The Impact of High-Stakes Accountability
On Instructional Leadership and Data-Driven Decision Making

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Abstract

This qualitative, multi-case study was designed to examine the impact high-stakes accountability and data-driven decision making has had on administrators and teacher leaders. Serving as the conceptual framework, instructional leadership theory is defined as a multitude of relationships, behaviors, and responsibilities that directly impact student achievement (Bottoms & Fry, 2009; O’Donnell & White, 2005). The researcher utilized instructional leadership theory as a lens to explore the participants’ perceptions with respect to the implementation of NCLB (Mertens, 2005). The focus of this study was to analyze how administrators and teachers were directly affected by tenets of the No Child Left Behind Act and how the resultant high-stakes accountability had an impact on students’ performances (Hess & Kelly, 2007) data-driven decision making (King, 2002).

A qualitative multi-case study approach allowed the researcher to examine how principals and teachers were affected by the reform resulting from the No Child Left Behind Act and high-stakes accountability (Creswell, 2007). For this research study, four single cases (i.e., individual schools), four principals, as well as four focus groups (containing 5-7 participants) were selected to “capture multiple realities” (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006, p. 72) and open-ended, emerging data (Creswell, 2003). Through data analysis, three themes emerged: 1) Changing Culture, 2) Changing Evidence and 3) Increased Rigor. These themes provide an understanding of the impact high-stakes accountability and data-driven decision making has had on public school principals and educators. Implications for school districts and leadership preparatory were discussed.