolios were submitted and judged by in-state and nationally recognized assessment experts on the quality of the documentation provided on the criteria (Plake, Impara, & Buckendahl, 2004; Roschewski, et al., 2001). In November, information was released to the public in a “State of the Schools” report that profiled each school district in the state. Districts were given two scores based on the results of the portfolio rating and student achievement on the assessments given the previous year. Districts reported the results of their students on these assessments and were given a rating based on the number of students who performed at the proficient or advanced level.
Since the onset of the assessment/accountability system in Nebraska, the STARS program has undergone a three year evaluation. The evaluation utilized a National Advisory Committee for Assessment (NACA) and a District Assessment Evaluation Team (DAET) (Buckendahl, Plake & Impara, 2004). Both teams provided evaluative information used to determine model strategies used by districts to complete their portfolios and to review district appeals and resubmissions to their portfolios. The three year evaluation identified the increase in assessment literacy among educators as strength of the Nebraska assessment/accountability program. It also suggested that the formative nature of the assessment system promotes continuous improvement by providing reviewers' recommendations about what districts can do to improve their assessment system. Weaknesses of the assessment/accountability system in Nebraska revolve around the limited understanding educators possess on creating acceptable measurement practices and the limitation to compare student performances across districts on assessment achievement (Buckendahl, Plake & Impara, 2004).

So far, no penalties have followed low ratings. Nebraska's assessment/accountability plan has provided financial support for each educational service unit to train people in the assessment development process. Nebraska allocated 1.8 million dollars for training and test development for the STARS program (Reid, 2001). These individuals then provided training at the local level. Federal monies have also been provided in the form of grants to

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schools so that teams of teachers can be provided compensation for developing their own local assessments (Christensen, 2001). It is hoped that community pressure and district pride will force low performing districts to improve student achievement (Reid, 2001).

Other states impose a system of ranking schools according to their student success. In Indiana, schools are ranked on a scale from unsatisfactory to exemplary based on students' test scores on the Indiana Statewide Testing for Educational Progress (Sheese & McDaniel, 2002). In Nebraska, school districts are not ranked but each district's performance is compared to how its assessment measured up to the six quality criteria of assessment development.

**Federal law: No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA).** The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA) signed into law on January 8, 2002 (Public Law 107-110) has been the greatest increase in federal involvement of K-12 education to date (Linn, Baker, & Betebenner, 2002; Dodge, et al., 2002). It amends the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 (U.S. Department of Education, 2002b). It no longer is reform about access or money, compliance or excuses, but about improving student achievement (Paige, 2002). This increase in federal involvement is supported by 57% of the population surveyed in the Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll (Rose & Gallup, 2002).

NCLBA provides billions of dollars to help states and districts meet the new demands for higher and more equitable outcomes. This amount is an increase in the federal budget by 20% over that of the previous year (Bush, 2000;
Dodge, et al., 2002). It has substantially shifted the role of the federal versus state control over education (Cohen, 2002). The No Child Left Behind Act will make the federal government a major partner in school accountability, yet will continue to fund schools at less than 8% of a school's total budget (Rose & Gallup, 2002).

NCLBA reflects government’s impatience with the pace of state-led accountability systems (Cohen, 2002). NCLBA requires more frequent testing, sets a 12 year timeline by which every state and every school must bring every student from every demographic subgroup up to a level of proficiency, and specifically defines the consequences for not meeting adequate yearly progress (AYP). Detailed guidelines to upgrade teacher professional development, math and science education, technology and early literacy instruction are part of the legislation of the NCLBA.

NCLBA requires states to test every child every year in grades 3 through 8 in reading and mathematics. It also holds districts and schools accountable for ensuring that all students make adequate yearly progress (AYP) toward the states' standards for grade-level proficiency by the year 2014 (Hunt, 2002; Olson, 2001; Tyler, 2003; U.S. Department of Education, 2002b). This means that schools must gain in student achievement and at the same time close the gap in achievement between groups of students (Linn, Baker, & Betebenner, 2002; Paige, 2002). According to Rose and Gallup (2002), although at least 66% of the public would require a national curriculum and a standardized test for all
students, NCLBA requires states to develop the content standards and the assessments that measure students' progress.

NCLBA makes states accountable for results. It requires states to implement statewide accountability systems covering all public schools and students. Performance on assessments by students must be broken out by subgroups of poverty, race, ethnicity, disability, and limited English proficiency to ensure that no child is left behind (U.S. Department of Education, 2002c). This information must be made available yearly by issuing an annual report card on statewide results and individual school performance (U.S. Department of Education, 2002a). In addition, all states will be required, at federal expense, to administer the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) test to a random sample of students in order to validate state test results (U.S. Department of Education, 2002b).

NCLBA provides flexibility for all states and every school district in the use of federal funds. Prior federal flexibility focused on the waiver of program requirements, NCLBA allows the transfer of up to 50% of the funding they receive under four major state grant programs to any one of the programs, or to Title I (U.S. Department of Education, 2002c). There is greater flexibility in the use of funds in return for greater accountability of results (Hunt, 2002; U.S. Department of Education, 2002a). Many public school districts are torn between the improvement demanded by NCLBA and maintaining programs and services that already exist under tight budgets. Some worry that the new testing system
will cost more than what Congress has set aside in aid for that purpose (Robelen, 2002a).

NCLBA focuses educational dollars on research-based strategies to improve student understanding and mastery of content standards. Specific to this aspect of NCLBA is the Reading First initiative. This ensures that every child can read by the end of third grade (U.S. Department of Education, 2002c). In order to accomplish this goal, investments in scientifically based reading instruction programs and strategies implemented in the early grades are imperative. In addition, funding to ensure that screening and diagnostic assessments are available for students in grades K-3 that are at risk of reading failure is provided along with professional development for the K-3 teachers. NCLBA proposes to invest almost 3 billion dollars in improving teacher quality (U.S. Department of Education, 2002a).

NCBLA expands choices for parents and exerts pressure on low-performing schools with consequences if they continue to fail to improve (Robelen, 2002a). Once a school is identified as not meeting the requirements of adequate yearly progress (AYP), parents are allowed to transfer their child to a better-performing public or charter school. The district must provide transportation to the new school by using Title I funds. Federal dollars may also be used to provide supplemental educational services, including tutoring (U.S. Department of Education, 2002c). The options and supplemental services should provide parents more say in their child's education and low-performing
schools with a substantial incentive to improve. According to George W. Bush prior to winning the presidential seat, "Federal money will no longer flow to failure" (Bush, 2000, p. 125).

**Impact of NCLBA on states.** When referring to President Bush's proposals on NCLBA, Merrow (2001), interprets the impact this has on schools in the following manner:

He's right to hold schools accountable, and certainly no child should be left behind, but I can't stop thinking about Woody Hayes. When he was coaching Ohio State football, Coach Hayes avoided the passing game because, as he put it, "Three things can happen when you throw the football, and two of them are bad." As I read President Bush's proposals, it seems to me that this time the odds are worse: about six things can happen, and five of them are bad. (p. 658)

Many states will find it difficult to report on the progress of students in grades 3 through 8 because many do not administer both reading and mathematics in these grades (Olson, 2002a). Currently, just 17 states test all students in grades 3-8, and even fewer meet all of NCLBA's requirements ("ESEA Signed into Law," 2002). "Many states, in fact, still have not fully complied with core requirements in the 1994 version of the ESEA – especially those related to standards and testing – even though the final deadlines are now past" (Robelen, 2002a, p. 29). Federal guidelines state that baseline data for defining AYP should be determined by the 2002-03 school year, yet some states do not have final assessments in place or plan changes in their current assessments so they will be unable to use this year's results for that purpose (Cohen, 2002). Although educators are concerned about meeting the
requirement of NCLBA by the end of the 2013-2014 school year, 80% of Americans surveyed in the Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll believe their school will meet that goal (Rose & Gallup, 2002).

As states define adequate yearly progress (AYP), many are reviewing their definition of “proficient” as the cut for meeting NCLBA. Many think the requirements for student proficiency under NCLBA may lead to a possible lowering of standards as states try to circumvent the bill’s requirements (“ESEA Signed into Law,” 2002). Currently the law is very vague, and the ambiguity allows each state room to experiment with its own definition (Olson, 2002b; Robelen, 2002b). Some education advocacy groups are recommending that the legislature change the criteria for determining how schools can earn the highest rating under NCLBA (Richard, 2002).

NCLBA establishes the goal of having all students at the proficient level or above within 12 years, yet many content standards used by states to develop tests vary in specificity and in rigor (Cohen, 2002; Goertz, 2001; Linn, et al., 2002; Olson, 2002b). This means that states are not starting on a level playing field. If current tests and standards are used to set the definition for AYP, some states will have much farther to go to show improvement, not because the students are achieving less than another state, but because of the greater rigor in their definition of a proficient performance (MacQuarrie, 2002). Bracey (2002) estimates that over 80% of the schools will fail at meeting AYP due to the lack of criterion.
NCLBA does not explicitly require that the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) test be used to validate state test results, but it does require that a sample of 4th and 8th grade students complete the assessment in every state every other year (U. S. Department of Education, 2002b). According to Olson (2002c), an ad hoc committee that oversees NAEP warned of the potential limits that could be drawn from comparing NAEP to state assessments. The results from NAEP may differ from state assessments in the content covered, the format used to assess content, and the categorizing or defining of subgroups. Some believe that using NAEP to verify student achievement, may even create a de facto national curriculum ("ESEA Signed into Law," 2002).

Many are waiting to see if NCBLA will allow states to use a combination of state and local assessments in different grades to meet the new testing requirement (Olson, 2002a). States must show in their plans a testing system that evaluates schools across the state in a fair and rational manner. The plan must also provide annually for the dissemination of information to parents on the progress of their children as compared to the state. The legislation has failed to spell out in the regulations whether the tests must be comparable across grades and schools (Robelen, 2002b; U. S. Department of Education, 2002b). This is seen as a major weakness because comparability will bring greater equity (Olson, 2002a).
Reporting adequate yearly progress AYP will be difficult for many urban school districts with high mobility rates. Transient students create huge problems for school districts trying to meet state requirements for accountability. Poor performance on tests can have little to do with teacher effectiveness, and more to do with the frequent mobility of the students. Because the federal accountability plan monitors AYP for disaggregate subgroups of students, including minorities, the poor, the disabled, migrant farm workers, and students with English as their second language, mobile students should also be included as a category (Hall, 2001).

**Summary.** The implementation of Nebraska's assessment/accountability system, called the School-based, Teacher-led, Assessment and Reporting System, or STARS is being substituted for a state-wide test. Each school district in the state is expected to develop quality assessments that align to the state standards. School districts and schools will be rated, not ranked, on how they develop their standards-based assessments, and on how well students master the assessment. In the development period, schools have been given guidance on how to meet these requirements.

Federal mandates have required states to be accountable for student results. They require that each state submits a plan that outlines how they will define adequate yearly progress (AYP) and use funds on research-based strategies to improve student understanding and mastery of content standards.
Some states are finding it difficult to meet the requirements of federal mandates because the language in the mandates has not been fully defined.

**The Role of Superintendents**

**Educational leader.** The superintendent is the single most important individual for influencing and setting the tone and pattern of change in a school district (Ennis & Wood, 1998; Hardy, 2004; Wertz, 2002). Historically, this position has been compared to the CEO of the company who focuses time primarily on fostering community and staff support, and developing and maintaining the vision of the company. Today, new leadership is required to turnaround education. According to Kearns and Harvey (2001), superintendents could take a lesson from corporate leaders and admit that educational quality has been ignored, and that educators have been out of touch with their customers.

The assessment/accountability movement demands instructional leadership for professional survival in education. Superintendents must take the role of reforming schools by focusing on the essential curriculum and authentic assessment movement (Lunenburg, 1992; Riley, 1996). The role of the superintendent also includes a larger focus on teaching and learning, professional development, data-driven decision making, and accountability (Hardy, 2004; King, 2002; Riley, 1996; Skidmore, 2004).

Although superintendents want to focus on curriculum and learning, many new to the position find it hard to juggle this focus with organization tasks, budgets, transportation, and school board issues (Harrington-Lueker, 2002).
Today, educational leaders are concerned about the balance between training and motivating teachers, supporting teachers to meet the expectations of accountability, and maintaining the daily functions of a district (George, 2001). Many district superintendents will be evaluated on their leadership abilities as related to facilitating student learning, and developing, implementing and evaluating curriculum and instruction which is directly connected to the goal of school improvement (Holloway, 2001). Yet many of them will find it difficult to find meaningful support in professional development for themselves (Hardy, 2004; Skidmore, 2004).

Superintendents set the tone of leadership by focusing on results. They have the goal of bringing school staff the information and tools needed to move students to higher performances (Starratt, 2004). They provide assistance in areas that will help low performing schools such as assigning the strongest teachers to the students who need them most, allocating financial resources to support student achievement, and spending professional development dollars wisely to meet accountability mandates (Craig & Haycock, 2002; Downey, 2001; Ennis & Wood, 1998; Mathews, 2001; Miles, 2001).

Although superintendents set the stage for school improvement, building principals often hold the burden of meeting achievement goals. Superintendents support learning by establishing performance goals that target improved student achievement and then support the administrators as they develop creative ways to implement strategies to accomplish that goal (Taylor & Williams, 2001).
Johnson (2002) revealed that 67% of the superintendents surveyed, by the education organization Public Agenda for the Wallace-Reader’s Digest Fund, believe holding principals accountable for their students’ test scores is a good idea, but 44% admit that talented principals are leaving the profession because of the stakes associated with standards and accountability.

Superintendents face many ethical challenges in meeting the goals of accountability set by state and federal mandates (Pardini, 2004). According to Kelleher (2002), a significant problem that plagues school districts is the belief held by educators that student achievement always falls within the bell curve, therefore expecting 100% of the students to master standards is an impossibility. Superintendents must convey their core values and vision for student achievement. How superintendents talk about achievement data, and making certain all students achieve at high levels, is a key factor in getting district staff and community stakeholders to respond to the challenge of improving student expectations (Craig & Haycock, 2002; Harrington-Lueker, 2002).

Corcoran, Fuhrman, and Belcher (2001) reviewed a study conducted by the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) on the roles of central office staff in shaping and supporting instruction reform in three large urban districts. The results indicated that regardless of the role of the central office to provide schools with good information about specific programs and design, previously held philosophical beliefs regarding curriculum and learning often won over empirical evidence. This makes it a challenge for superintendents to keep
the focus on the reform when philosophical patterns of thinking held by staff influence the strategies and the success of the district goals.

The influence of politics. Over the years, politics have played a key role in curriculum policy (Hess, 2004). The superintendents' role in establishing curriculum policy within their districts has diminished while state and federal departments of education have increased their role in developing curriculum mandates. Although school boards still have the power to set curriculum, many are limited by State law requiring certain levels of achievement or requirements and by state and federal funding (Andero, 2000).

The traditional separation between education and local government is not as clear in the United States today as it once was. Many big cities are seeing the power of politicians and interest groups asserting greater authority over the public schools (Bjork & Lindle, 2001). Many politicians are using their power to gain public support by controlling funds set aside for public education. Some use funding as a reward for increased student achievement (Hunter, 1997).

The impact of implementing federal and state mandates without the necessary funding or support from the state is becoming a critical problem. Due to changes in leadership, new state mandates, and changes in funding, many large districts have a difficult time maintaining any reform that has a focus and support from staff (Corcoran, et al., 2001). State policymakers should eliminate the inequities that exist in most state school finance formulas. According to Craig and Haycock (2002), in 42 states, districts with the highest child poverty rates
receive fewer state and local dollars per student than districts with the lowest poverty rates. Sergiovanni (2000) contends that states should provide technical assistance and professional development for helping schools set standards and develop assessments that are defensible and trustworthy.

Superintendents today tend to view their leadership from the political and moral perspectives, especially having knowledge of legislation, policy development, and understanding the political system and community resources (Hsieh & Shen, 1998). In a survey conducted on the challenges faced by superintendents by Johnson (2002), 81% of the superintendents who responded said that politics and bureaucracy are the main reason superintendents are leaving the profession. That may be why superintendents are using various strategies to respond to state and federal accountability requirements (Hunter, 1997). Because what is taught, how it is taught, and what is learned is being increasingly controlled by state legislators, superintendents are providing leadership that encourages schools to be more adaptive to changes in their environment, and to seek changes in the environment itself (Sergiovanni, 2000).

Most superintendents have concerns in how mandates and processes are being implemented and how the results of state accountability systems are working to benefit students (Jones, 2001; Mackiel, 2000). Some believe the results of higher academic standards, increased graduation requirements, and high-stakes testing may only produce superficial benefits (Donlevy, 2000; Mackiel, 2000). Schools are designed to prepare young people to become
productive citizens. While educational reform involving standardization, competition, and high expectations bring value and accountability, it also puts large numbers of children into conditions that are impossible for them to meet and may extinguish the desire of many to learn (Donlevy, 2000).

**Summary.** The role of the superintendent has changed since the onset of standards and the assessment/accountability movements. Politics now have impacted schools' structure and instruction. Much of the change is due to the movement toward accountability, but some has resulted from the tie with funding. School funding is on the chopping block. Many stakeholders see school accountability as one way of holding funding back from schools that do not perform. Superintendents are worried that this move to tie funding with accountability will harm schools in the long run.

**Superintendents' Perceptions of Standards-based Reform and Accountability**

*Administrators' perceptions of standards and assessments.* There is very little research on the perceptions of administrators' on state assessment/accountability systems. To date, five research studies have been conducted on the perception of administrators of their state standards or assessment/accountability systems (Danielson, 1994; Duke, Tucker, & Heinecke, 2000; Harris, 1981; Johnson, 1981; and Weichel, 2002). One of the reasons for the lack of research in the areas of standards and accountability is that it is still a new phenomenon. A chronological summary is outlined below of the latest
research conducted on standards and assessment/accountability systems implemented across the United States.

Harris (1981) conducted a study in Illinois with 156 school districts, which constituted one-fifth of all school districts in the state. A 24-item survey was created and distributed to collect data on the perception of public school administrators (superintendents and principals) on the issue of minimal competency standards. Three hundred and forty one superintendents and principals were surveyed on their perceptions toward various aspects of minimal competency standards. The results showed no distinct differences in the responses between superintendents or principals. The general conclusion gained from this study was that administrators (77%) did not believe that minimal competency standards would make a significant difference in student achievement, although 57% believed that schools would become more accountable for student competency. They also stated (79%) that minimal competencies should be developed at the local-level opposed to the state-level.

In that same year, Johnson (1981) conducted a related study in Washington State on the perception of 250 school superintendents on the impact of mandatory evaluation programs. She found superintendents perceived an increase in communication to both the public and parents in relation to student progress due to mandatory evaluation. The perceived impact of the mandatory evaluation also led to increased testing, increased record keeping, and an
increase in the ability to gather and assess information concerning the needs of students.

A qualitative study was conducted by Danielson (1994) on the perception of 9 elementary principals from a single district in North Carolina regarding the impact of a statewide high-stakes accountability policy on curriculum, instruction, resources, and professional roles and relationships. The results indicated that the rating system used in North Carolina had a great effect on how principals responded to the high-stakes accountability system. Principals believed the curriculum narrowed, and more time was spent on test preparation. They also felt that avoiding the sanctions of being rated as a low performing school was the prime motivation, not receiving monetary rewards of being rated as a high performing school.

The second study focusing on a statewide accountability system was conducted in Virginia by Duke, Tucker, and Heinecke (2000). They surveyed 16 principals on the Accountability Initiative implemented in the state of Virginia in 1995. The intent of the initiative was to hold individual schools accountable for attaining statewide standards in selected grades. The results indicated that the positive gains of accountability were: (a) increases in curriculum coordination and focus to align to state requirements, (b) increases in teacher collaboration, (c) changes in instructional planning, practice, and assessments to meet state requirements, and (d) increases in local efforts to monitor teaching and learning. The problems associated with state mandated accountability initiatives were: (a)
reduction of curriculum, (b) reduction of choice for students, (c) standardization of instructional practice, (d) erosion of school climate and morale, and (e) loss of local control.

The last study compared the perceptions of high school principals in Nebraska on the impact of state standards on schools (Weichel, 2002). Two hundred and sixty one surveys were completed by high school principals across the state. The results indicated that overall principals perceived that state standards would have little impact on their schools except in the areas of administration, stress, pressure and time. They also felt it would impact educators' time, but not greatly influence student learning. Generally high school principals in large districts had a more positive view of state standards than in small school districts. Overall, many of the responses from principals resulted in neutral scores; a response the author explains is due to the "newness" of the standards movement in Nebraska.

Summary

Much has been said about the standards and assessment/accountability movement. There has been no agreement on whether the movement to increase accountability for student achievement can be directly linked to the increase in establishing standards and standards-based assessments. Narrowing the curriculum and standardizing the instruction to assure that all students are being taught similar content with similar expectations does not necessarily ensure that all students will learn to the same level of proficiency. On the contrary, it may
backfire and cause many of our students to opt out of education, reducing the number of students who obtain a high school diploma.

State and federal mandates, especially with the passage of "No Child Left Behind" (NCLB) legislation, have changed the way students are being educated and how levels of proficiency are being determined. States are required to follow regulations that require them to implement standards and accountability plans and to outline how they will require each school district to meet adequate yearly progress. Although the language of NCLB allows for flexibility, states that do not align to the legislation will forfeit federal monies. States are quickly trying to understand how this will impact their state and the education system.

In conclusion, the research that exists in determining the impact of state standards or assessment/accountability systems on administrators is limited. As states and the federal government begin to mandate testing and accountability requirements on schools, more administrators will begin to feel the impact that these mandates have on the operation of the school, on educators' time and instruction, and ultimately on student achievement.
Chapter 3

Methods

The purpose of this study was to determine superintendents' perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability system (School-based Teacher-led Assessment and Reporting System or STARS) as they effect high schools. This chapter describes the research design, sample, instrument, variables, and methods of data analysis used in this study.

Research Design

A cross-sectional survey approach was used to collect data regarding superintendents' perceptions of the assessment/accountability system (STARS) in Nebraska. Both demographic and perceptual data were collected. Analysis produced both descriptive and inferential statistics for interpretation.

Sample

The sample consisted of the 259 public school superintendents in Nebraska who lead districts that contain one or more high schools.

Data Collection

Data were collected through a survey. Two types of data were collected, demographic and perceptual.

Demographic Data. Demographic information was collected on the

- Superintendent's gender,
- Superintendent's age,
- School district size,
• Superintendent’s years of experience as a superintendent
• Percentage of district students on free and reduced lunch,
• Rating received on the district assessment portfolio for communication at the eleventh grade,
• Amount of funding provided from the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) to implement STARS, and
• Amount of additional financial support required to implement STARS.

Perceptual Data. Data measuring the superintendents’ perceptions of the STARS program included how they perceived the STARS program’s effect on

• Teachers
• Instructional practice
• Students
• Building principals
• Resource allocation decisions, and
• How they assessed the various components of the STARS reporting system.

Procedure. In the fall of 2003, a survey packet was made available on-line through the University of Nebraska at Omaha’s web site. I sent each superintendent an electronic letter inviting participation and (a) an explanation of the study, (b) instructions for filling out the demographic information and the survey on-line, (c) the website address that contained the survey, (d) a request to
send a reply via email when they completed the survey, and (e) the
demographics information and the survey itself, which used a Likert response
format (see Appendix A). A survey completion email was used to maintain
anonymity. The survey completion email was sent by the superintendents
separate from the on-line survey.

Those who did not respond within 3 weeks were sent a follow-up email
asking them to complete the on-line survey. The response rate after the second
email was 50% (129/259).

Sample Characteristics

The final sample of superintendents and their districts is described below.

Gender. Ninety-two percent of the respondents were male, and 8% were
females.

Age. Age was broken down into four categories. Approximately, 7% of
the respondents were younger than 40 years old, 19% between 40 and 49, 57%
between 50 and 59, and 17% over 60. The percentages do not add up to 100
because individual percentages were rounded.

District Populations. Five categories were used to distinguish groups of
respondents based on district populations. Fifty-eight percent of the
superintendents that responded were in charge of districts with less than 500
students, 23% of districts with 501-1000, 5% of districts with 1001-2000, 10% of
districts with 2001-5000, and 4% of districts with 5001 or more.
Years as a Superintendent. Thirty-eight percent of the superintendents had 5 or fewer years experience, 15% had between 6-9 years of experience, 17% had between 10-15 years of experience, 20% had between 16-25 years of experience, and 10% had 25 or more years of experience.

Free/reduced lunch percentage. Free and reduced lunch percentages were groups using the Title I service categories determined by the federal government. Six percent of the districts had 0-10% of their students receiving a free and/or reduced lunch, 46% of the districts had between 11-34% of their students receiving a free and/or reduced lunch, 30% of the districts had between 35-49% of their students receiving a free and/or reduced lunch, 17% of the districts had between 50-74% of their students receiving a free and/or reduced lunch, and 1% of the districts had between 75-100% of their students receiving a free and/or reduced lunch.

Nebraska STARS rating on Communication Portfolio at 11th Grade. The rating districts receive on the communication portfolio was determined using the state categories. Four percent of the districts received an unacceptable rating on the 11th grade communication portfolio, 2% received an acceptable-needs improvement rating on the 11th grade communication portfolio, 4% received a good rating on the 11th grade communication portfolio, 43% received a very good rating on the 11th grade communication portfolio, and 47% received an exemplary rating on the 11th grade communication portfolio.
Amount of STARS Grant. The amount of money awarded to districts to be used to support assessment development was based on a state formula that used student enrollment to determine funding. Two percent received $95,000, 3% received $47,500, 9% received $23,750, 5% received $19,000, 27% received $14,250, 25% received $4,750, 26% received $2,375, and 3% received $950.

Financial support required by district. In addition to STARS funding, districts supplemented the funding to support assessment development. Six categories were created to identify groups of respondents. Twenty-six percent of the respondents used less than $5000 to support the funding of assessment development, 22% of the respondents used between $5,000-$9,999 to support the funding of assessment development, 20% of the respondents used between $10,000-$19,999 to support the funding of assessment development, 17% of the respondents used between $20,000-$49,999 to support the funding of assessment development, 8% of the respondents used between $50,000-$99,999 to support the funding of assessment development, and 7% of the respondents used more than $100,000 to support the funding of assessment development.

Instrument

Origin. The Likert-survey utilized in this study was developed from three previously administered studies. Relevant and appropriate questions were drawn from each and, in some instances, modified to best suit the specific
purposes of this study (see Appendix A). The source studies are described below:

1. Duke, Tucker, and Heinecke (2000) surveyed Virginia administrators to determine their perceptions of the consequences of educational reform in their state.

2. Johnson (1981) collected administrators' perceptions of mandatory evaluation programs in elementary and secondary schools. Johnson's survey instrument consisted of 30 subscales that measured tasks common to school administrators.


Content validity. To ensure the survey's content validity, the questions were reviewed by members of the Metropolitan Omaha Education Consortium (MOEC) Executive Steering Committee of Superintendents. A cover letter explaining the validity process and the questions were sent to the members for review (see Appendix B). The MOEC schools consisted of seven local urban/suburban districts in the area of Omaha, Nebraska. Suggestions from five superintendents were submitted. These suggestions were evaluated and corrections and/or additions were incorporated into the survey. This revised survey was distributed to obtain estimates of reliability.
Reproducibility. To provide an estimate of reliability, the survey was piloted with 30 randomly chosen superintendents across Nebraska. The pilot group was sent a letter explaining the process for obtaining reliability and the survey (see Appendix C). These superintendents were also eligible to be part of the ultimate study sample.

The reliability coefficient for each of the sub-scales was computed using Cronbach’s alpha. Cronbach’s alpha was .6995 for the teacher subscale, .8568 for the student subscale, .8440 for the principal subscale, .7019 for the resource allocation subscale, .7140 for the instructional practice subscale, and .8728 for the STARS component subscale (see Appendix D).

Research Questions

1. What are the Nebraska public school superintendents’ perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability system (STARS) in high schools?

2. Is there a relationship between district size and superintendents’ perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability system (STARS)?

3. Is there a relationship between a superintendent’s years of experience as a superintendent and his/her perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability system (STARS)?

4. Is there a relationship between the socio-economic status of a district and the superintendents’ perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability system (STARS)?
5. Is there a relationship between the rating received on the district assessment portfolio for communication at the eleventh grade and the superintendents' perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability system (STARS)?

6. Is there a relationship between the amount of financial support provided by the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) and the superintendents' perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability system (STARS)?

7. Is there a relationship between the amount of financial support districts must provide in addition to the NDE funding and the superintendents' perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability system (STARS)?

Data Analysis

Independent variables. The independent variables included the demographic information obtained from the superintendents about themselves and their district. These included: (1) district size, (2) years experience as a superintendent, (3) percentage of district students on free and reduced lunch, (4) rating received on the 2002-2003 district assessment portfolio for communication at the eleventh grade, (5) amount of funding provided from the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) to implement STARS, and (6) amount of additional financial support required to implement STARS.

Dependent variables. For each of the research questions, the dependent variable was the mean score calculated on each of the sub-scales used in the survey. These included: (1) effect on teachers; (2) effect on instruction; (3)
effect on students; (4) effect on building principals; (5) effect on resource allocation; and (6) effect of STARS components.

**Analysis Procedures.** The survey questions were constructed on a 5-point Likert scale. One on the scale represented “strongly disagree”, and 5 on the scale represented “strongly agree”.

Some questions asked the superintendents to mark high scores for negative responses. An example of this type of question is 1.3, “Teachers have been reluctant to attend workshops on assessment.” A positive score on this question would actually describe a negative effect. Recoding was a necessary statistical procedure to allow responses to all questions to be compared and interpreted statistically in a similar manner.

When performing statistical analysis of the data collected for each subscale, means were computed from the usable responses. The mean substitution process was utilized for the purpose of being able to use a particular superintendent’s scores if he/she left some of the items blank.

Analysis of responses to Research question 1 utilized descriptive statistics, such as means and standard deviations, to provide information on the superintendents’ perceptions of the state assessment/accountability system (STARS).

Analysis of responses to Research questions 2 through 7 utilized a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to examine differences in superintendents’ perceptions related to the demographic variables. Because multiple statistical
tests were conducted, an alpha level of .01 was used for each statistical analysis to help control for Type I errors.
Chapter 4

Results

The purpose of this study was to determine superintendents’ perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability system (STARS) as they effected high schools. This chapter describes the research design, sample, instrument, variables, and methods of data analysis used in this study.

Data were collected using an on-line survey. Electronic mail requests were sent to 259 public school superintendents in Nebraska asking them to complete the survey. The response rate was 50% (129/259). The survey questions were constructed on a 5-point Likert scale, where one represented "strongly disagree" and 5 represented "strongly agree".

Research Question 1

What are the Nebraska public school superintendents’ perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability system (STARS) in high schools?

Perceptions regarding effect on teachers. The overall mean score on the 7-item subscale was 2.66 (SD=.54). Recoded mean scores for each question ranged from a low of 1.49 on question 1.7 to a high of 4.60 on question 1.2. Table 1 displays the mean and standard deviation scores for each survey item and the overall mean of the recoded value for the subscale.
Table 1

Superintendents’ Perceptions Regarding Effect on Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>M (recoded M)</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Teacher morale has improved.</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Teachers have had more committee work responsibilities.</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>1.40 (4.60)</td>
<td>.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Teachers have been reluctant to attend workshops on assessment.</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>3.34 (2.66)</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Teacher morale has worsened.</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>2.50 (3.50)</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 Teachers have become more accountable for their students' success.</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6 Teachers have gained knowledge about assessment because of STARS.</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.7 Teachers have had fewer workshops to attend.</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Recoded M and SD 2.66 .54
Overall, it appears that superintendents do not see Nebraska’s assessment/accountability system having a major effect on teachers’ lives ($M=2.66$, $SD=.54$), although there are some dimensions and some kinds of districts in which the superintendents do perceive a great impact, such as on efforts required for committee work ($M=4.60$, $SD=.63$) and a greater accountability ($M=3.67$, $SD=.99$). Despite the absence of an across-the-board impact, superintendents perceive a generally negative effect on teacher morale ($M=3.50$, $SD=1.07$), and a generally positive effect on the knowledge teachers have gained about assessments because of STARS ($M=4.15$, $SD=.74$).

**Perceptions regarding effect on instruction.** The overall mean score on the 5-item subscale was 2.67($SD=.66$). Recoded mean scores for each question ranged from a low of 2.52 on question 5.1 to a high of 4.36 on question 5.4. Table 2 displays the mean and standard deviation scores for each survey item and the overall mean of the recoded value for the subscale.
Table 2

Superintendents' Perceptions Regarding Effect on Instruction.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>M (recoded M)</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Teachers spend less time helping individual students.</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>3.48 (2.52)</td>
<td>.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2 Teachers move more quickly through the curriculum in order to cover all of the material on which their students are evaluated.</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>2.85 (3.15)</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3 Teachers have spent less time teaching and more time on test preparation activities.</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>2.35 (3.65)</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4 Record keeping has been a major time constraint for teachers.</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>1.64 (4.36)</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5 Teachers' instruction is limited to what is assessed.</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>3.04 (2.96)</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Recoded M and SD**

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Recoded M and SD</strong></td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>.66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Overall, it appears that superintendents do not see Nebraska’s assessment/accountability system having a major effect on classroom instruction ($M=2.67$, $SD=.66$), although there are some facets in some districts in which the superintendents do perceive a negative effect, such as on the need for teachers to cover curriculum quickly ($M=3.15$, $SD=1.02$), and on the time spent on test preparation in favor of teaching ($M=3.65$, $SD=1.05$). Despite the lack of a universal impact, superintendents have a negative perception on the amount of time teachers spend in assessment record keeping ($M=4.36$, $SD=.72$).

Perceptions regarding effect on students. The overall mean score on the 7-item subscale was 2.83 ($SD=.68$). Recoded mean scores for each question ranged from a low of 2.71 on question 2.3 to a high of 2.97 on question 2.2. Table 3 displays the mean and standard deviation scores for each survey item and the overall mean of the recoded value for the subscale.
Table 3
Superintendents' Perceptions Regarding Effect on Students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>M (recoded M)</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1 More students who need assistance have been identified.</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Students the farthest behind in their learning have received the most attention and assistance.</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 There has been an improvement in student grades.</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 Students leave high school more equipped to be successful.</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5 Students have become more accountable for their own success.</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6 Students learn more.</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7 Norm-referenced achievement scores for students have increased.</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Recoded M and SD**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>.68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In general, it appears that superintendents do not see Nebraska's assessment/accountability system having a major effect on students ($M=2.83$, $SD=.68$). There is a fairly neutral perception from superintendents that students the farthest behind are receiving more attention and assistance ($M=2.97$, $SD=.94$), and that more students needing assistance are being identified ($M=2.91$, $SD=1.04$).

**Perceptions regarding effect on building principals.** The overall mean score on the 8-item subscale was 3.78 ($SD=.60$). Recoded mean scores for each question ranged from a low of 3.35 on question 3.6 to a high of 4.12 on question 3.1. Table 4 displays the mean and standard deviation scores for each survey item and the overall mean of the recoded value for the subscale.
Table 4

Superintendents' Perceptions Regarding Effect on Building Principals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>M (recoded M)</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Building principals have gained knowledge about assessment</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>because of STARS.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Building principals have sent communications to the staff</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>4.02</td>
<td>.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>regarding school progress on STARS.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Building principals have sent communications to the parents</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>regarding school progress on STARS.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Building principals have interpreted accountability reports to</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>staff.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5 Building principals have engaged in more school improvement</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>planning with their staff.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6 Building principals have provided teachers with instructional</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>methods to improve test results.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7 Building principals have provided in-services for teachers on</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>4.01</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the topic of assessment.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.8 Building principals have become more accountable for their</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>school's success.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Recoded M and SD

3.78  .60
Essentially, it appears that superintendents see Nebraska’s assessment/accountability system having a positive effect on building principals (M=3.78, SD=.60). Superintendents perceive that building principals have gained knowledge about assessments (M=4.12, SD=.69), are sending communications to the staff on school progress on assessments (M=4.02, SD=.74), and are providing in-services for teachers on the topic of assessments (M=4.01, SD=.84).

Perceptions regarding resource allocation. The overall mean score on the 7-item subscale was 2.87(SD=.61). Recoded mean scores for each question ranged from a low of 1.83 on question 4.7 to a high of 4.19 on question 4.6. Table 5 displays the mean and standard deviation scores for each survey item and the overall mean of the recoded value for the subscale.
Table 5

Superintendents' Perceptions Regarding Resource Allocations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>M (recoded M)</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Teachers have been reassigned to teach courses in which student results are reported to the state.</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>3.75 (2.25)</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Elective courses have been reduced.</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>3.40 (2.6)</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3 Teachers have requested to be transferred out of courses in which student results are reported to the state.</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>3.46 (2.54)</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4 Costs associated with the assessment/accountability system (STARS) such as testing and reporting have resulted in lowered expenditures in other areas.</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>2.59 (3.41)</td>
<td>1.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5 Field trips have been reduced because of STARS reporting.</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>3.28 (2.72)</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6 Costs for testing in my district have increased due to state requirements.</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>1.81 (4.19)</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7 The total cost for implementing testing for state reporting in my district has been covered by the STARS grant.</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>1.83</td>
<td>.87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Recoded M and SD 2.87 .61
On the whole, it appears that superintendents do not see Nebraska’s assessment/accountability system having a major effect on resource allocations in their district ($M=2.87, \text{SD}= .61$), although there are some aspects in some districts in which the superintendents do perceive a substantial effect, such as on the increased costs to the district for testing ($M=4.19, \text{SD}= .85$). Regardless of the absence of a sweeping impact, superintendents perceive a general negative effect toward the costs for implementing state required testing which is not covered by state-funded STARS grant ($M=1.83, \text{SD}= .87$).

**Perceptions regarding STARS components.** The overall mean score on the 8-item subscale was 2.96($\text{SD}= .82$). Recoded mean scores for each question ranged from a low of 2.49 on question 6.6 to a high of 3.30 on question 6.5. Table 6 displays the mean and standard deviation scores for each survey item and the overall mean of the recoded value for the subscale.
Table 6

Superintendents' Perceptions Regarding STARS Components.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.1 STARS Assessment Portfolio ratings have been accompanied by sufficient comments to help my district improve its assessments.</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>1.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2 Eleventh grade student performance ratings on standards have been fair and reasonable.</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3 Assistance from the Nebraska Department of Education on implementing STARS has been adequate.</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>1.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4 The timeline for reporting student achievement on STARS is reasonable.</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.5 The timeline for submitting the assessment portfolio is reasonable.</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.6 The assessment/accountability system (STARS) in Nebraska has made a significant positive difference in student achievement in my district.</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.7 STARS reporting of student progress on standards is a good indicator of accountability.</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.8 STARS results are one good indicator for adequate yearly progress (AYP) reporting.</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>1.20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Recoded M and SD: 2.96 .82
Generally, it appears that superintendents have a neutral perception of Nebraska's assessment/accountability system in regards to the STARS components (M=2.96, SD=.82). They believe the timeline for reporting student achievement on STARS is reasonable (M=3.23, SD=1.02), the portfolio submission timeline is reasonable (M=3.30, SD=1.03), the performance ratings have been fair and reasonable (M=3.07, SD=1.06), and the assistance from the Nebraska Department of Education on STARS implementation has been adequate (M=3.07, SD=1.17). Overall, a slightly negative perception was held by superintendents on whether STARS has made a significant positive difference in student achievement in their districts (M=2.49, SD=1.11).

Research Question 2

Is there a relationship between district size and superintendents’ perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability system (STARS)?

Perceptions regarding effect on teachers. On the subscale measuring the effect on classroom teachers, there was a statistically significant difference across the district sizes of public school superintendents’ perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability system (F(4,123)=4.456, p=.002). Follow-up Tukey pair-wise comparison tests indicated that superintendents of districts with populations of 2001-5000 students are significantly more positive than superintendents with populations of 501-1000 students (p=.037) and superintendents with populations of 0-500 students (p=.003).
Perceptions regarding effect on instruction. On the subscale measuring the effect on instruction, there was a statistically significant difference across the district sizes of public school superintendents' perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability system ($F(4,116)=4.253, p=.003$). Follow-up Tukey pair-wise comparison tests indicated that superintendents of districts with populations of 2001-5000 students are significantly more positive than superintendents with populations of 501-1000 students ($p=.012$) and superintendents with populations of 0-500 students ($p=.016$).

Perceptions regarding effect on students. On the subscale measuring the effect on students, there were no statistically significant differences across the district sizes of public school superintendents' perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability system ($F(4,123)=1.485, p=.211$).

Perceptions regarding effect on building principals. On the subscale measuring the effect on building principals, there were no statistically significant differences across the district sizes of public school superintendents' perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability system ($F(4,120)=1.248, p=.294$).

Perceptions regarding resource allocation. On the subscale measuring the effect on resource allocation, there were no statistically significant differences across the district sizes of public school superintendents' perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability system ($F(4,121)=.954, p=.436$).

Perceptions regarding STARS components. On the subscale measuring the implication of the STARS components, there were no statistically significant
differences across the district sizes of public school superintendents’ perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability system ($\text{F}(4,116)=2.792, p=.029$).

**Research Question 3**

Is there a relationship between a superintendent's years of experience as a superintendent and his/her perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability system (STARS)?

**Perceptions regarding effect on teachers.** On the subscale measuring the effect on teachers, there were no statistically significant differences across the years of experience groups on public school superintendents’ perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability system ($\text{F}(4,120)=.351, p=.843$).

**Perceptions regarding effect on instruction.** On the subscale measuring the effect on instruction, there were no statistically significant differences across the years on experience groups of public school superintendents’ perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability system ($\text{F}(4,113)=.693, p=.598$).

**Perceptions regarding effect on students.** On the subscale measuring the effect on students, there were no statistically significant differences across the years of experience groups on public school superintendents’ perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability system ($\text{F}(4,120)=2.404, p=.053$).

**Perceptions regarding effect on building principals.** On the subscale measuring the effect on building principals, there were no statistically significant differences across the years on experience groups of public school
superintendents’ perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability system ($F(4,117)=1.488, p=.210$).

**Perceptions regarding resource allocation.** On the subscale measuring the effect on resource allocation, there were no statistically significant differences across the years of experience groups on public school superintendents’ perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability system ($F(4,118)=.680, p=.607$).

**Perceptions regarding STARS components.** On the subscale measuring the STARS components, there were no statistically significant differences across the years of experience groups on public school superintendents’ perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability system ($F(4,113)=1.339, p=.260$).

**Research Question 4**

Is there a relationship between the socio-economic status of a district and the superintendents’ perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability system (STARS)?

**Perceptions regarding effect on teachers.** On the subscale measuring the effect on teachers, there were no statistically significant differences across districts’ free/reduced lunch groups on public school superintendents’ perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability system ($F(3,114)=.344, p=.794$).

**Perceptions regarding effect on instruction.** On the subscale measuring the effect on instruction, there were no statistically significant differences across
districts’ free/reduced lunch groups on public school superintendents’ perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability system ($F(3,110)=.157$, $p=.925$).

**Perceptions regarding effect on students.** On the subscale measuring the effect on students, there were no statistically significant differences across districts’ free/reduced lunch groups on public school superintendents’ perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability system ($F(3,114)=.238$, $p=.870$).

**Perceptions regarding effect on building principals.** On the subscale measuring the effect on building principals, there were no statistically significant differences across districts’ free/reduced lunch groups on public school superintendents’ perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability system ($F(3,112)=.505$, $p=.680$).

**Perceptions regarding resource allocation.** On the subscale measuring the effect on resource allocation, there were no statistically significant differences across districts’ free/reduced lunch groups on public school superintendents’ perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability system ($F(3,113)=.878$, $p=.455$).

**Perceptions regarding STARS components.** On the subscale measuring the STARS components, there were no statistically significant differences across districts’ free/reduced lunch groups on public school superintendents’
perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability system ($F(3,110)=1.044, p=.376$).

**Research Question 5**

Is there a relationship between the rating received on the district assessment portfolio for communication at the eleventh grade and the superintendents' perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability system (STARS)?

**Perceptions regarding effect on teachers.** On the subscale measuring the effect on teachers, there were no statistically significant differences across portfolio rating groups on public school superintendents' perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability system ($F(4,118)=.599, p=.664$).

**Perceptions regarding effect on instruction.** On the subscale measuring the effect on instruction, there were no statistically significant differences across portfolio rating groups on public school superintendents' perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability system ($F(4,114)=.296, p=.880$).

**Perceptions regarding effect on students.** On the subscale measuring the effect on students, there were no statistically significant differences across portfolio rating groups on public school superintendents' perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability system ($F(4,118)=1.243, p=.297$).

**Perceptions regarding effect on building principals.** On the subscale measuring the effect on building principals, there were no statistically significant differences across portfolio rating groups on public school superintendents'
perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability system ($F(4,117)=.624$, $p=.647$).

**Perceptions regarding resource allocation.** On the subscale measuring the effect on resource allocation, there were no statistically significant differences across portfolio rating groups on public school superintendents' perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability system ($F(4,117)=1.071$, $p=.374$).

**Perceptions regarding STARS components.** On the subscale measuring the STARS components, there were no statistically significant differences across portfolio rating groups on public school superintendents' perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability system ($F(4,114)=.511$, $p=.727$).

**Research Question 6**

Is there a relationship between the amount of financial support provided by the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) and the superintendents' perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability system (STARS)?

**Perceptions regarding effect on teachers.** On the subscale measuring the effect on teachers, there was a statistically significant difference across (STARS) financial support groups on public school superintendents' perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability system ($F(7,115)=2.900$, $p=.008$). Follow-up Tukey pair-wise comparison tests indicated that superintendents of districts receiving STARS funding of $23,750 (district student populations of 2,000 to 3,999) are significantly more positive than superintendents receiving STARS funding of $14,250 (district student populations of 500-999) ($p=.037$),
superintendents receiving STARS funding of $4,750 (district student populations of 250-499) ($p=.014$), and superintendents receiving STARS funding of $2,375 (district student populations of 100-249) ($p=.043$).

**Perceptions regarding effect on instruction.** On the subscale measuring the effect on instruction, there was a statistically significant difference across (STARS) financial support groups on public school superintendents' perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability system ($F(7,109)=3.016$, $p=.006$). Follow-up Tukey pair-wise comparison tests indicated that superintendents of districts receiving STARS funding of $23,750 (district student populations of 2,000 to 3,999) are significantly more positive than superintendents receiving STARS funding of $14,250 (district student populations of 500-999) ($p=.015$), and superintendents receiving STARS funding of $4,750 (district student populations of 250-499) ($p=.049$).

**Perceptions regarding effect on students.** On the subscale measuring the effect on students, there were no statistically significant differences across (STARS) financial support groups on public school superintendents' perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability system ($F(7,115)=1.607$, $p=.140$).

**Perceptions regarding effect on building principals.** On the subscale measuring the effect on building principals, there were no statistically significant differences across (STARS) financial support groups on public school superintendents' perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability system ($F(7,112)=.979$, $p=.450$).
Perceptions regarding resource allocation. On the subscale measuring the effect on resource allocation, there were no statistically significant differences across (STARS) financial support groups on public school superintendents' perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability system ($F(7,113) = .810$, $p = .581$).

Perceptions regarding STARS components. On the subscale measuring the STARS components, there were no statistically significant differences across (STARS) financial support groups on public school superintendents' perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability system ($F(7,109) = 2.009$, $p = .060$).

Research Question 7

Is there a relationship between the amount of financial support districts must provide in addition to the NDE funding and the superintendents' perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability system (STARS)?

Perceptions regarding effect on teachers. On the subscale measuring the effect on teachers, there were no statistically significant differences across (district) financial support groups on public school superintendents' perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability system ($F(5,108) = 1.528$, $p = .187$).

Perceptions regarding effect on instruction. On the subscale measuring the effect on instruction, there were no statistically significant differences across (district) financial support groups on public school superintendents' perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability system ($F(5,105) = 1.152$, $p = .338$).
Perceptions regarding effect on students. On the subscale measuring the effect on students, there were no statistically significant differences across (district) financial support groups on public school superintendents' perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability system ($F(5,108)=2.118$, $p=.069$).

Perceptions regarding effect on building principals. On the subscale measuring the effect on building principals, there were no statistically significant differences across (district) financial support groups on public school superintendents' perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability system ($F(5,107)=1.779$, $p=.123$).

Perceptions regarding resource allocation. On the subscale measuring the effect on resource allocation, there were no statistically significant differences across (district) financial support groups on public school superintendents' perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability system ($F(5,107)=1.333$, $p=.256$).

Perceptions regarding STARS components. On the subscale measuring the STARS components, there were no statistically significant differences across (district) financial support groups on public school superintendents' perceptions of the Nebraska assessment/accountability system ($F(5,105)=1.235$, $p=.298$).

Summary

This study revealed some statistically significant results regarding the Nebraska assessment/accountability system that will be of interest to
administrators in both the district and state educational systems. Chapter 5 will discuss and interpret these findings.
Chapter 5
Discussion, Recommendations, and Summary

Discussion

This study examined public school superintendents' perceptions of how the Nebraska assessment/accountability system (STARS) has effected high schools. Data were gathered using an on-line survey developed from instruments originally created by Weichel (2002), Duke, et al., (2000) and Johnson (1981) and modified for use with superintendents. E-mail requests were sent to public school superintendents in Nebraska whose districts have high schools inviting them to participate in the survey. The response rate was 50% (129/259). The survey questions were constructed on a 5-point Likert scale where one represented "strongly disagree" and 5 represented "strongly agree".

The variables measured were (1) district size, (2) years of experience as a superintendent, (3) percentage of district students on free and reduced lunch, (4) rating received on the 2002-2003 district assessment portfolio for communication at the eleventh grade, (5) amount of funding provided from the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) to implement STARS, and (6) amount of additional district financial support required to implement STARS. Statistical analyses included descriptive statistics and one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs).

Several statistically significant results were identified through subscale analyses. Taken together, they indicate a relationship between district size and a
superintendent's perception of how STARS has affected high school teachers and instruction.

Three main themes emerged from the data:

1. Overall, superintendents perceive STARS as having had no significant effect on high school teachers, instruction, students, or resource allocations.

2. Overall, superintendents perceive STARS to have had a positive effect on high school building principals' leadership practices ($M=3.78$, $SD=.62$).

3. Specifically, superintendents in districts with student populations of 100-1000 (81% of respondents) perceive what effect STARS has had on high school teachers and on instruction as less positive than do superintendents in school districts of 2001-4000 students (10% of respondents).

**Theme 1: No Perception of Significant Effect**

Overall, superintendents perceive that the Nebraska assessment/accountability system (STARS) does not have a significant effect on the high school teachers, instruction, students, or resource allocations in the district. Survey responses of 3.0 on a 5-point Likert scale were interpreted as neutral perceptions. Questions with average mean scores above 4.0 (agree) or below 2.0 (disagree) were interpreted as evidence of strong feelings in response to the subject. Of the 42 survey questions, only nine individual mean scores
showed an average difference of one point or more from the neutral score. Of the six subscales, no averaged mean scores were one point or more from the midpoint.

**Effect on teachers.** Superintendents feel that STARS has created more committee work responsibilities ($M=4.60$, $SD=.63$) for high school teachers and certainly has not reduced the number of workshops they must attend ($M=1.49$, $SD=.72$). This is understandable since the Nebraska assessment/accountability system hinges on teacher input in developing local district assessments. Its very name explains this outcome: School-Based Teacher-Led Assessment and Reporting System. Workshops and committees are integral parts of this process.

On the other hand, superintendents also perceive that many teachers are gaining knowledge about assessment development and becoming better judges of assessment quality because of STARS ($M=4.15$, $SD=.74$). This probably is a by-product of the system established in Nebraska. Assessment literacy courses have emerged in several institutions and the state university system has created a program of 18 semester credit hours to educate teachers and administrators in assessment development and the statistical analysis techniques needed to support STARS (Lukin, et al., 2004). In addition, the state mandates that at least one person in each district must have a working knowledge of assessment literacy and the requirements of meeting the quality criteria outlined by STARS before it will accept a district's assessment portfolio.
Still, committee participation, workshop attendance, and a budding growth in assessment literacy do not lead superintendents to perceive any truly important changes in teachers' lives. Overall, superintendents feel that STARS has had relatively little effect on high school teachers ($M=2.66$, $SD=.54$). Whether this perception is accurate may be open to question since it contradicts the responses obtained from high school principals (Weichel, 2002) and fourth grade teachers in Nebraska (Beran, 2003). To whatever extent this might be a misperception may reflect the fact that organizational leaders often find it difficult to assess the attitudes of front line employees (Fulk & Mani, 1986; Tesser & Rosen, 1975). Superintendents may not regularly interact with the teachers in their high schools and their perceptions may be shaped more by what they hear – or the absence of comment – than by what they observe or are directly told. It also may be that teachers are not yet speaking up to superintendents about the effect STARS has on their day-to-day lives.

Another possible reason superintendents see little effect on teachers is because individual teachers are not matched with low student performance in STARS reporting, so there is no individual accountability pressure (Impara, & Buckendahl, 2004). Teachers may not feel enough concern to provoke comments sure to reach the superintendent’s ears, such as through union activities, contract negotiations, or grievance proceedings.

A third possibility maybe that at the time of sampling, the effect of STARS reporting was over-shadowed by the requirements of No Child Left Behind
(NCLB) reporting. Each of these assessment/accountability systems requires a different reporting format. Superintendents may pay more attention to NCLB since failing to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) standards can result in sanctions against a district.

**Effect on instruction.** Since superintendents perceive that STARS has not had a great effect on high school teachers, it makes sense that they don’t see much effect on instruction either. While superintendents perceive that teachers see record keeping as a major time constraint (\( M = 1.64, SD = .72 \)), they don’t generally believe that the STARS process takes so much time that it prevents teachers from helping individual students. STARS also is not perceived as causing teachers to move more quickly through the curriculum, or to spend less time teaching the broader content of their subjects and more time specifically preparing students for the tests. This perception, though, might also be a result of superintendents’ minimal knowledge of teacher day-to-day activity. A major problem for every organizational leader is understanding and appreciating the pressures faced by those on the firing line (Norton, Webb, Dlugosh, & Sybouts, 1996).

In the superintendents’ eyes STARS does not limit the curriculum to those items assessed in the exams. This perception appears to be in conflict with national surveys (Pedulla, 2003) and with the perceptions of fourth grade teachers in Nebraska who felt that the standards were leading to a narrowing of the curriculum (Beran, 2003). This discrepancy may result from the differences
between teaching at an elementary and at a high school. Teachers at the elementary level generally teach across more subject areas than do subject-specific high school teachers. The multiple subject area demands may cause some elementary teachers to feel they must narrow the curriculum in order to teach all of the required standards.

Effect on students. Superintendents also do not perceive that STARS has a measurable effect on high school students (M=2.83, SD=.68). Scores from this subscale vary no more than one point from neutral. Weichel (2002) obtained similar responses from high school principals. In fact, this perceived lack of student effect may range across all grades. Fourth grade teachers in Nebraska didn't perceive any effect on their students either when Beran surveyed them in 2003. Rising scores on district-created assessments may not necessarily reflect increases in learning overall (Abrams & Madus, 2003; Popham, 2004c).

One possible explanation for this perception is that there may not be an effect as yet. It might be that the STARS program has not been in place long enough to produce a discernible difference in high school student achievement. Since the STARS assessments are aimed at influencing and improving curriculum and instruction over the years from fourth grade on, effects may not be realized until the current fourth graders reach high school.

Another reason may be that superintendents do not see significant high school achievement changes in norm-referenced tests (NRT). The only NRT analysis conducted in Nebraska (Isernhagen & Dappen, 2004) compared class 3,
4, and 5 school districts (representing 94% of the Nebraska student population) in reading at grades four, eight and eleven. The analysis compared the number of students in the top two quartiles of a reading NRT from 2001 to 2003. The results showed only a 1.19% (n=180 districts) improvement at the eleventh grade level. The modest increase in these norm-referenced scores seems unlikely to lead superintendents to assume that STARS assessments have a measurable effect on student achievement.

Effect on resource allocation. If STARS does have an effect on high schools, it probably is found in finance. Superintendents strongly believe that the costs to implement the Nebraska assessment/accountability system (STARS) have increased at the district level (M=4.19, SD=.85), and do not think that the state provides adequate financial support (M=1.83, SD=.87). Although questions about STARS financing resulted in strong perceptions from individual superintendents, the general opinion revealed by the subscale as a whole was that STARS does not have a greatly negative effect on district resources (M=2.87, SD=.61).

One possible reason for the individually strong negative opinions that did surface is that tests are expensive to create and administer. First, districts are expected to create and publish at least six tests. This is one test in each of two subject areas at each of the grade levels (grades 4, 8 and 11) following specific guidelines for assessment development. Second, the Nebraska Department of Education has set requirements for how districts may spend STARS funding.
The guidelines mandate that 85% of the funds be spent on salaries and fringe benefits, while the remainder may be used to pay for contracted services (10%) and administration (5%). This allocation may not be congruent with what a superintendent sees as needed for staff development registration costs, data analysis, or test construction and printing. Superintendents may object to redirecting district funds slated for other needs to assessments.

At the same time, however, superintendents do not perceive that the costs of STARS has required them to reassign high school teachers, reduce elective courses, reduce field trips, or lower expenditures in other areas. Still, even though districts may not have been forced to reduce expenditures in other areas, some may have had to cap allocations in certain areas to meet the cost of STARS implementation.

An interesting consideration obtained from this research is the mild satisfaction with which the superintendents perceive the whole STARS process. They just don’t see the portfolio ratings, student performance ratings, assistance from the Nebraska Department of Education, or STARS requirements as having any great effect on the high schools in their district (M=2.96, SD=.82). Although the state mandated timeline for reporting student achievement and submitting the portfolio seems reasonable to them, the superintendents do not perceive that the Nebraska assessment/accountability system (STARS) has a significant effect on high school student achievement. Again, this could be due to the relative newness of this process in Nebraska.
Theme 2: Positive Effect on Principals' Leadership Practices

Although superintendents don't see much STARS effect on high school students or teachers, they do generally perceive STARS to have a positive effect on high school building principals' leadership practices ($M=3.78$, $SD=.60$). Overall, they believe that STARS is causing high school building principals to gain knowledge about assessments ($M=4.12$, $SD=.69$), send more communications than in the past regarding school progress to staff ($M=4.02$, $SD=.74$), and provide more in-service assessment training for teachers than in the past ($M=4.01$, $SD=.84$).

One likely reason for the superintendents' positive perception of improved leadership among their high school principals is that they are likely to be the leader and contact person in compiling the data required for the STARS state reporting. Superintendents may rely on building leadership to complete the high school portion of the district portfolio and to assemble student achievement data. In turn, the building leadership probably has to work more with classroom teachers to develop assessments and to ensure that accurate information is collected and submitted for state reporting. This squares with the superintendents' perceptions reported earlier, that high school teachers have increased their committee work participation and seen no reduction in the number of workshops they must attend.

Weichel (2002) found that high school principals in Nebraska expected the state standards/assessment/accountability system to have a negative effect on
their role as the school leader because it would reduce their discretionary time and add pressure. Weichel reasoned that because principals are looked to for direction and guidance when new processes are implemented (Lashway, 2000), they will likely have to commit more time to faculty development. Additionally many Nebraska high school principals are required to learn the STARS reporting process in order to implement it since they will be required to administer tests, interpret test scores, help teachers increase their assessment literacy, arrange professional development opportunities, and encourage change in the classroom (Weichel, 2002). While principals may see these demands as further burdens in an already overloaded job, superintendents may see these activities as fostering greater interaction and shared decision-making.

Theme 3: Perception Differences Based on District Size

The perceived effect of the STARS system differed among superintendents by district size. Specifically, superintendents in districts with population ranges of 100-1000 students (81% of respondents) are less positive about STARS and its effect on high school teachers and daily instruction at a statistically significant level than are those leading school districts with ranges between 2000-5000 students (10% of respondents). This is worrisome since a majority of the superintendents responding to this survey in Nebraska oversee districts with populations that range between 100-1000 students. On the contrary, perceptions were generally neutral from superintendents of districts above 5000 students (4% of respondents).
It may be that much of the discrepancy in perceptions can be attributed to funding differences. Those who are receiving less money for implementation are also those who are less positive about the state assessment/accountability system. According to Harmon & Branham (1999), small schools may have fewer resources to support assessment development and planning. This may also partly explain why Weichel (2002) found that high school principals' perceptions of STARS also varied with school size.

Recommendations for Practice

Increase State Funding to Support Assessment/Accountability Process

The results of this study, like Beran’s (2003) study of how STARS has effected fourth grade teachers, argues for a distinct need to increase the amount of funding allotted to Nebraska districts for assessment development, administration, and data analysis. Over eighty percent of the responding superintendents were in districts with populations under 1000 students. The perception of inadequate funding for assessment/accountability requirements may be why they believe STARS has had less of a positive effect on both teachers and instruction in their districts. The collective perception of superintendents in rural Nebraska school districts suggests, as Harmon & Branham (1999) argue, that implementing standards brings focus and clarity to student expectations, but the efforts require sufficient resource support to produce improved results.
On the other hand, superintendents in large urban districts are also concerned about the lack of funding. Due to the complexities that come with size, large districts often do not have the resources available to adequately facilitate reform processes (Hannaway & Kimball, 1998) such as the assessment development required in Nebraska (Glissman, 2005). Currently, school districts are provided STARS funding based on their student populations. Seven of the eight state categories are used to group districts with populations up to 17,999 students. The eighth category is comprised of three districts with 18,000 or more students. These systems have populations of approximately 46,000, 32,000, and 20,000 students. The grouping is artificial and flawed. Because the number is small, the grouping is expedient, and it masks critical differences. Not only does the number of students differ widely across these three, but so do the cultural diversity and poverty levels. Obviously, the needs of each of these school districts vary, and providing them with the same amount of funding is not appropriate.

The larger urban school districts also object to the rules for how to spend STARS funding. In November of 2004, the Metropolitan Omaha Education Consortium (MOEC) Assessment Task Force submitted a letter to the Nebraska Commissioner of Education requesting additional funds and flexibility in meeting the requirements of STARS reporting. Many of the districts in the metro area were concerned that restricting spending for contracted services to ten percent of the total funding was too limiting. Contracted services may include, but not be
limited to, paying for staff development consultants, paying for teachers to attend professional development training on assessments, hiring additional staff to process and analyze data, or covering the costs of printing tests. The commissioner responded that increasing spending flexibility was not possible at this time. He said that the rules would remain the same since the funding is supported by federal monies and must conform to the intentions of the No Child Left Behind legislation. He reiterated that STARS funding must be used for standards development, assessment processes, and school improvement efforts conducted by teachers (emphasis added). He encouraged districts to spend their local funds for contracted service costs running over the state-allotted amount (D. Christensen, personal communication, November 8, 2004). This urban district concern needs to be readdressed by the State Department of Education.

Assessment Literacy

Is it possible that teachers across Nebraska are sufficiently literate in assessment to make this statewide system work? Assessment literacy means knowing how to improve learning by responding to needs defined by student assessment data. Teachers must identify which students are mastering the required knowledge, and then use the data from those assessments to make changes in teaching practices (Jerald, 2003; Popham, 2004a). According to Swaffield & Dudley (2003), educators need to become assessment literate in order to make educated decisions about both assessment methods and the use
of assessment data. The State of Nebraska and the Buros Center for Testing have provided assistance to teachers in understanding the technical aspects of the six quality criteria required for submitting the portfolio for state reporting of STARS (Plake, Impara, & Buckendahl, 2004), but much work is still needed to provide them with a practical understanding of how assessment relates to student learning and their own teaching. Many educators are not sufficiently literate in basic assessment to understand whether their achievement results show significance (Swaffield & Dudley, 2003), and a national survey revealed that only 30 percent of teachers believe that a state-mandated testing program is worth the time and money (Pedulla, 2003).

Maybe an assumption is being made by the Nebraska Department of Education that teachers in Nebraska are embracing standards-based teaching and instruction. It is appropriate to ask if teachers are focusing on standards or only following the outline of the textbook on what should be discussed, learned and assessed. A State Board of Education goal is to have all teachers and administrators trained in the use of STARS by 2008. Stiggins (2004) argues that while it is important for administrators to be grounded in assessment literacy before embarking on a school improvement plan, no such plan can succeed without informed teacher participation and commitment.

Teachers in Nebraska are scattered in terms of their involvement with and understanding of STARS. Less than 50% of the teachers surveyed or interviewed in focus groups in Nebraska reported involvement in the alignment of
the curriculum to the state standards, the scoring of assessments, or the
development of assessments (Bandalos, 2004). Even fewer teachers (less than
25%) have been involved in re-teaching activities following the assessments, or
in assisting with the district's portfolio (Bandalos, 2004).

Nebraska has tried to address the low level of teacher understanding by
investing in assessment literacy courses that could lead to an 18-hour
assessment endorsement. Three cohorts, approximately 150 teachers from
across the state, have completed the endorsement program since 2001. The
program, called the Nebraska Assessment Cohorts (NAC), involves increasing
the assessment literacy of teachers and administrators to improve classroom
assessment practices. Since the creation of the assessment endorsement, a few
localized learning teams and pre-service assessment literacy programs have
been established (Lukin, et al., 2004). Although the efforts to increase
assessment literacy are noted, more needs to be done to capture a critical mass
of teachers. Even if all 150 NAC graduates were high school educators, the
overall effect would be next to nothing in Nebraska's 299 high schools.

In addition, more emphasis should be placed on assessment for learning –
that is, assessment that promotes students' learning (Black et al., 2004) – among
Nebraska educators. This promotes the use of formative assessments to
increase student understanding. Many current high school classroom educators
were not required to learn assessment techniques as part of their pre-service
training. High school teachers need to incorporate more meaningful formative
assessment into their programs in order to monitor student progress toward mastery of a given standard. It is when teachers review the results of these assessments with other teachers that they begin to respond to student needs with corrective instructional practices (Rettig, McCullough, Santos & Watson, 2003).

**Recommendations for Future Research**

**Small versus Large Districts**

The results of this study show that superintendents of small and large districts differ in their perceptions of state-mandated assessment reporting, but this may only be scratching the surface. Many rural school district superintendents feel they need more guidance (Davis, 2004) and funding. Small rural districts often feel forced to pool their resources with neighboring school districts in order to reap any benefits from state funding (Tyler, 2003; Tyler & Kibby, 2004; Williams, 2003). Small rural district superintendents may perceive that STARS places a greater burden on them, their principals, and their teachers than on those in larger districts (Tyler, 2003) since they do not have the staff to specifically dedicate to assessment development and coordination. Assessment demands put enormous pressure on small districts in finding the needed resources, time, and expertise (Gallagher, 2003). Unable to centralize the problems, many small districts leave the coordination of assessment development responsibilities to small groups of classroom teachers (Bandalos, 2004; Gallagher, 2003).
Large districts, on the other hand, have more staff to help with assessment development and implementation, but are not as able as small districts to implement changes quickly (Hannaway & Kimball, 1998). Large districts are also more likely to have less teacher participation, proportionate to their size, in their assessment design process (Gallagher, 2003). This may also mean less real contributions by the teachers who are involved, and hence less decision-making ability. The results from this study show that more research is needed on identifying the differences between the effect assessments have on small and large districts.

**Elementary versus Secondary School Impact**

Superintendents' perceptions of STARS effect on elementary schools are unknown as yet. The results from this study show a need to research whether the effect is different at the elementary level in comparison to secondary. Pedulla (2003) showed that elementary and middle school teachers feel a greater amount of stress and pressure as a result of teaching in a state with statewide testing programs than do high school teachers. The pressure on elementary teachers to teach multiple subjects well is greater than at the high school level where teachers may teach only one state reported subject.

In addition, future research may focus on whether superintendents perceive the match or alignment of standards in elementary versus secondary classrooms differently, therefore the effect of STARS differently. Local control in Nebraska creates various methods and forms of standards alignment and articulation. This
appears to be more notable in the elementary grades. Since elementary curricula may not align with the state standards as well as the high school curriculum does, more instructional change might be needed at the elementary level to master the standards (Pedulla, 2003).

Assessment Development Comparisons

The Nebraska system is by far a better choice than state-generated assessments that do not align with the curriculum development cycle established in each district. Superintendent responses, however, are driven by their perceptions of their district-created assessments. If they perceive their assessments as more rigorous and demanding than other districts, the system fails to hold each district to the same expectations of excellence.

Nebraska may need to address concerns from superintendents and the public that district-generated assessments do not necessarily mean districts create relatively equivalent assessments (Gallagher, 2003). To date there has not been a substantive review of the content of teacher-developed assessments in terms of question and task quality (Plake, Impara, & Buckendahl, 2004). We cannot effectively move forward until this is accomplished.

Summary

In summary, the results of this study show that Nebraska superintendents generally do not see that the STARS system has any great effect on the high school teachers, students, instruction, or resource allocations in their districts. They do perceive that STARS generates funding concerns and has some
positive effect on high school building level leadership practices. The results also show that superintendents in large districts perceive STARS's effect differently from those with small populations.

**Final Thoughts**

Do superintendents feel that the process of STARS is reasonable, but the results aren't worth it? The answer really isn't clear, but maybe more time is needed to see the effect of STARS in Nebraska. The assessment/accountability process is still a new phenomenon. We may need to wait to see how our fourth grade students fare through the complete STARS process before the ultimate verdict is in on the worth of this system.

A limitation to this study is that it cannot be generalized beyond Nebraska, since STARS is a state program established on the premise that each district should create its own assessments for reporting purposes. The success of the Nebraska system resides heavily on its teachers and principals. The ultimate test for Nebraska's assessment/accountability system is whether other states will see this process as superior to the single statewide test system. If other states begin to adopt a School-based Teacher-led Assessment and Reporting System (STARS), then the Nebraska system may increase its credibility with superintendents, principals and teachers both here in Nebraska and nationally.
References


Christie, K. (2002). State leadership: Is the new ESEA the chicken or the egg? *Phi Delta Kappan, 83*(8), 570-571.


Guskey, T. (2001b), High Percentages are not the same as high standards. Phi Delta Kappan. 82 (7), 534-536.
   Educational Leadership, 58 (5), 84-85.


Olson, L. (2002c, March 13). Want to confirm state test scores? It's complex, but NAEP can do it. Education Week, pp. 1, 10-11.


Dear Nebraska Superintendent,

My name is Wanda Clarke and I am working on a dissertation topic regarding the Nebraska assessment/accountability system. In 1999, Nebraska implemented the School-based Teacher-led Assessment and Reporting System (STARS) to achieve district accountability for mastering the state standards in Communications (Reading, Speaking, Writing, and Listening), Mathematics, Science and Social Studies. So far, state reporting has only been established in Communications and Mathematics. My dissertation will focus on the superintendents’ perceptions of Nebraska’s assessment/accountability system (STARS) as it effects high schools.

I would appreciate it if you would be willing to take 20 minutes to complete my survey. The first part of the survey consists of basic demographic data. You will be asked to share basic statistical information regarding your district (such as, number of students in your district, percentage of students receiving free and/or reduced lunch, your STARS portfolio rating, the amount of STARS grant received, and the additional financial support required to implement STARS.) Some of this information may need to be obtained prior to taking the survey. In sections one through six, the survey will ask you to provide a response using a 5-point Likert scale. All responses should be based on your perceptions of the impact on your district.

If you would like a copy of the results, please email me at wanda.clarke@ops.org. Thanks in advance for your participation. Your contribution to my research is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Wanda Clarke
Instructional Research Administrator
Omaha Public Schools
wanda.clarke@ops.org

View the survey at: http://coedb.unomaha.edu/lschulte/wcsurvey.htm

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Superintendents' perceptions of how Nebraska’s assessment/accountability system (STARS) will effect High Schools their district.

Directions: Please complete this information based on your perceptions of the impact on your district. Choose the most appropriate answers for the following profile questions. Put an “X” in the box next to your answer.

NOTE: Reporting results will not specifically identify any superintendent or district.

Profile:
1. Gender 0 Male 0 Female

2. Age ____________

3. Number of students in your district. ________________

4. Total years of experience as a district superintendent. ________________

5. Percentage of students receiving free and/or reduced lunches in your district. ______

6. Nebraska Department of Education's Rating on your district 2002-03 Communications Portfolio for 11th Grade.
   0 Unacceptable
   0 Acceptable - Needs Improvement
   0 Good
   0 Very Good
   0 Exemplary

7. Based on the chart below, identify the total amount of STARS Grant your district is eligible to receive.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public School District with Enrollment</th>
<th>Maximum Grant Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. 18,000 students or more</td>
<td>$95,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. 4,000 - 17,999 students</td>
<td>$47,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. 2,000 - 3,999 students</td>
<td>$23,750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. 1,000 - 1,999 students</td>
<td>$19,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. 500-999 students</td>
<td>$14,250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. 250 - 499 students</td>
<td>$4,750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. 100 - 249 students</td>
<td>$2,375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. less than 100 students</td>
<td>$950</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8. Estimate the amount of additional financial support required to implement STARS for all grade levels in your district _________________.

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Superintendents’ perceptions of how Nebraska’s assessment/accountability system (STARS) will effect high schools in their district.

Directions: Please indicate a response for each of the statements listed below. Your response should be your perceptions I regard to your high schools.

Select only one response for each item and place an “X” in the appropriate box.
SA = Strongly Agree
A = Agree
N = Neutral
D = Disagree
SD = Strongly Disagree

1. Teachers
Now that the state assessment/accountability system (STARS) has been implemented in Nebraska, My perception is that...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Teacher morale has improved.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Teachers have had more committee work responsibilities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.3 Teachers have been reluctant to attend workshops on assessment.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.4 Teacher morale has worsened.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 Teachers have become more accountable for their students' success.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6 Teachers have gained knowledge about assessment because of STARS.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.7 Teachers have had fewer workshops to attend.</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Students
Now that the state assessment/accountability system (STARS) has been implemented in Nebraska, My perception is that...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1 More students who need assistance have been identified.</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2.2 Students the farthest behind in their learning have received the most attention and assistance.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 There has been an improvement in student grades.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 Students leave high school more equipped to be successful.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2.5 Students have become more accountable for their own success.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6 Students learn more.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Select only one response for each item and place an “X” in the appropriate box.
SA = Strongly Agree
A = Agree
N = Neutral
D = Disagree
SD = Strongly Disagree

3. **Building Principals**
Now that the state assessment/accountability system (STARS) has been implemented in Nebraska, My perception is that...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Building principals have gained knowledge about assessment because of STARS.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Building principals have sent communications to the staff regarding school progress on STARS.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3.3 Building principals have sent communications to the parents regarding school progress on STARS.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Building principals have interpreted accountability reports to staff.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3.5 Building principals have engaged in more school improvement planning with their staff.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3.6 Building principals have provided teachers with instructional methods to improve test results.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3.7 Building principals have provided in-services for teachers on the topic of assessment.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3.8 Building principals have become more accountable for their school's success.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. **Resource Allocation**
Now that the state assessment/accountability system (STARS) has been implemented in Nebraska, My perception is that...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Teachers have been reassigned to teach courses in which student results are reported to the state.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4.2 Elective courses have been reduced.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.3 Teachers have requested to be transferred out of courses in which student results are reported to the state.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4 Costs associated with the assessment/accountability system (STARS) such as testing and reporting have resulted in lowered expenditures in other areas.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.5 Field trips have been reduced because of STARS reporting.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.6 Costs for testing in my district have increased due to state requirements.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.7 The total cost for implementing testing for state reporting in my district has been covered by the STARS grant.</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Select only one response for each item and place an “X” in the appropriate box.
SA = Strongly Agree
A = Agree
N = Neutral
D = Disagree
SD = Strongly Disagree

5. Instruction
Now that the state assessment/accountability system (STARS) has been implemented in Nebraska, My perception is that...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5.1 Teachers spend less time helping individual students.</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.2 Teachers move more quickly through the curriculum in order to cover all of the material on which their students are evaluated.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5.3 Teachers have spent less time teaching and more time on test preparation activities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.4 Record keeping has been a major time constraint for teachers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.5 Teachers' instruction is limited to what is assessed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.6 Teachers continue to see subject areas with no state standards or testing requirements as important.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

6. STARS Components
Now that the state assessment/accountability system (STARS) has been implemented in Nebraska, My perception is that...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>6.1 STARS Assessment Portfolio ratings have been accompanied by sufficient comments to help my district improve its assessments.</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.2 Eleventh grade student performance ratings on standards have been fair and reasonable.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6.3 Assistance from the Nebraska Department of Education on implementing STARS has been adequate.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.4 The timeline for reporting student achievement on STARS is reasonable.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.5 The timeline for submitting the assessment portfolio is reasonable.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.6 The assessment/accountability system (STARS) in Nebraska has made a significant positive difference in student achievement in my district.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6.7 STARS reporting of student progress on standards is a good indicator of accountability.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.8 STARS results are one good indicator for adequate yearly progress (AYP) reporting.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
December 11, 2003

Dear MOEC Superintendent,

My name is Wanda Clarke and I am working on a dissertation topic regarding the Nebraska assessment/accountability system. In 1999, Nebraska implemented the School-based Teacher-led Assessment and Reporting System (STARS) to achieve district accountability for mastering the state standards in Communications (Reading, Speaking, Writing, and Listening), Mathematics, Science and Social Studies. So far, state reporting has only been established in Communications and Mathematics. My dissertation will focus on the superintendents’ perceptions of Nebraska’s assessment/accountability system (STARS) as they affect high schools.

For my study, I will survey public school superintendents with high schools in the state using survey questions modified from three previous studies conducted across the nation. One of these was recently conducted in Nebraska with high school principals. This is where I need your help. Attached are the subscales and questions associated with the survey I plan to use. This survey must be reviewed for content validity, and it is my hope that you will complete the enclosed procedures for obtaining content validity. Please forward your responses to me at the address below.

Thanks in advance for your participation in obtaining content validity for this survey. If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to give me a call at home (712) 525-1165 or email me at (wanda.clarke@ops.org).

Sincerely,

Wanda Clarke
Instructional Research Administrator
Omaha Public Schools
3215 Cuming Street
Omaha, NE 68131
wanda.clarke@ops.org
To obtain content validity, I want to ensure that the items used in this survey are appropriate for measuring public school superintendents’ perceptions of Nebraska’s assessment/accountability system as they affect high schools. The system used in Nebraska is called the School-based, Teacher-led Assessment and Reporting System, or STARS. Please rate the appropriateness of each item in measuring superintendents’ perceptions of Nebraska’s assessment/accountability system as they affect high schools.

The items developed in this survey are grouped into 6 categories

**Teachers** – The impact STARS has on teachers’ morale, teaching, and professionalism.

**Students** – The impact STARS has on students’ achievement and success.

**Administration** – The impact STARS has on administrators’ morale, leadership, and communication with staff and parents.

**Resource Allocation** – The impact STARS has on allocating resources, such as personnel, elective courses, and textbooks.

**Instruction** - The impact STARS has on instruction versus assessment.

**STAR Components** – The impact STARS has on district assessment development, district timelines, district accountability.
Superintendents' Perceptions of Nebraska's Assessment/Accountability System - STARS.
Please use the following scale to rate the appropriateness of each statement in assessing Nebraska's assessment/accountability system - STARS as they effect high schools. If possible, please provide ways to improve the items that you rate “1” or “2”.

| 1 = Not Appropriate | 2 = Marginally Appropriate | 3 = Very Appropriate |

Teachers
Now that the state assessment/accountability system (STARS) has been implemented in Nebraska, my perception is that....

1 2 3 Teacher morale has improved.
1 2 3 The stress level among teachers has increased.
1 2 3 Teachers have resigned or retired early (citing standards as a reason).
1 2 3 Teachers have spent more time collaborating with one another about curriculum, instruction, and assessment.
1 2 3 Teachers have been afraid to change their current teaching styles and techniques to support standards-based instruction.
1 2 3 Teachers have had more committee work responsibilities.
1 2 3 Teachers have been reluctant to attend workshops on assessment.
1 2 3 Teacher morale has worsened.
1 2 3 Teachers have spent less time teaching and more time on test preparation activities.
1 2 3 There is a group of teachers in my district who fully support STARS.
1 2 3 Teachers have become more accountable for their students' success.
1 2 3 Teachers have gained knowledge about assessment because of STARS.

1 2 3 Record keeping has been a major time constraint for teachers.

1 2 3 Teachers have had fewer workshops to attend.

**Instruction**
Now that the state assessment/accountability system (STARS) has been implemented in Nebraska, my perception is that....

1 2 3 Teachers spend less time helping individual students.

1 2 3 Teachers move more quickly through the curriculum in order to cover all of the material on which their students are evaluated.

1 2 3 Teachers' instruction is limited to what is assessed.

1 2 3 Subject areas with no state standards or testing requirements continue to be seen as important.

1 2 3 Teachers spend more time helping individual students.

1 2 3 The assessment/accountability system (STARS) in Nebraska has made a significant positive difference in student achievement in my district.

**Students**
Now that the state assessment/accountability system (STARS) has been implemented in Nebraska, my perception is that....

1 2 3 More students have been assigned to special education services or alternative schools.

1 2 3 More students who need assistance have been identified.

1 2 3 More students have become eligible for special education services.

1 2 3 Students the farthest behind in their learning have received the most attention and assistance.

1 2 3 The needs of higher ability learners have not been ignored.
There has been a significant improvement in student achievement.

Students leave high school more equipped to be successful.

Students have become more accountable for their own success.

Students learn more.

Norm-referenced achievement scores for students have increased.

Administration

Now that the state assessment/accountability system (STARS) has been implemented in Nebraska, my perception is that....

School administrators have been under greater pressure.

School administrators have gained knowledge about assessment because of STARS.

School administrators have sent communications to the public and staff regarding school progress.

Increased communication has resulted in greater parent interest in schools.

Administrators have retired early (citing standards as a reason).

Administrator morale has worsened.

School administrators have interpreted accountability reports to staff, community, and parents.

School administrators have engaged in more collaborative planning.

Administrators are reluctant to attend more workshops related to STARS.

School administrators have provided teachers with instructional methods to improve test results.

Administrators have spent more time monitoring test preparation and administration.
School administrators have planned and developed in-services for teachers on the topic of assessment.

Administrators have spent additional time on record keeping related to assessment.

School administrators have become more accountable for their school’s success.

Resource Allocation
Now that the state assessment/accountability system (STARS) has been implemented in Nebraska, my perception is that....

Teachers have been reassigned to teach the grade levels and/or courses in which students results are reported to the state (i.e. 4th Grade, or 8th Grade Mathematics).

Elective courses have been reduced.

Teachers have requested to be transferred out of grades where state reporting of test results is done (i.e. 4th Grade, or 8th Grade Mathematics).

Enrollment in courses not aligned to state reporting subjects have declined because students must meet more academic requirements.

Textbooks/materials have been purchased based on how well content matches state standards/local content standards.

Costs associated with the assessment/accountability system (STARS) such as testing and reporting have resulted in lowered expenditures for other educational supplies.

Field trips have been eliminated or curtailed.

Costs for testing in my district have increased due to state reporting.

The total cost for implementing testing for state reporting in my district has been covered by the STARS grant.
STARS Components
Now that the state assessment/accountability system (STARS) has been implemented in Nebraska, my perception is that....

1 2 3 Portfolio ratings have been accompanied by sufficient comments to help my district improve their assessments.

1 2 3 Student ratings on standards have been fair and reasonable.

1 2 3 Assistance from the Nebraska Department of Education on implementing STARS have been adequate.

1 2 3 The timeline for reporting student achievement on STARS is reasonable.

1 2 3 The timeline for submitting the assessment portfolio is reasonable.

1 2 3 Flexibility is a key component to the STARS program.

1 2 3 STARS reporting is a good indicator of accountability.

1 2 3 STARS results are a good indicator for Title I's adequate yearly progress (AYP).
APPENDIX C

IRB # 420-03-EX

December, 2003

Dear Nebraska Superintendent,

My name is Wanda Clarke and I am working on a dissertation topic regarding the Nebraska assessment/accountability system. In 1999, Nebraska implemented the School-based Teacher-led Assessment and Reporting System (STARS) to achieve district accountability for mastering the state standards in Communications (Reading, Speaking, Writing, and Listening), Mathematics, Science and Social Studies. So far, state reporting has only been established in Communications and Mathematics. My dissertation will focus on the superintendents' perceptions of Nebraska's assessment/accountability system (STARS) as they effect high schools.

For my study, I will survey public school superintendents with high schools in the state using survey questions modified from three previous studies conducted across the nation. One of these was recently conducted in Nebraska with high school principals. This survey has already been reviewed by the Metropolitan Omaha Education Consortium (MOEC) Executive Steering Committee of Superintendents and the next step is to pilot this survey to a sample of superintendents prior to the actual implementation. This is where I need your help.

To obtain an estimate of reliability, I must perform a pilot study prior to full-scale implementation. Your district is one that I would like to utilize for this requirement. I would appreciate it if you would be willing to take 20 minutes or so to look over my survey, mark your answer on each question, and mail the survey back to me. While your participation to determine reliability is entirely voluntary, your support is greatly appreciated.

In the attached documents you will find a self addressed stamped envelope, a copy of the four-page survey (which is copied front to back), and a postcard to check off participation. Please complete the survey and return it in the envelope and at the same time return the postcard with your name affixed. When I receive the card, I will be able to determine your participation, and at the same time, your responses will remain anonymous.

Thanks in advance for your participation in this reliability study. If you feel some of the items may be improved or clarified with modifications, I would appreciate your input. Please write directly on the survey with your suggestions. If you have any questions...
about this study, please feel free to give me a call at home (712) 525-1165 or email me at (wanda.clarke@ops.org).

Sincerely,

Wanda Clarke
Instructional Research Administrator
Omaha Public Schools
wanda.clarke@ops.org
## APPENDIX D

### RELIABILITY ANALYSIS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUBSCALE</th>
<th>RELIABILITY COEFFICIENT – CRONBACH’S ALPHA</th>
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<td>STARS Components</td>
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</table>
December 3, 2003

Wanda Clarke
Educational Admin. & Supervision, KH414
UNO - VIA COURIER

IRB#: 420-03-EX

TITLE OF PROTOCOL: Nebraska Public School Superintendents' Perceptions of Nebraska's Assessment/Accountability System

Dear Ms. Clarke:

The IRB has reviewed your Exemption Form for the above-titled research project. According to the information provided, this project is exempt under 45 CFR 46:101b, category 2. You are therefore authorized to begin the research.

It is understood this project will be conducted in full accordance with all applicable sections of the IRB Guidelines. It is also understood that the IRB will be immediately notified of any proposed changes that may affect the exempt status of your research project.

Please be advised that the IRB has a maximum protocol approval period of three years from the original date of approval and release. If this study continues beyond the three year approval period, the project must be resubmitted in order to maintain an active approval status.

Sincerely,

Ernest D. Prentice, Ph.D.
Co-Chair, IRB

EDP/gdk