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## ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: Massachusetts Public School Administrators' Perceptions of the  
Development and Implementation of Educational Policy

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The purpose of this study was to describe public school administrators' perceptions of the development and implementation of educational policy and whether policies being implemented in the current educational reform environment meet the criteria for high leverage policies according to *The High Leverage Policy Framework* (Cobb, Donaldson, Lemons, & Mayer, 2010). This framework is predicated upon the understanding that the development of education policy is part of a larger political and social context, which must be taken into account by those creating those policies. Furthermore, while the perceptions of those responsible for the implementation of policies are often overlooked, they are crucial to understanding the challenges presented by implementation efforts.

A cross-sectional survey was the method used to collect data for this study. The sample was drawn from the population of public school superintendents and principals in Massachusetts who were responsible for implementing the 2010 Massachusetts antibullying policy at the district or school level. The online survey yielded 319 responses from Superintendents and Principals across the State of Massachusetts. Analysis of responses generated 18 notable findings regarding school administrators' perceptions of process of development and implementation of educational policies.

Eighty to 93% of the Massachusetts public school administrators who participated in this study reported that the number and pace of the creation of educational policies overwhelm administrators and inhibit effective implementation. Furthermore, participants reported that they are not given enough resources to effectively implement these policies. A descriptive and inferential statistical analysis of the totality of the data indicated that participants held a more negative view of the overall policy environment than they did of the Massachusetts antibullying policy enacted in 2010. Additionally, with respect to the high leverage policy framework, participants' responses indicated the elements of design features and implementation contingencies were the points within the system where the breakdown between the development and implementation of educational policies was most apparent.



University of Hartford  
Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership  
Dissertation

**Massachusetts Public School Administrators' Perceptions of the Development and  
Implementation of Educational Policy**

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my father, Dr. Robert F. Gazda. It is from him that I have learned what it truly means to be an educational leader. The professionalism, caring and intelligence with which he approaches the profession continue to serve as a model for my own career. I am proud to be his son and follow in his footsteps, advocating on behalf of the children of Massachusetts for the best educational opportunities possible.



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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to describe public school administrators' perceptions of the development and implementation of educational policy and to determine whether policies being implemented in the current educational reform environment met the criteria for high leverage policies. A high leverage policy is one that increases academic aspirations, achievement, or attainment for all students; promotes greater equity in learning, performance, or life outcomes for students; and generates positive ripple effects throughout an educational system (Cobb, Donaldson, Lemons, & Mayer, 2010). The *high leverage policy framework* (Cobb et al., 2010) is the conceptual model of policy development and implementation employed in this study. It was developed for the New England Secondary Schools Consortium. This framework presents policy developers and implementers with a holistic process to aid in the identification, development, and execution of policies that have a high impact on the educational environment (Cobb et al., 2010). The framework is predicated upon the understanding that the development of educational policy is part of a larger political and social context that must be taken into account by those creating those policies. Furthermore, while the perceptions of those responsible for the implementation of policies are often overlooked, they are crucial to understanding the challenges presented by implementation efforts.

As policymakers attempt to address high profile concerns, their attention often becomes narrowly focused on the problem they are attempting to address with their proposed legislation as well as the benefits they believe it will impart (Anderson, 2011). Legislators frequently give little thought to the challenges presented by implementation of their policies at the local level (Anderson, 2011; Junge & Krvaric, 2011; Nudzor, 2009). State-level mandates designed to address the problem of bullying are one example of educational policies that are often difficult to

implement because the proposed solution is far removed from the front lines of education and educators' day-to-day experiences (Nudzor, 2009). In order to ensure policy implementation and to maximize targeted outcomes, it is vital that the perspectives of those entrusted to implement these policies, such as superintendents and principals, be taken into consideration. These educators and administrators are uniquely qualified to identify potential barriers to policy implementation.

This study sought to identify how public school administrators in Massachusetts perceived the development and implementation of the educational policies that were currently impacting schools in the Commonwealth. A cross-sectional survey was the method used to collect data. The sample was drawn from the population of public school superintendents and principals in Massachusetts (hereinafter referred to as public school administrators) who were responsible for implementing the 2010 Massachusetts antibullying policy at the district or school level. This chapter provides the context for this study, a statement of the problem, an explanation of the conceptual model, definitions of terms, and the significance of the study.

### **Context for the Study**

Often there is a disconnect between development and implementation of educational policy in the United States (Robertson, 1984). The development of public policy is not an end, but rather "each policy is one more strategy for structuring relationships and coordinating behavior to achieve collective purpose" (Stone, 2002, p. 261). This is not a static process. It is a constantly evolving series of moves that adapts to the environment in which these policies are being implemented and the creation of which is often a reaction to an event or problem that has caught the public's, and thus the legislators', attention (Anderson, 2011). However, even then, rarely are policy ideas truly novel. Rather, the development of public policy is often a

consequence of a progression of incremental changes to existing ideas or legislation (Anderson, 2011).

The fact that education is now considered a national concern, in what has traditionally been a state and locally controlled area, exacerbates the tensions inherent in a federal system (Consiglio, 2009; Martin, 2012). The development of educational policy is shaped by the tension created through the interplay of the federal government and the states that have historically retained control over their educational systems (Martin, 2012). The federal government has no direct authority over education, though it exercises its will upon the states through the application of the federal government's spending power (Consiglio, 2009; Martin, 2012). That being said, Congress has become increasingly involved in the realm of education starting with the decree of giving money to public schools from the sale of western lands in 1785, right up to the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. It is not mandatory for states to implement federal laws such as the NCLB; however, failure to do so means they will not be able to collect federal funds for education.

Many individuals assert that the federal government's development of reform policy in this arena through the application of its spending powers is an overreach of that power and not intended by the framers (Heise, 2006). This is not the first time that the federal government's use of its spending power in this manner has been questioned. In 1987, the Supreme Court was asked to determine whether the federal government's requirement that states raise their drinking age to 21 in order to receive federal highway funds was a constitutional application of Congress's spending power. The Supreme Court held in *South Dakota vs. Dole*, that although the federal government's requirement was coercive, it was not unconstitutionally so, as it merely imposed an opportunity cost upon those states that chose to forgo federal funds available under



the act (Consiglio, 2009). This case also applies to the application of federal spending power in education through legislation like NCLB (2002). Although NCLB is coercive, the federal government has the right to set conditions for the receipt of its funds (Consiglio, 2009).

After federal legislation is passed, it is incumbent upon the states to implement federal policy with regard to education if they want to receive the funds dedicated to those initiatives. It is at the state level that the intentions of the framers of federal educational policies often fall apart. This phenomenon is also seen at the local level as unintended consequences occur when both state and federal policies are implemented at the district and school level, creating unforeseen costs or new challenges to be overcome (Hill & Hupe, 2005; Lipsky, 1980). This tension is present in all aspects of the management of governmental affairs, but the fact that education affects children adds an emotional component to the discussion. Additionally, the majority of people in the country are a product of its educational system. Consequently, there are many individuals whose experiences within that system have colored their perceptions and given them strong ideas about the future directions for education.

The development of policy is the means by which the intentions of the government are given voice and implementation of those policies is how that will is carried into effect (Anderson, 2011). National and state legislatures have become increasingly involved in the development of educational policy that affects local schools and districts. Implementation of externally defined accountability standards, such as those imposed by the federal government on states and schools, often meets with resistance (Arens, 2005) as they are frequently blind to the realities confronting local public school administrators. Policies that affect a school environment must be adaptable to the individual needs of the specific school community in which they are to be implemented (Noell & Gansle, 2009). The final form that legislation takes is the result of a

series of compromises between various political factions and interest groups (Edwards, 2010). Consequently, the outcome of these compromises frequently creates vague or ambiguous terms or desired actions that cause difficulty in implementation (Anderson, 2011). Educators must be engaged in the process of change and their input valued in order for implementation of a new policy to be successful because they are the individuals who ultimately have control over educational systems (Noell & Gansle, 2009).

Policies are not static and the changing political climate in the United States often alters the direction of the public's will as expressed through the laws passed by the country's legislators. The longer a policy has been around, the more difficult the changes become. Vestiges of old policies often affect the implementation of new ones and inhibit the execution of a new method of doing things (McCarthy, Wiener, & Soodak, 2012). In other words, the attitude of implementers surrounding the validity of the policy could dramatically affect the implementation of that policy (Praisner, 2003).

Germane to this investigation is the flurry of legislative action around the country surrounding the development of policy designed to eliminate bullying in schools. This laudable ideal often runs into difficulty when these laws are implemented in a school environment. Lack of specificity and failure to compel the creation of local policies to implement legislative mandates, as outlined in Limber and Small (2003), can create a patchwork pattern of compliance and thwart the intent of the legislation. Furthermore, failure by the legislation to provide a definition of what type of conduct constitutes bullying could lead to inconsistent application of an appropriate standard. Terry (2010) demonstrated that legislation alone is not enough to ensure the successful implementation of policies at the district or school level. Change must encompass a long-term, comprehensive strategy, and all stakeholders must be invested in the

project. The problems in implementation of these bullying laws are indicative of the difficulties created by a makeshift pattern of educational policies developed in the country due to the interplay of federal, state, and local forces.

When developing policy, legislators should always attempt to place their political capital behind the policy that will have the greatest impact. High leverage policies, by definition, have a larger impact on the learning environment in schools and by extension can positively affect student achievement. Their effect is systemic, and they work to increase educational equity for all students. Cobb et al. (2010) contended, “Policy makers need to consider the leverage points the policy will address and what design features are most likely to be effective given existing contextual conditions and any foreseeable factors that might influence its implementation” (p. 6). This is often where the breakdown occurs as legislators are regularly focused on the perceived benefits of the proposed policy rather than the challenges or problems that might be experienced during its implementation. More to the point, “policy-directed change” is ultimately dependent upon individual local-level implementers who are faced with competing policies, goals, and priorities and approach the task with their own unique experiences, beliefs, motivations, interpretations, and capacities (McClaughlin, 1987).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Frequently, problems or issues will attract the attention of local or national media and their coverage of an issue will spur legislative action on the topic (Anderson, 2011). Such coverage will then catch the attention of policymakers who feel compelled to respond by generating legislation to address the perceived problem. However, this can create a predicament as policymakers often become so involved with the development of their proposed legislation, as well as the benefits they believe it will impart, that they give little thought to the implementation

of these policies at the local level (Junge & Krvaric, 2011; Nudzor, 2009). This phenomenon is readily apparent in the examination of large-scale reform where Noell and Gansle (2009) found that, “systemic reformers will typically be energized by the promise of the reform itself rather than attending to ethical and pragmatic concerns that may appear to be barriers to positive change” (p. 85).

Recent years have witnessed increased regulation of schools, in large part due to increasing numbers of federal and state mandates, to an extent never before experienced (Haney, 2013). State-level mandates designed to address the problem of bullying are an excellent example of educational policies that are often difficult to implement because the proposed solution is far removed from the front lines of education and educators’ day-to-day experiences (Nudzor, 2009). However well intentioned, dealing with this difficult issue presents several immediate and challenging questions. Who should be responsible for developing policies such as those designed to address bullying in our schools? Should state legislatures bear the primary responsibility for setting guidelines for how to address school issues such as bullying? What is, or should be, the role of K-12 systems, districts, and individual schools in developing and enforcing policies?

These types of questions are not unique to the area of bullying. The distinction between the creation and implementation of educational policy is often unclear. There is often a vast discrepancy between original legislative intent and actual outcomes subsequent to the implementation of a new policy (Junge & Krvaric, 2011; Nudzor, 2009). Trends in the creation of policies include the development of policy objectives that are “grander, the programs more comprehensive, and implementation challenges more complex” (Odden, 1991, p. 4). However,

oftentimes it is the very act of implementation itself by local administrators that alters policies to fit the reality of the world in which they function (Hill & Hupe, 2005).

This study examined this phenomenon (the development and implementation of policy) in association with the current educational policy environment and with regard to the May 3, 2010 anti bullying legislation passed in Massachusetts. The Massachusetts law is appropriate for the study of a specific policy because it is a relatively recently passed piece of legislation and the issue of bullying is one that touches all schools to some degree. Consequently, it is a topic ripe for examination and a policy with which Massachusetts public school administrators should be intimately familiar and currently in the process of implementing.

National attention has focused state legislatures on the issue of bullying, and states are reviewing and updating current laws with every state currently having some type of bullying legislation (Policies & Laws, 2014). In general, state-level antibullying legislation required that schools (a) implement policies to prohibit bullying, (b) formulate procedures for handling bullying incidents, (c) set up procedures for the anonymous reporting of bullying incidents, (d) require reporting by teachers, and (e) establish procedures for investigating reported incidents (Elinoff, Chafouleas, & Sassu, 2004). Additionally, some states now require the implementation of bullying prevention programs and prohibit retaliation against individuals who report incidents of bullying (Elinoff et al., 2004). There is no federal law that directly addresses bullying, but The Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Act, which is part of NCLB (2002), provides support for school safety of which antibullying initiatives are an element (Olweus, 2010).

The Massachusetts antibullying legislation that was enacted on May 3, 2010 has requirements that are in line with the laws in most other states as listed previously with regard to the development of comprehensive policies and reporting requirements for schools and districts.

It further mandates training for school staff in order to prevent, identify, and respond to bullying and instruction on bullying for each grade level each year (Bullying in Schools, 2010). This policy is intended to strengthen the Massachusetts school districts' responses to bullying in order to create an environment where students feel safe and are able to learn (Bullying in Schools, 2010).

Consequently, the purpose of this study is twofold. First, this study elicited public school administrators' perceptions of whether the overall policy environment in the United States was having the desired effect of improving the delivery of educational services to the nation's children through the creation of high leverage educational policies. Second, this study examined a specific policy, Massachusetts antibullying policy enacted in 2010, to uncover public school administrators' perceptions of whether this policy was a high leverage policy that had the impact the legislature intended and whether the policy supported the primary role of schools (e.g., teaching, academic attainment, greater equity in learning for all students).

Such a study has the potential to inform the state-level policy process, from development through implementation, by examining the perceptions of those responsible for carrying out the implementation of those policies in our schools. As with many legislative initiatives, little is currently known about this particular mandate's impact on the environment within schools. Furthermore, no peer-reviewed reports have been published to determine whether an individual educational policy, such as the Massachusetts anti bullying legislation that was enacted in 2010, could be considered a high leverage policy.

This exploratory study aims to fill these gaps and describe school administrators' perceptions of whether the Massachusetts antibullying policy enacted in 2010 met the criteria for a high leverage policy. Although this study focused on legislation designed to combat bullying,

it was not designed to be a bullying study. The focus of this study centered on the implementation of this policy. This study has implications for the implementation literature as it seeks to understand public school administrators' perceptions of the development and implementation of educational policies and how aspects of the high leverage policy framework developed by Cobb et al. (2010) of the Center for Education Policy Analysis can inform that process.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework of policy development and implementation employed in this study was developed in 2010 for the New England Secondary Schools Consortium by Cobb et al. (2010) at the Center for Education Policy Analysis. This high leverage policy framework allows for the precise analysis of educational policy from inception and development through implementation. This framework is derived from a variety of sources, including school redesign, educational policy, organizational change, leadership development, and program evaluation. This framework was not designed to be applied in isolation, but rather accounts for the fact that the development of educational policy occurs as part of a larger political and social context. The framework serves as a tool for both policy developers and implementers as it provides a process to identify, develop, and implement policies that lead to positive effects on the educational environment. This process offers a holistic view of the development of education policy to provide sustainable change and reform throughout an educational system.

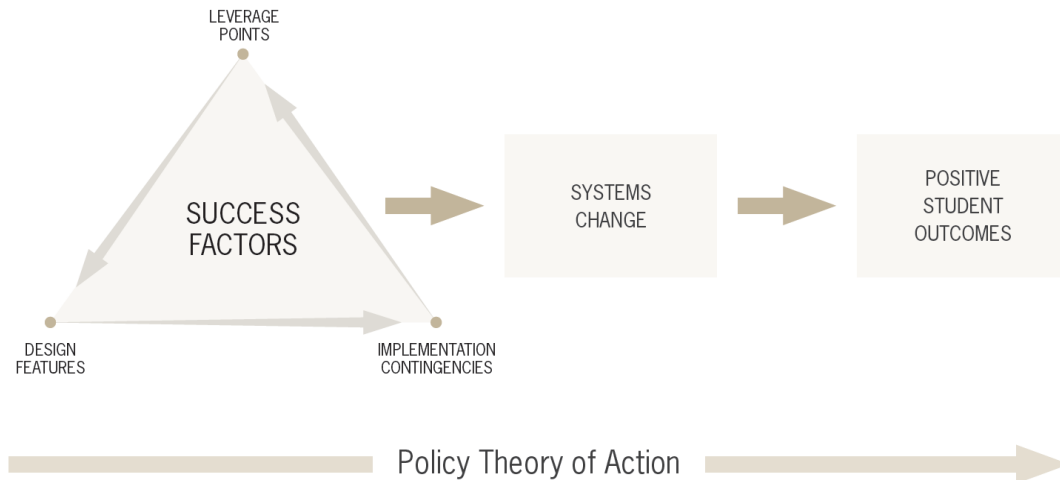
This framework is purposely goal-oriented with a strong focus on desired results and the steps necessary to achieve those outcomes. According to Cobb et al. (2010), a high leverage policy (a) increases academic aspirations, achievement, or attainment for all students; (b) promotes greater equity in learning, performance, or life outcomes for students; and (c) generates

positive ripple effects throughout an educational system. The first two elements focus on the most important results to be accomplished by educational policy—the achievement of the desired student-centered outcomes. Those results can be evaluated through performance on standardized tests as well as a myriad of other assessment measures (e.g., student behavior reports) reflecting broader indicators of success depending upon the policy being explored, which in this study was the Massachusetts antibullying policy enacted in 2010. The third element outlines an essential component of a high leverage policy, namely that it have a systemic impact on the entity it is designed to affect. A policy is not considered to be high leverage if it only influences a narrow segment of the educational system. Cobb et al. (2010) explained, “The positive ripple effects of a high leverage policy should not be constrained to a small subset of students, but should be experienced by every student in the system” (p. 3).

The high leverage policy framework compels policymakers to clearly articulate a theory of action and to take into account leverage points and design features most likely to facilitate successful implementation given the contextual and political environment. The framework serves as a filter through which to view the contextual and political background surrounding the design and implementation of educational policy. These factors have a dramatic influence on whether policy produces the desired effects of systemic sustainable change in districts, schools, and classrooms with the ultimate goal of directly impacting student academic and/or social emotional achievement (Cobb et al., 2010). There are three factors of the framework that are critical to the development of effective policy—leverage points, design features, and implementation contingencies. These factors interact with each other and together have direct effect on systems change, which in turn should lead to positive student outcomes. How effectively the three critical factors of the framework work together determines the success of



any new policy and the policy-directed systems change the policy is intended to affect along with the resultant positive student outcomes. Figure 1 depicts the interaction among the components of the high leverage policy framework and the policy theory of action that undergirds this framework.



*Figure 1.* The components of the high leverage policy framework (Cobb et al., 2010).

### **Leverage Points**

A leverage point can be either an entry point into the educational system or the desired objectives of a piece of educational policy. These leverage points can be attributes of the educational system, such as teacher-quality regulations and assessment practices, or performance objectives, such as increasing college enrollment or reducing achievement gaps.

One example of a leverage point could be the incorporation of 21st century skills, such as communication and analytical problem solving, into standardized state assessments. This change would act to compel a large-scale pedagogical shift as systems adapt their practices to meet the

requirements of the new test. This in turn could lead to practices and procedures designed to capture more expansive measures of student learning and achievement.

### **Design Features**

Design features are the calculated, deliberately planned features of a policy, both written and implied, that clearly articulate the purpose for which the policy was created. Design features may contain “the specific language in a statute, guidance on how a policy should be enacted, the requirements for compliance, or the implementation timeline” (Cobb et al., 2010, p. 4). The Massachusetts anti bullying legislation provides a good example of this concept of design features in its requirement for instruction on bullying prevention.

Each school district, charter school, approved private day or residential school and collaborative school shall provide age-appropriate instruction on bullying prevention in each grade that is incorporated into the curriculum of the school district or school. The curriculum shall be evidence-based (Bullying in Schools, 2010, para. e.1).

This feature of the legislation clearly articulates expectations for the implementation by school districts of an educational component to combat the problem of bullying.

### **Implementation Contingencies**

The educational and political environment to which a policy is applied often determines whether it will be implemented successfully. Inevitably, problems arise and unintended implementation contingencies are created many times by a disconnect between the requirements of the policy and the practicality of compliance at the point of execution. Additionally, vestiges of past policies can hinder implementation of new initiatives, particularly if there is a lack of resources dedicated to the process and a lack of proper oversight by the authorizing agency (McCarthy et al., 2012).

Implementation contingencies are often created by ambiguities or omissions in enacted educational policies. One example of this would be the definition of bullying found in the Massachusetts antibullying legislation (Bullying in Schools, 2010). Although the Massachusetts law attempts to define bullying, that definition neglects to state that there must be an imbalance of power between the perpetrator and the target of the bullying (Limber & Small, 2003). Additionally, the definition is flawed because there is no reference to the fact that it is widely recognized that for altercations to be considered bullying behavior they must be repeated over time (Limber & Small, 2003). This lack of a concrete definition could lead to differences in interpretation, which is an implementation contingency that could lead to inconsistent implementation and difficulties in enforcement from district to district.

### **Systems Change**

Change is inevitable in any institution, and the challenges it creates for an organization are determined both by the scope of the intended transformation as well as the thoughtfulness with which that change is implemented. High leverage policies are those with a broad impact on the organization as a whole. The concept of systems change “refers to transformative actions that produce organizational and pedagogical innovations, which in turn positively affect the quality of student learning, opportunities, and outcomes” (Cobb et al., 2010, p. 5). The strength of the relationship between the three success factors previously discussed will dictate the extent to which the intended policy has a positive effect on the system as a whole.

For a systems change to be truly transformational it must alter the essential structure of a school district’s practices stimulating a positive impact on the relationships between teachers and students with respect to the curricula being taught (Cobb et al., 2010). Additionally, it must perpetuate change in other areas of the system by causing the institution to rethink its internal

practices, policies, and priorities. An example of an educational policy that has just such a systemic effect is the Individuals With Disabilities Act of 2004 (IDEA), which was a reauthorization of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975. This legislation is grounded in the belief that all students possess unique abilities and should be included as valuable members of the school community (Causton-Theoharis & Theoharis, 2008). This philosophy has yielded dramatic policy-directed change in all aspects of education as well as promoted equity for all students.

### **Positive Student Outcomes**

The ultimate goal of any educational policy and systems change is to enhance the opportunity for substantive and quantifiable student achievement. Positive student outcomes relate “to higher educational aspirations, achievement, or attainment; enhanced learning opportunities and instructional quality; and greater equity in learning, performance, or life outcomes for students” (Cobb et al., 2010, p. 5). Reduced incidents of bullying behavior, enhancement of 21st century skills, or a reduction in school dropout rates are all examples of positive student outcomes that policies might attempt to address.

### **Policy Theory of Action**

Policy theory of action “refers to the undergirding logic, beliefs, and assumptions that describe what a policy will produce and how it will achieve its intended objectives” (Cobb et al., 2010, p. 5). Stated another way, a policy theory of action clearly articulates what policymakers have determined are the most appropriate leverage points that they intend the policy to target, the particular design features of that policy, and any anticipated implementation contingencies that might arise during execution of the policy. A well-crafted policy theory of action will also express how the policy will constructively yield systems change and positive student outcomes.

## Definition of Terms

Table 1

### *Definition of Terms*

Term	Description
Design features	Design features are the calculated, deliberately planned features of a policy, both written and implied, that clearly articulate the purpose for which it was created (Cobb et al., 2010).
High leverage policy	A high leverage policy is a policy whose intent is to increase academic aspirations, achievement, or attainment for all students; promote greater equity in learning, performance, or life outcomes for students; and generate positive ripple effects throughout an educational system (Cobb et al., 2010).
Implementation contingencies	Implementation contingencies are the problems and unintended consequences that inevitably arise during implementation that inhibit successful implementation efforts. They are created many times by a disconnect between the requirements of the policy and the practicality of compliance at the point of execution (Cobb et al., 2010).
Leverage points	A leverage point can be either an entry point into the educational system or the desired objectives of a piece of educational policy (Cobb et al., 2010).
Policy	A policy is a “relatively stable, purposive course of action or inaction followed by an actor or set of actors in dealing with a matter of concern” (Anderson, 2011, p. 6).
Policy Theory of action	A theory of action clearly articulates what policymakers have determined are the most appropriate leverage points that they intend the policy to target, the particular design features of that policy, and any anticipated implementation contingencies that might arise during execution of the policy (Cobb et al., 2010).
Positive student outcomes	Positive student outcomes relate “to higher educational aspirations, achievement, or attainment; enhanced learning opportunities and instructional quality; and greater equity in learning, performance, or life outcomes for students” (Cobb et al., 2010, p. 5).

Table 1 (continued)

*Definition of Terms*

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Term	Definition
Public school administrators	For the purposes of this study, Massachusetts public school administrators refer to superintendents and principals collectively.
Systems change	The concept of systems change “refers to transformative actions that produce organizational and pedagogical innovations, which in turn positively affect the quality of student learning, opportunities, and outcomes” (Cobb et al., 2010, p. 5).

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### **Related Literatures**

In order to provide context for this topic, Chapter Two explores three areas of related literature. The first area of literature examines the development and nature of educational policy (i.e., the relationship of federal, state, and local concerns in education). In order to understand the impact of educational polices, the forces that influence the development of those policies must be examined. The federal system under which we function with its juxtaposition of responsibilities creates an interesting, often challenging, environment that dramatically impacts the final form of any piece of legislation. The literatures in this section will explore those forces and delve into their significance.

The second area of literature covers an examination of the implementation of educational public policies. Once policies are enacted, the very act of implementation works to shape and define the end results of those policies. Those individuals responsible for implementation at the local level influence the overall impact of polices through the choices they make in the implementation process. Implementers, through their decision over where to allocate finite

resources, determine which aspects of those policies are emphasized or devalued. This section explores how the implementation process works to shape policies.

The third and final area of literature is an examination of the development and implementation of antibullying legislation across the United States. This area has been ripe with legislation in states across the country. The issue of bullying has become more prominent with the influence of technology and changing social norms. Consequently, this is an area of educational policy ripe for study as each state, including Massachusetts, seeks to develop policies to address this issue. This area provides an examination of how such policies have been enacted as well as problems that have arisen.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Procedures and Participants**

A cross-sectional survey was the method utilized to collect data for this study. The survey collected quantitative data through questions utilizing a 5-point Likert scale, and open comment elements in each question were used to add richness and depth to the data collected. Survey collection was accomplished utilizing the online Survey Monkey platform. Use of an Internet-based survey format maximized the number of potential respondents in the sample. This increased the potential reach of the sample, and as a result, the representative nature of that sample (Fowler, 2009).

The sample was drawn from the population of Massachusetts public school administrators who were responsible for implementing the 2010 Massachusetts antibullying policy at the district and school levels. This included every superintendent and principal in the State of Massachusetts. The quantitative questions in the survey allowed for the development of trends regarding public school administrators' views about the policies being examined with

further open-ended comments from participants used to offer depth and insight for the analysis of the data.

The survey developed for this study utilized questions designed to elicit general responses with regard to the implementation of state and federal educational policies. It also sought specific information regarding Massachusetts antibullying legislation passed in 2010 as viewed through the lens of the high leverage policy framework (Cobb et al., 2010).

A descriptive analysis of the data was conducted to determine administrators' perceptions of the creation of educational policy at the state and federal levels and its implementation in districts and individual schools. Further analysis was conducted around the specific state policy of Massachusetts antibullying legislation enacted in 2010 to determine administrators' perceptions of whether this legislation met the criteria of a high leverage policy. Finally, an inferential data analysis was also conducted in order to determine if perceptions differed between participants in different demographic categories. The analysis and organization of the data were performed using the capabilities inherent in the Survey Monkey platform and SPSS version 21 which accounts for excessive ties and unequal sample sizes. Additionally, all power metrics were calculated using the G-Power statistical package version 3.1.9.2.

### **Research Questions**

There were two main research questions that guided this exploratory cross sectional study. The first question sought to understand the current educational policy environment in this country from the perspectives of Massachusetts public school administrators. The second focused on the implementation of a single policy (Massachusetts antibullying policy enacted in 2010). Consequently, the research questions for this study are as follows:



1. What are public school administrators' perceptions regarding whether policies being created in the current educational environment meet the criteria to be considered high leverage policies? There are six subquestions.

- a) What are public school administrators' perceptions of whether current educational policy initiatives take advantage of *leverage points* in the educational policymaking environment?
- b) What are public school administrators' perceptions of whether current educational policy initiatives contain appropriate *design features* to effectuate needed change?
- c) What are public school administrators' perceptions of whether current educational policy initiatives allow flexibility for administrators to respond to *implementation contingencies* during implementation?
- d) What are public school administrators' perceptions of whether current educational policy initiatives promote *systems change*?
- e) What are public school administrators' perceptions of whether current educational policy initiatives lead to *positive student outcomes*?
- f) What are public school administrators' reports of their *theory of action* for current educational policy initiatives?

2. What are public school administrators' perceptions of whether the Massachusetts antibullying policy enacted in 2010 meets the criteria to be considered a high leverage policy? There are six subquestions.

- a) What are public school administrators' perceptions of whether the Massachusetts antibullying policy meets the criteria for *leverage points*?

- b) What are public school administrators' perceptions of whether the Massachusetts antibullying policy meets the criteria for *design features*?
- c) What are public school administrators' perceptions of whether the Massachusetts antibullying policy meets the criteria for *implementation contingencies*?
- d) What are public school administrators' perceptions of whether the Massachusetts antibullying policy promotes *systems change*?
- e) What are public school administrators' perceptions of whether the Massachusetts antibullying policy leads to *positive student outcomes*?
- f) What are public school administrators' perceptions of the *theory of action* for reducing bullying in their schools?

### **Significance of the Study**

The study was designed to elicit public school administrators' perceptions of whether the overall policy environment in the United States was improving the delivery of educational services to the nation's children through the creation of high leverage educational policies. This study also examined a specific policy, Massachusetts antibullying policy enacted in 2010, and sought to determine public school administrators' perceptions of whether this policy was a high leverage policy that had the impact that the legislature intended. In order to accomplish this objective, the sample for this study was drawn from the population of Massachusetts public school administrators who were responsible for implementing educational policies, including the 2010 Massachusetts antibullying policy at the district and school levels. These administrators' perceptions were captured through an online survey utilizing the Survey Monkey platform.

This study is significant for the following reasons. Although there is a considerable body of research on educational policy development, this research has been primarily concerned with

the creation of these policies rather than the perceptions of the individuals most responsible for their implementation (Cann & Wilhelm, 2011; Kos, 2010; Malczewski, 2011). Few published peer-reviewed studies have examined school administrators' perceptions regarding the implementation of new policies (DeBray, 2005; Miller & Grobe, 2013; Whitney, Renner, Pate, & Jacobs, 2011), and this study adds to the knowledge base in that regard.

A study that elicits local-level implementers' perceptions of whether a state's policy aimed at decreasing the incidence of bullying is a high leverage policy that supports the primary business of schools also has the potential to inform practice, specifically the policy development process. The results could shed light on and increase policymakers' understanding of the problems experienced at the local level when policies are put into practice.

Furthermore, such a study could cause policymakers to consider the effect that future policies will have on the educational environment creating a condition where they reflect upon whether those policies are truly high leverage. Currently, in this country we are experiencing a time where policies are being continually developed by state and national legislatures to correct perceived deficiencies in our educational system. Often these policies overlap with, compete with, or impede each other and lead to overload and confusion by those responsible for implementation. A determination of which initiatives are high leverage policies will help the policymakers and the American educational system focus upon those likely to have the greatest effect for positive change.

The Cobb et al. (2010) high leverage policy framework is the lens through which school administrators' perceptions were examined. There are no published empirical investigations using this framework. The application of the framework to this study is an important first step in looking at the utility of this model, and it was anticipated that application of this framework

would assist in the determination of where, if at all, a breakdown existed between enactment and implementation of policies.

## CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURES

This study was designed to elicit public school administrators' perceptions of whether the educational policy environment in the United States was having the desired effect of improving the delivery of educational services to the nation's children through the creation of high leverage policies. Furthermore, this study examined a specific policy, the Massachusetts antibullying policy enacted in 2010, and sought to determine public school administrators' perceptions of whether that policy was a high leverage policy that had the impact the legislature intended. According to Cobb et al. (2010), "A high leverage policy increases academic aspirations, achievement, or attainment for all students; promotes greater equity in learning, performance, or life outcomes for students; and generates positive ripple effects throughout an educational system" (p. 3).

This chapter reviews the selected literatures that assisted in the design of this study and examines the phenomenon under investigation. The literature outlined in this chapter was located through systematic searches of electronic databases (e.g., Academic Search Premier, ERIC, and ProQuest Education Complete) as well as the library at the University of Hartford. A variety of search terms and combinations of terms were utilized to cull out the applicable literatures, such as policy development, policy implementation, bullying, education, administrator, and federalism. Three areas of related literature were identified and are explored here to add context to this study: (a) the development and nature of educational policy (i.e., the relationship of federal, state, and local concerns in education), (b) an examination of the implementation of educational public policies, and (c) an examination of the development and implementation of antibullying legislation across the United States. These three areas delineate

the process of policy development, as well as the barriers to, and consequences of, policy implementation at the local level.

### **Development of Educational Policy**

The development of public policy is not an end, but rather “each policy is one more strategy for structuring relationships and coordinating behavior to achieve collective purpose” (Stone, 2002, p. 261). This is not a static process. It is a constantly evolving series of moves that adapts to the environment in which these policies are being implemented. Rarely are policy ideas truly novel. Rather, the development of public policy is often a consequence of a progression of incremental changes to existing ideas or legislation (Anderson, 2011). Rather than make large-scale changes, policymakers elect to make small changes to existing policies. This is often safer and less likely to illicit opposition from interest groups.

Ultimately, a policy is the means through which the political system seeks to address an issue deemed to be a public problem (Fowler, 2009). In recent years, the educational system in the United States has received a substantial amount of negative attention (Cooley, 2010). Consequently, a great deal of political attention and energy has been dedicated to the creation of policies designed in reaction to this perceived crisis. No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top, Common Core State Standards, and many other federal and state mandates are a response to this crisis (Haney, 2013). The fact that various policymakers have determined this to be a national problem, in what has traditionally been a state and locally controlled arena, exacerbates the tensions inherent in the U.S. system of government.

The remainder of this section focuses on select empirical research associated with the development of educational public policy. Specifically, a study-by-study review of

investigations related to the tension between federal, state, and local entities and the influence of the political environment on development of policy are presented.

### **The Tensions of Federalism – Federal, State, and Local Concerns**

There is often tension between federal, state, and local entities with regard to the development of educational policy. Individuals in each of these arenas have the authority to create policies and mandate implementation (Anderson, 2011). Any examination of the educational policy environment should examine the impact that this federal system has on implementation efforts at the local level. Louis, Thomas, and Anderson (2010) examined the influence that state policy has on local small school districts. They employed a framework that utilized perceptions of power, networking, and loose coupling to focus their analysis of four small districts (six or less schools). The geographic locations of the schools differed with one each in Missouri, Nebraska, Oregon, and Texas. Data collection for this study was qualitative in nature and conducted through interviews with key personnel in each district. Through their research, the authors sought to answer the following two research questions: (a) how do district leaders in smaller districts interpret their relationship with state policymakers and (b) do the differences between states' political cultures help to account for variability in the way in which school district administrators interpret district-state relationships?

The research conducted by Louis et al. (2010) had four main findings: (a) smaller districts tended to accept state mandates surrounding accountability as legitimate, (b) each small district described the power relationship with the state in a different way as applied to their own local circumstance, (c) responses of smaller districts were internally consistent and tied to the larger political culture of education in the state, and (d) this study challenged assumptions on school district-state relationships based on large urban or suburban districts. The extent to which

policies handed down from the state and federal policymakers were accepted and effectively implemented depended as much on the size of the district as the circumstances at the local level, such as finances, staffing, and local politics. The authors encouraged policymakers to include input of the implementing administrators into the development of these policies rather than rely merely on the public statements of state and national spokespersons.

Just as there is tension between state and local governments, federal legislation often creates challenges at the local level as well. This is especially true within the sphere of education, as this is an area that has traditionally been seen as the purview of the states. In his article, Martin (2012) examined the inadequacies of the federal system in dealing with education through an examination of the NCLB Act of 2001. This study was qualitative in nature, and the researcher examined legislation and scholarly articles nationwide utilizing an a priori approach. Martin began with an examination of the historical role of the federal government in the development of educational policies. He closely followed the increased involvement of Congress in the realm of education starting with the decree to give money from the sale of western lands to public schools in 1785 right up to the passage of NCLB. NCLB is seen by some to be the greatest encroachment by the federal government on the power of the states to regulate the public education system (Consiglio, 2009; Martin, 2012). Martin examined, in detail, the salient aspects of this landmark legislation pointing out the controversial areas of the law along with what critics have cited as its flaws.

Martin (2012) asserted that Congress has been slow to respond to the obvious shortcomings of the law, such as its inflexibility and reliance upon punitive consequences. Furthermore, NCLB (2002) is often unresponsive to the concerns of the states, as states have no redress other than to sue the federal government. He concluded that NCLB needs to be reformed



to balance the roles of the federal and state governments in setting educational policy. Martin believed that this could be accomplished through the application of new theories of federalism that support a strong federal role in education while at the same time granting greater control to state governments.

### **Influence of the Political Environment on the Development of Educational Policy**

Placier, Walker, and Foster (2002) discovered just how the political climate could affect the development of policy in their qualitative case study of the design of academic curriculum standards in Missouri. These researchers took a critical pragmatic approach to their examination of the intent and interactions of the parties involved in the writing of Missouri's state standards. In Missouri, the legislation calling for the creation of state standards gave the responsibility for writing those standards to an educator work group comprised of a majority of classroom teachers. Nevertheless, ultimate approval of those standards rested with the legislators.

It became apparent to the researchers in this study that philosophical differences between the groups created tension that dramatically affected the final product (Placier et al., 2002). The educator work group determined that the new standards should not follow the current trend of focusing primarily on content. Rather, the participants intended the standards to balance process and content, facilitate interdisciplinary learning, reflect knowledge of how students learn, and work to improve students' overall cognitive performance. Nevertheless, the end result reflected reluctance on the part of policymakers to take a risk and develop standards contrary to the current trend. Instead, they insisted on content specific standards like those adopted by other states and created bland, value neutral standards that lacked specificity in an attempt to appeal to all interest groups. Instead of political tensions and interest groups narrowing the focus of the original scope of the legislation, as we will see in the next study, the standards arising out of this

legislation were greatly diluted because of the political climate in which they were created. Rather than take a chance on a new type of standards that the educators in the work group believed were necessary to effectively provide the skills for student success, the political process shaped standards that reflected the legislators' attempt to appease everyone.

In his study, Edwards (2010) looked at the impact of historical context, social elements, and institutional processes on shifting educational agendas through an examination of the Title IX legislation's redefinition to include sports. Through a qualitative examination of legislation, scholarly articles, and school policies from across the United States, Edwards sought to clarify how outside influences shaped the Title IX policy to include equity in athletics when that was not initially within the scope of the legislation. This study sought to answer the question as to why interest groups allowed the focus of Title IX to be narrowed from its initial purpose of addressing gender discrimination in education to concentrate on athletics. Edwards discovered that political considerations and interactions along with institutional policies made change possible while the work of interest groups and historical context caused a refocusing of the legislation to include athletics.

Context and timing are important when it comes to the initial impetus for the creation of new policy as well as the shape that the final policy will ultimately take. As is often the case, one aspect of a law becomes a battleground for proponents and opposition and the rest of the legislation is pulled along in its wake. Edwards's (2010) research uncovered that it was the fact that the primary opposition to the Title IX legislation came from groups in support of men's athletics that caused women's groups to recognize the potential of such a law and thus refocused the discussion and emphasis of the final product toward athletics.

## **Synthesis of Research Examining the Development of Educational Policy**

The studies reviewed demonstrate the challenges of creating educational policy within the U.S. federal system of government. The focus, direction, and areas of concern for the development of policies shift over time depending on prevailing political and cultural trends. Martin (2012) and Louis et al. (2010) indicated that there is constant tension created by the interplay of political forces between federal, state, and local governmental bodies and agencies. This tension is present in all aspects of the management of the nation's governmental affairs, and the fact that education affects children adds an emotional component to the discussion. Additionally, the majority of people in the country are a product of our educational system. Consequently, there are many people whose experience within that system has colored their perceptions and given them strong ideas about the future directions for education.

Furthermore, Placier et al. (2002) along with Edwards (2010) indicate that the creation of educational policy is not stagnant over time but is heavily influenced by circumstances and current events. The current trend in educational policy revolves around a focus on standards and accountability. Outside forces, such as interest groups, act upon policymakers and shape the final outcome of policy discussions as is evidenced by the narrowing in scope of the Title IX legislation. Edwards demonstrated that even when policymakers engage experts to shape educational policy, public pressure and political climate work to influence the end product.

An examination of the previous studies illuminates limitations inherent in this research. First, the studies discussed are all qualitative in nature with most of the research conducted through a review of policies from across the country. Second, a consistent limitation of these studies is the lack of survey or interview data used to assess the development and effectiveness of the implementation of educational policy. Research into educational policy often focuses on

studying the policies themselves with little attention paid to examining the perceptions of those responsible for their implementation (Junge & Krvaric, 2011; Nudzor, 2009). The development of policies is not an end in and of itself, but rather part of the process by which a perceived problem is addressed (Anderson, 2011). Policies are inextricably tied to the process by which they are implemented and the environment in which they are carried out. This is an apparent gap in the literature, and the area that this study sought to address. Information gleaned from the evaluation of the implementation of policies could then be utilized to shape subsequent policy decisions. By analyzing the process by which policies are implemented, policymakers could then shape subsequent policies such that problems encountered during implementation could be avoided or at a minimum mitigated.

### **Implementation of Educational Public Policy**

The continually evolving nature of policy development allows policies to be drafted that adapt to the environment in which they are implemented. The high leverage policy framework utilized in this study is grounded on the assumption that the creation and implementation of policies do not occur in a vacuum, but rather are influenced by the larger political and social context in which each policy is developed. That political or social context can either facilitate change or inhibit implementation as the enactment of the policy reacts to the environment in which it is being put into practice. Furthermore, rarely are policy ideas truly novel. Instead, the development of public policy is often a consequence of a progression of incremental changes to existing ideas or legislation (Anderson, 2011).

Ultimately, a policy is the means through which the political system seeks to address an issue deemed to be a public problem (Fowler, 2009). Policy implementation is what occurs between the development of anticipated policy outcomes to solve a perceived problem and the

actual results the policy engenders (Hill & Hupe, 2005). There is often a vast discrepancy between original legislative intent and actual outcomes subsequent to the implementation of a new policy as a result of the environment in which implementation must occur. Trends in the creation of policies have seen the development of policy objectives that are “grander, the programs more comprehensive, and implementation challenges more complex” (Odden, 1991, p. 4). Over the years, three main philosophical areas in the study of policy implementation have emerged: top-down, bottom-up, and a combined approach.

### **Top-Down Theory of Policy Implementation**

In his book, *The Implementation Game*, Eugene Bardach (1977) outlined his views on the process of policy creation. Bardach described the implementation process as a game of competing interests between interested parties. Throughout the process, each party vies for control in order to have their priorities take precedence and shape the end product. His examination of this process led him to propose recommendations for policymakers. First, he advised policymakers to take greater care in the crafting of policies so as to structure the “game” to illicit the desired policy outcome(s). Second, he counseled that policymakers must then fix the game to ensure that outcome. Consequently, Bardach viewed implementation as a top-down directed process where legislation must be crafted with extreme care and appropriate oversight conducted to ensure compliance. This approach is labor intensive, and not all policies are able to command this outlay of time and resources. It works best in small focused legislative endeavors, such as the one present in the following study.

One example of policymakers fixing the game as advocated by Bardach (1977) is outlined in Greg Garn’s (1999) study of the charter school initiative in Arizona. In this study, Garn investigated how Arizona policymakers overcame the phenomenon of local implementers

undermining legislators' intent. This study effectively demonstrates the top-down model of policy creation. It also demonstrates how policymakers, through a thoughtful crafting of legislation, can take into account the environment in which a policy will be implemented and issues which might thwart its intent.

Garn (1999) conducted a descriptive and exploratory case study gathering data from analysis of documents, observations of key actors, and interviews with policymakers and implementers. Those key actors were also observed in the performance of their duties in committee hearings and open sessions of the Arizona House of Representatives in 1998. Garn was careful to point out that this single case study may not be indicative of national trends. Additionally, because of the recentness of the reform and the minimal reporting requirements, little quantitative data was available for study. The results of this study were based on data gathered solely from the perceptions of policymakers and implementers (i.e., those responsible for putting the policy into practice).

Arizona policymakers, through their charter school legislation, wanted to limit the bureaucratic requirements for charter schools as well as increase market accountability mechanisms and in the end were very successful with that endeavor. Garn (1999) found that although there was a large body of literature focused around slippage (deviation from the desired result) during the implementation of educational policies, policymakers often utilized factors, such as granting or withdrawing authority or funds, in an attempt to control the end result. In Arizona, there is a history of tension between the state legislators and the Arizona Department of Education. State legislators believed that bureaucrats at the Department of Education misinterpreted the intent of their policies while Department of Education officials reported that they were being continually asked to do more with fewer resources.

Garn (1999) found that the Arizona legislature took two steps to ensure that the intent of the legislation was not undermined by members of the Department of Education. First, they minimized the authority of the Department of Education to regulate charter schools giving the governor the power to appoint members to a state board for charter schools. Second, this legislation was passed as an unfunded mandate for the administrative staff of the Department of Education. Consequently, although the Department of Education could make the argument for oversight authority of charter schools as the statute creating their agencies gave them authority over all state public schools, they were not given the funds to hire the additional support staff necessary to carry out that task. This effectively removed charter schools from their purview, thus decreasing the bureaucratic requirements and increasing market accountability mechanisms, as was the legislature's intent. Garn effectively illustrates that when appropriate care is given to crafting legislation that accounts not only for design features and a theory of action, but also thoughtfully accounts for leverage points and implementation contingencies as outlined in the high leverage policy framework, the original intent of the legislation can be maintained throughout the implementation process. This case study demonstrates the top-down theory of policy creation. In this example, the Arizona legislature crafted a policy that took into account potential attempts to undermine its implementation and change its intended impact.

The top-down theory of policy implementation is founded on the idea that "political mandates are clear and that administrators [should] do what their political bosses demand of them" (Hill & Hupe, 2005, p. 42). Furthermore, as Garn (1999) demonstrated, careful crafting of educational policies can ensure that the intent of those policies is carried out through the implementation process. Put in terms of the high leverage policy framework, advocates of the top-down theory emphasize the design features and theory of action aspects of the framework,

minimizing the impact of implementation contingencies, such as local administrators' perceptions of the policy they are being mandated to implement. According to the top-down theory, if policymakers want a certain result, they merely have to craft the appropriate legislation and devise the appropriate safeguards and procedures. Thus, an analysis of top-down theory demonstrates how its proponents disregard or at least minimize the impact local-level implementers can have on the process.

### **Bottom-Up Theory of Policy Implementation**

In contrast, bottom-up theory is based upon the principle that each policy is unique and dependent both upon the environment in which it is being implemented and those responsible for carrying out its mandates. The act of implementation by local administrators requires policies to be altered to fit the reality of the world in which they function (Hill & Hupe, 2005). If policy implementers do not agree with a policy, they may attempt to minimize what they believe to be the policy's negative impact and ultimately undermine the policy and its implementation. Oftentimes, vague language in policies allows flexibility of interpretation thus giving implementers the ability to determine the effectiveness of policies. It is the difference in intent and perception between policymakers and implementers that results in policies having an impact in real world settings that is different from what was intended. This can result in positive and negative outcomes. This is the case since the end result may be more responsive to local needs and concerns but does not satisfy the intentions for which the policy was originally crafted. Bottom-up theorists place emphasis on implementation contingencies, as it is the impact of these contingencies that ultimately determines the impact of a policy.

A leading proponent of the bottom-up theory of implementation is Michel Lipsky (1980). He grounded his work, *Street Level Bureaucracy*, in observations of the behavior of individuals



in public service organizations. His studies led him to conclude that the procedures these bureaucrats established to deal with the demands and pressures of their work effectively became the policies they carried out. It is not Lipsky's point that the undermining of policies by street-level bureaucrats is undertaken for idealistic reasons, but rather he argued that it is done primarily to cope with the uncertainty and work pressures these bureaucrats face on a daily basis. Lipsky's view is that in order to understand policy implementation, one must examine the pressures acting upon implementers and the effect these pressures have on policy outcomes. He argues that rather than resist those tendencies they should be embraced to facilitate change. Rather than focusing on tighter regulation of processes and procedures to enforce desired outcomes, Lipsky argues that we should focus accountability measures on those outcomes and give street-level bureaucrats more discretion in determining how to achieve them.

In terms of the high leverage policy framework, advocates of the bottom-up theory emphasize flexibility to allow for implementation contingencies and system change aspects of the framework. They focus on, and allow for, positive impact from implementation contingencies, such as local administrators' perceptions of the policy they are being mandated to implement. The belief of this theory is that, if the policymakers want the policy to be successful, they must allow those who are implementing that policy to shape and mold it to the environment in which it is being put into effect. This allows policies to be living instruments that adapt to the local environment. While the end result may not be exactly what policymakers originally had in mind, the end result is responsive to local concerns and requirements and therefore has a positive impact. Thus, an analysis of bottom-up theory demonstrates how its proponents emphasize the impact local-level implementers can have on the process, dramatically changing the original intent of the policy.

### **Combined Theory of Policy Implementation**

The third, final, and most recent trend in the study of implementation theory is a synthesis of the two aforementioned approaches. This combined theory of practice is a more holistic approach that views the study of policy implementation as a system, which is impacted by those designing the policy, those implementing the policy, and outside influences (Hill & Hupe, 2005). Paul Sabatier and Hank Jenkins-Smith (1993) provide an example of this theory as they examined this trend in the development of their “advocacy coalition approach.”

An advocacy coalition operates within a political subsystem (e.g., education, environment, and banking). It consists of individuals or organizations that share a certain set of core beliefs and seek to shape the political process to achieve collective aims. These advocacy coalitions see the end goal as paramount and will work to influence both the policy development and implementation processes in order to accomplish their goals. The advocacy coalition framework asserts that policy change over time is the work of three distinct processes. The first process relates to the interactions of various advocacy coalitions working both in conjunction with, and in opposition to, each other to achieve desired goals. The second influence is changes that are external to the political subsystem such as socioeconomic, influence of other systems, and competing coalitions; in other words, the environment in which implementation is to occur. The third factor to consider is “stable system parameters,” such as regulatory structure and state and federal constitutional rules that work to constrain or allocate resources for policy implementation. Consequently, the coalition advocacy approach to policy implementation is a more holistic approach that examines these competing coalitions, processes, and the environment in which they exist in order to understand the impact they have on the policy process.

The combined approach, of which the advocacy coalition framework is one example, involves all key aspects of the policy process as outlined by the high leverage policy framework. It takes into account top-down features, such as an emphasis on the design features and theory of action aspects of the framework, while affording implementers the flexibility to allow for implementation contingencies and system change aspects of the framework on which the bottom-up theory rests. Consequently, the end result is stronger as there is thoughtful design in the creation of the policy while implementers have the ability to shape the policy to the local environment in which it is being executed. Such policy development incorporates and calls for a thorough examination of design features, leverage points, and implementation contingencies. Furthermore, it takes into account both the intention of the creators of the policy as well as those of the implementers and allows for outside actors to influence the process. Therefore, given the comprehensive nature of this approach, it is this theory of study under which the analysis contained in this study was conducted as it examines implementers' (public school administrators) perceptions of the implementation of educational policies.

### **Competing Mandates, Interests, and the Challenges of Implementation**

The social and political environment within which policy is created changes with time, and the 20th century has seen government much more involved in the implementation of social policy, such as education, than it had been in the past (Hill & Hupe, 2005). Prior to the 20th century, government had been much more willing to allow local implementers to shape policies to fit the local environment. Local autonomy has thus been largely removed or at least greatly impinged upon as policies have become “central commitments or even political mandates to achieve new social goals” (Hill & Hupe, 2005, p. 40).

The NCLB Act (2002) is an excellent example of this trend; however, successful policy implementation still depends on building and preserving the will and capacity of implementers (Fowler, 2009). Policymakers often overlook the impact that implementers have on the ultimate success or failure of an initiative. They assume that, since a course of action is mandated by policy, it will be implemented with fidelity (Fowler, 2009). However, there is a wide gulf between mere compliance and committing the time, staffing, and other resources necessary to successfully implement a new policy. Federal, state, and local policies all compete for the same small and often dwindling pool of resources (Fowler, 2009). Consequently, if a policy is perceived by implementers as invalid or an ineffective utilization of local resources, implementers are not likely to comply with that policy and may instead put their efforts and money behind alternative policies (often local) that they believe will have the most positive impact on their organizations (Consiglio, 2009).

Through its emphasis on accountability, NCLB (2002) attempts to assess school districts' progress toward the implementation of comprehensive school reform efforts. Nevertheless, there is much debate about whether the accountability provisions focused around standardized testing truly support the assessment of progress with regard to school improvement (Guilfoyle, 2006; Hursh, 2005; Maki, 2009). Arens (2005) examined the public perceptions of accountability in order to determine whether accountability, as currently outlined in NCLB, adequately addresses the public's beliefs on this issue. The author collected data through an examination of the literature on accountability and public perception as well as through focus groups and surveys of parents, teachers, administrators, and community members. The study found that NCLB's insistence upon a performance model of accountability was not a priority for the aforementioned stakeholders. They understood the need for student testing to be a part of an accountability

model, but resisted the federal law's overwhelming emphasis on this element. Expressed in terms of the high leverage policy framework, federal policymakers focused on design features (accountability) and leverage points (financial incentives/disincentives) but failed to account for implementation contingencies such as stakeholder priorities. Arens found that when accountability was externally defined, those most affected by it expressed feeling disenfranchisement that negatively impacted effective implementation of attempted reforms.

This perception of disconnect on the part of stakeholders was also present in Arens's (2005) finding that, although community members reported it was important that accountability be linked to clearly articulated standards, they expressed concern that those standards were arbitrarily defined. This led to resistance on the part of those responsible for implementation, as they desired greater flexibility on how those standards were implemented and assessed. It was evident from the responses that the further from the local environment those standards were developed, the more resistance those standards encountered. Furthermore, accountability systems that placed emphasis on schools being responsible and responsive to students' needs were better received than those that emphasized academics or standards.

The educational reform movement in this country is concerned with changing the way schools operate in order to improve student outcomes. Noell and Gansle (2009) examined the pragmatic issues of systemic change in education. Their study was a qualitative thematic analysis of related school policies, scholarly articles, and legislation from around the country. The authors examined the theoretical level of systems change proposed at the legislative policy level. The authors contended that the proponents of change primarily focused on the intended benefits of policy reforms; however, the reality of implementation received little consideration.

To develop this line of inquiry, Noell and Gansle (2009) examined the effect of NCLB (2002) on the comprehensive school reform movement. They discovered that for comprehensive school reform movement's efforts to be successful, there should be both resources and buy-in. Noell and Gansle asserted that successful policy initiatives allow for flexibility to adapt to the needs of individual schools and solicit teacher input into the implementation at the local level. Additionally, it is essential to take ethical and practical issues into account when attempting systemic reform or else said reform will not succeed. Assessment and feedback of any such endeavor are necessary components for analyzing these programs to ensure that changes can be made during the implementation process. This line of inquiry is important to this study because feedback and analysis of implementation could then be utilized to shape subsequent policy efforts.

### **Incrementalism**

As previously stated, policy development and implementation is an incremental process where the present builds off of the efforts of the past (Anderson, 2011). Remnants of past policies can work to either inhibit or support new initiatives, and much of that support, or lack thereof, is determined by the perceptions of the implementers of the new policy. The foundation of the IDEA (2004), which was a reauthorization of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, is the belief that all students possess unique abilities and should be included as valuable members of the school community (Causton-Theoharis & Theoharis, 2008). This policy ideal of inclusion, emphasized by this federal law, often creates challenges in implementation at the local level. McCarthy et al. (2012) examined how past practices with regard to the education of students with disabilities affected the implementation of more recent and inclusive practices for educating these students. This was a qualitative study in which

researchers interviewed administrators at 11 public high schools in New York State. The 11 schools were geographically diverse with one rural school, six suburban schools, and four urban schools. Interviews were conducted with two administrators at each school (the principal and a special education administrator identified by the principal).

The researchers found that the remnants of past educational policy and practices with regard to segregation of students with special needs persisted and weakened attempts to implement inclusive practices. McCarthy et al. (2012) identified four major areas that persisted from past policies. They were (a) low expectations for students with disabilities, (b) categorical placement decisions, (c) separate teacher tracks, and (d) separate administrative structures. These areas did not operate independently, but rather were intertwined and influenced the overall educational environment for students with disabilities. Holdover beliefs or practices in one category can impact new policy implementation that seeks to change one of these attitudes. An examination of the policy of segregation more closely illuminates this problem.

The policy of segregating students with disabilities was premised upon the belief that students with disabilities were less able to learn. IDEA (2004) mandates that students with disabilities be educated in the least restrictive environment possible (Etscheidt, 2006). Nevertheless, the interpretation of what exactly least restrictive means for the individual student is influenced by the perceptions of the educators who make that determination (Praisner, 2003). Even with the shift in policy to a belief in inclusion, the remnants of past beliefs were evident in some educators' concerns that the new policy was based on unrealistic expectations for those students. The remains of past policies, such as segregation, were not implicitly being carried out in schools, but rather remained in the background through the thoughts and perceptions of teachers and administrators and thus impacted the implementation of the new policy of inclusion

(McCarthy et al., 2012). Additionally, some of these past practices remained beneficial to a subset of stakeholders thus inhibiting the transition to the implementation of new policy initiatives. This study reinforces the fact that in order for a new policy to truly be effective and transformative it must acknowledge the past experiences and beliefs of its implementers and allow them some flexibility in shaping policy execution. If that flexibility is not present, implementers may seek to undermine the effort.

### **Power of Policymakers Versus Implementers in Policy Implementation Efforts**

Policymakers and implementers both have the power to shape policy implementation efforts (Anderson, 2011). Through accountability measures in legislation and the distribution of resources, policymakers can try and force compliance with new policies (Consiglio, 2009; Haney, 2013). Through resistance and allocation of time, resources, effort, and money, implementers can influence the effectiveness of implementation (Hill & Hupe, 2005). Policy development and implementation in education continues to experience a transformation as competing interests seek to shape the direction of public education in the United States. Along with increased participation in education by the federal government, state legislatures have dramatically increased their involvement in the development and implementation of educational policy (Little & Houston, 2003). Furthermore, whereas the federal government must rely on its spending power to coerce compliance (Consiglio, 2009; Haney, 2013; Martin, 2012), state legislatures are able to legislate and compel compliance more directly (Little & Houston, 2003). Recent years have marked a change in states' role and influence in the educational arena. According to Little and Houston (2003), "The role of the state agency in education reform has shifted from focusing solely on monitoring and ensuring compliance with regulations to setting policy directions and providing assistance for implementation of reform efforts" (p. 55). This



shift has increased the challenges of developing policy in this realm as state legislatures get more involved with the details of school curriculum design and governance.

In 1987, McClaughlin studied the idea of macro vs. micro (i.e., national or regional vs. local) interests in the development and implementation of policy. The Great Society, initiated by President Johnson, saw government become increasingly involved in individuals' daily lives and implementation problems came as something of a surprise to policymakers and planners (McClaughlin, 1987). The impetus for those problems and subsequent responses depended on the lens through which individuals perceived those difficulties. "Thus while economists interpreted disappointing program outcomes as market failures and sought solutions in incentives, sociologists and organization theorists saw signs of inadequate organizational control, and counseled new penalties and increased oversight" (McClaughlin, 1987, p. 171).

However, over time it became apparent that local capacity and will were the major indicators for success or failure of any given policy (McClaughlin, 1987). Consequently, an approach that incorporates appropriate pressure to focus local implementers' attention and support to facilitate implementation is needed to maximize the chance for success. Individual interpretation is the linchpin upon which all policy implementation turns and "change ultimately is a problem of the smallest unit" (McClaughlin, 1987, p. 174) of an organization. This is evident in education through teachers' implementation of new initiatives in the classroom.

External pressure can only go so far to ensure compliance as implementers at all levels in the organization "negotiate" their response to new initiatives. McClaughlin (1987) asserts that this bargaining process is exactly what makes it so difficult for policy analysts to assess the effect of a given policy since inherently local concerns dictate the course of that bargaining. Often teachers are seen as resistant to change when this is frequently a reflection of their

professional assessment that the new initiatives are not as valuable as the ones they are replacing. It is thus that the macro (big picture) world of policymakers collides with the micro (district, school, and classroom) world of ground-level implementers as both strive to achieve their own goals and agendas. Effective implementation involves finding a balance between these concerns and opening a dialogue that allows for negotiation and compromise.

Spillane (2000), through his examination of the impact of the implementation of mathematics reform legislation in Michigan, found that district leaders' (i.e., administrators, curriculum specialists, and lead teachers) perceptions of policies and their prior experiences had a dramatic impact on how they implemented policies at the district level. His study first analyzed central patterns in district leaders' understandings of mathematics reform and then explored how a cognitive frame could inform our understanding of the policy implementation process.

Spillane's (2000) study was based on data gathered in the second phase of a 5-year research investigation. This phase involved a multicase study of nine Michigan school districts utilizing a continuous comparative methodology to collect and analyze data on the school districts' implementation of mathematics and science policy. The researcher collected policy documents and conducted 165 interviews utilizing a snowball technique to identify district leaders to interview. Interview protocols were developed from a review of the implementation literature. Interview data were then coded utilizing a computer-based coding database developed for this purpose.

According to Spillane (2000), "Implementation involves interpretation: Implementers must figure out what policy means in order to decide whether and how to ignore, adapt, or adopt policymakers' recommendations in their practice" (p. 145). He asserts that, according to a

cognitive frame analysis, it is essential to determine the ways that a policy causes implementers to change their minds about an approach to an educational question or process. It is these local actors' perceptions that shape the policy to fit local agendas or goals. Thus, "cognitive theory suggests that people use their prior knowledge and experiences to construct new understandings" (Spillane, 2000, p. 146). Spillane found that district leaders tended to focus on the form of the mathematics reform (process) rather than the function (intended outcome). Consequently, although there was an effort to comply, "the dominant perspective among district leaders on real-world connections involved no change in the mathematical knowledge students learned in school but rather a change in the form of the mathematical material and of the learning activities" (Spillane, 2000, p. 156). This form-focused understanding was found not to be limited to mathematics, but carried across all disciplines. This demonstrates how the interpretation of intended policies by district leaders dramatically impacts the implementation of those policies.

This idea of the impact that an individual's attitude has upon the implementation of a policy was explored by Praisner (2003) in his study of the attitude of elementary school principals toward the inclusion of students with disabilities. Principals are the key to success with comprehensive school reform efforts. It is the principal's responsibility to allocate resources within their building and they do so according to their own beliefs and priorities. If the principal of a building does not believe in the validity of the policy to be implemented, then it will not be possible to effectively implement that policy in the school setting. Praisner surveyed 408 elementary school principals throughout the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in order to examine their attitudes toward inclusion. The author used the Principals and Inclusion Survey to determine the extent to which principals' perceptions of inclusion were influenced by

experience, training, and program factors. Descriptive statistics were then used to analyze the data collected.

Praisner (2003) found a direct relationship between principals' beliefs about inclusion and the outcomes for students with disabilities in their schools. Although a student's individual education plan team was ultimately responsible for making placement decisions under IDEA (2004), the attitude of the building principal strongly influenced those decisions. Additionally, the author found that the principals often believed that students in some disability categories, such as those with social or emotional needs, were less appropriate for inclusion than those students with more mild disabilities. Praisner learned that the strongest determinant for whether a principal believed in inclusion was that principal's past experiences with inclusion. The number of years of experience working in a school setting was found to have no impact; however, the more positive an experience that principals had encountered in their practice, the more likely they were to believe in the policy of inclusion.

### **Synthesis of the Research Examining the Implementation of Educational Policy**

The aforementioned studies demonstrate that legislation alone is not enough to compel sustainable effective change in a school environment. Noell and Gansle (2009) revealed that policies that affect a school environment must be adaptable to the individual needs of the specific school community in which they are to be implemented. Educators must be engaged in the process of change and their input valued in order for a program to be successful. NCLB (2002) marks the greatest involvement by the federal government into a policy area that has traditionally been under local control. Arens's (2005) work illustrates the challenge of externally defined accountability standards imposed by the federal government on states and schools.

Implementers often feel disenfranchised, which impedes effective execution of the desired policy initiative.

Policies are not static and the changing political climate in the United States often alters the direction of the public's will as expressed through the laws passed by our legislators. The longer a policy has been around, the more difficult it is to make changes to that policy. McCarthy et al. (2012), through their examination of IDEA (2004), point out that oftentimes vestiges of old policies can have an impact on the implementation of new policies as they influence implementers to either consciously or unconsciously inhibit the execution of new methods of doing things. The attitude of implementers surrounding the validity of the policy dramatically affects the implementation of that policy. Praisner (2003) demonstrated how the building principal was the key to changing the course of an existing policy, such as IDEA.

How a policy is interpreted has a dramatic impact on the fidelity with which it is implemented in a school setting. McClaughlin (1987) found that macro (state/federal) interests were often overshadowed by micro (district/school) concerns. Consequently, new policies were often interpreted in such a way as to reinforce current practices or at least mitigate what local-level implementers saw as unnecessary change. Mitigation or dilution of new policy by local implementers, such as district or building administrators, leads to a type of informal negotiation causing implementation to vary among school districts depending upon the perception of the importance of the new policy by local administrators. This was supported in Spillane (2000) through a cognitive theory approach. However, Garn (1999) demonstrated that under certain conditions, with appropriate thought given to implementation contingencies, legislators could put safeguards into place to ensure the intent of the policy is carried into practice by implementers.

The main limitation of many of these studies (other than Garn, 1999) is that they fail to explore the reasons for implementation failure. As evidenced by the previous studies, policymakers often focus on leverage points, such as financial incentives/disincentives, to compel compliance as well as accountability measures within the design features to induce desired outcomes. However, failure to plan for the implementation contingencies inherent in the process, the largest being the perception and priorities of the local implementing authority, creates a situation where these initiatives will fail or at least have their intended impact minimized. By its very nature of competing interests, the U.S. federal system of government creates challenges in the implementation of educational policy. If state and/or local officials do not feel as if they have input into the development of federal legislation, they will balk at its implementation (Anderson, 2011). For the implementation of policies to be successful, Conner and Rabovsky (2011) point out that flexibility must be given for local priorities to be realized in order to overcome resistance by implementers. Consequently, an examination of the perceptions of public school administrators, as provided by this study, is crucial to understanding the problems experienced at the local level when policies are put into practice. Furthermore, utilization of the high leverage policy framework provided by Cobb et al. (2010) assisted in identifying at which point in the process those problems occurred.

### **Anti Bullying Legislation, Development, and Implementation**

As described in this chapter, the interaction of federalism, remnants of past policies, and lack of local buy-in, among other things, influence whether the implementation of a new policy will be successful. The following sections explore bullying legislation in the United States as the specific piece of legislation being examined in this study relates to that topic. There is currently a proliferation of state policies designed to combat the perceived problem of bullying in U.S.

schools. Bullying is when a student or group is being “exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more students” (Olweus, 1993, p. 9). The long-term effects of bullying on all involved are sobering. Bullying is an activity that can have long-reaching implications for all involved even lasting years after the actual bullying has stopped (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). The effects of bullying are not limited to those students who are the targets of the aggression. School and classroom climate are also impacted, and bullies themselves as well as bystanders experience negative long-term consequences due to exposure to these incidents (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). Victims of bullying tend to experience poorer general health (Rigby, 1996); higher rates of depression (Seals & Young, 2003); and greater involvement in risky behaviors, such as alcohol or drug consumption (Nansel et al., 2001) and criminal activity (Olweus, 1993). Bystanders who merely observe bullying behavior can also exhibit many of these same behaviors and symptoms (Limber & Small, 2003).

The importance of this issue appears obvious to many, particularly given the amount of attention bullying has garnered in recent years by local and national media sources. However, dealing with this issue is not easy and presents several immediate questions. Who should be responsible for developing policies to address bullying in our schools? Should state legislatures bear the primary responsibility for setting guidelines for how to address bullying by students? What specific behaviors should legislation attempt to address?

The elimination of bullying within a school requires a systemic approach that is not merely reactionary but takes proactive measures to eliminate bullying (Juvonen, 2005). Federal and state harassment laws provide little deterrent for bullying or remedies to victims for either the physical or psychological effects of bullying. The Equal Protection Clause of the U.S. Constitution does provide redress for victims if they fall within a protected class and the bullying

is because of their membership in that class, but a vast majority of the victims of bullying do not qualify for such protection (Sacks & Salem, 2009). Consequently, there is a need for intervention by state legislatures to ensure that this issue is addressed and that students are protected.

Limber and Small (2003) examined proliferation of antibullying laws passed by state legislatures. The authors sought to describe the various laws working to compare and contrast how bullying was defined as well as the intended scope of the legislation. At the time the study was conducted, only 15 states had passed laws specifically designed to address the issue of bullying. An examination of those laws led to the discovery that only nine of those laws took the crucial step of defining exactly what bullying entailed. Lack of a clear definition leaves it to local implementers to determine what constitutes bullying, which can lead to inconsistent implementation of the legislation and thwart the intentions for which the law was designed. Additionally, the researchers found that in those states where bullying was defined, the definitions varied widely and some failed to capture the vital component of the presence of a power difference between the target and the aggressor. This leads to a situation where bullying and harassment laws can become confused and lead to ineffective implementation of the legislation.

Today, the vast majority of the states leave development of the actual plan to combat bullying to the individual schools or districts. Furthermore, many compel schools to adopt bullying prevention programs and provide training for staff on how to identify bullying and local procedures for reporting incidents. Reporting requirements and disciplinary consequences for perpetrators are present in many state statutes. However, at the time of the Limber and Small (2003) study, only West Virginia required a plan for the protection of the targets of bullying.



The previous studies illustrate the importance of the careful consideration necessary to create a successful policy. Design elements must be carefully crafted to minimize the impact of unforeseen difficulties during implementation and experts sought to determine what will be a productive solution to the problem being remedied.

State legislatures have taken the issue of students' well-being, including bullying, seriously. Currently, every state has some type of antibullying legislation or state policy (Policies & Laws, 2014), and the past 10 years have seen a dramatic increase in legislation surrounding this topic with 34 states enacting some form of antibullying legislation (Limber & Small, 2003; Olweus, 2010). Legislation that seeks to reduce the incidents of bullying through prohibition and consequences alone will meet with little success. In 2006, South Carolina passed the Safe Schools Climate Act, which sought to limit and punish harassment, intimidation, and bullying in South Carolina schools (Terry, 2010). South Carolina's policy was flawed in that the definition failed to mention an imbalance of power or incidents repeated over time. Additionally, the South Carolina law merged harassment and bullying together. Unlike bullying, harassment does not have to have an imbalance of power, but a person does have to be in a protected class. Combining bullying into preexisting harassment policies can lead to "confusion and incorrect assumptions about the nature of bullying" (Limber & Small, 2003, p. 448). The ineffectiveness of South Carolina's law as well as findings in other studies on this topic have proven that changing the culture that creates bullies and victims requires commitment from all stakeholders (school, parents, and community) to a long-term comprehensive strategy (Smith, 2004).

### **Case Studies on Implementation of Anti Bullying Legislation Across the United States**

In response to a perceived crisis with respect to the issue of bullying in U.S. schools, state and local officials have reacted by adopting a myriad of related policies that school administrators and teachers must implement. Although there are some differences, Elinoff et al. (2004) found that most states that have passed antibullying legislation require that schools (a) implement policies to prohibit bullying, (b) formulate procedures for handling bullying incidents, (c) set up procedures for the anonymous reporting of bullying incidents, (d) ensure teachers report incidents, and (e) establish procedures for investigating reports of bullying. Additionally, some states now require the implementation of bullying prevention programs as well as prohibitions against retaliation toward individuals who report incidents of bullying.

Dayton and Dupre (2009) examined bullying laws in the United States set against the backdrop of international law. The researchers used a qualitative approach to study policy trends in order to examine and interpret antibullying legislation passed by state legislatures across the country. In the international arena, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the United Nations in 1989 and in which the United States had a defining role in its creation, focused the awareness of the international community on the problem of bullying in today's society. The authors note that although the United States played an important role in the creation of this policy, and it was signed by the United States in 1995, it has yet to be ratified by the senate.

Through their examination of the various states' attempts to combat bullying by the creation of policy, Dayton and Dupre (2009) found that lawmakers in different contexts held a variety of views on which elements of bullying to emphasize and what tools to require to combat bullying in schools. The researchers found that a piecemeal approach using punitive measures,

“zero-tolerance” policies, and mediation was unsuccessful unless there was support from the entire school community for the implementation of a systematic program. Training was necessary for educators in order to identify and treat the root causes of bullying. Additionally, proactive measures to create and maintain a positive school culture had more long-term success than merely imposing punitive consequences (Dayton & Dupre, 2009). Definitions of what constitutes bullying must be broad enough to clarify the actions being defined, while avoiding overbroad language that could violate individuals’ right to free speech. Careful crafting of the legislation by policymakers is necessary to ensure that a solid definition is drafted. In addition, proactive measures to create a positive school climate need to be employed and funding (a piece that is usually lacking) must be addressed to ensure schools are able to implement these programs in an effective manner (Dayton & Dupre, 2009).

Terry (2010) examined the extent to which South Carolina’s antibullying legislation enacted in 2004 and titled the Safe School Climate Act had been implemented in the schools. The author was interested in determining if legislation alone was enough to change the climate in a school. Terry used a survey with both yes/no and open-ended questions to collect data from South Carolina educators about the impact of the Safe School Climate Act. Over 120 teachers, administrators, and district staff members completed the survey. The results revealed that 63% of respondents answered “no” or “don’t know” to whether South Carolina’s legislation exerted the needed pressure to keep schools free of bullying. Responses demonstrated that awareness of the problem increased, but many of those surveyed reported that legislative action and awareness did not correlate to a change in student behavior or the school environment. Inconsistent implementation at the school level led to a variety of results. Terry’s work revealed that merely passing a law was not enough. Implementation strategies must engage those involved in that

implementation in order to achieve systemic change. It is hoped that the application of the high leverage policy framework will provide additional structure to the collection and analysis of data so as to provide greater insight into the difficulties administrators perceive in implementation of educational policies.

In this modern technological age, social patterns are quickly changing especially among youth who are often the first to embrace new mediums for social interaction. Technology and social networking have increased the potential for negative peer interactions (Stewart & Fritsch, 2011). Moreover, the effects on the target of bullying have increased significantly because text messaging platforms and social networking sites allow bullies access to their target 24 hours a day, 7 days a week (Snakenborg, Van Acker, & Gable, 2011). No longer can a target go home and count on being safe. No longer are bullies' audiences limited to other students in the hallways, locker rooms, or lunchrooms. They have access to a much wider audience as posts on the web can be viewed by millions of people exposing their targets to a greater level of ridicule (McHenry, 2011).

Snakenborg et al. (2011) explored this relatively new phenomenon in their study on cyber-bullying. They conducted a qualitative review of various states' legislation, scholarly research articles, and school policies to determine how this aspect of bullying was being addressed. In their study, Snakenborg et al. defined cyber-bullying as "the use of electronic forms of communication by an individual or group to engage in sending or posting content about an individual or group that a reasonable person would deem vulgar, threatening, embarrassing, harassing, frightening or harmful" (p. 90). The researchers confirmed that the anonymity of the Internet created an atmosphere where bullying was even more volatile and reached a larger

audience than ever before. Additionally, the study found that girls were more likely to be both the aggressor and the target in this cyber environment.

Snakenborg et al. (2011) found little research on the prevention of cyber-bullying. Nevertheless, state and local governments along with schools have advocated for certain approaches to prevention or intervention without supporting evidence. The researchers learned that these endeavors fell into roughly three categories: (a) laws, rules, or policies designed to regulate cyber-bullying and abusive behavior; (b) curricular programs designed to educate children on safe Internet usage; and (c) technological approaches designed to thwart or diminish the probability of cyber-bullying. Furthermore, in 2008 Congress passed the Protecting Children in the 21st Century legislation, which addresses cyber-bullying along with other concerns engendered by the digital age. Snakenborg et al. advocated the need for more research in this area and the identification of scientifically based programs for intervention rather than the current practice of relying on practical beliefs about what should be done.

The Internet allows for a psychological buffer for the persecutors of bullying as they are not forced to look their victim in the eye and are not forced to witness the direct impact of their actions on others (Snakenborg et al., 2011). Consequently, bullying, which was relatively limited in the past, seems to be finding greater traction as children who might not have had a willingness to bully their peers face-to-face can now avoid having to directly witness their victim's distress, which could be creating an overall rise in bullying incidents (Stewart & Fritsch, 2011). This increased level of persecution means that bullying often has an even greater impact upon the victims as they come to feel there is no escape because, through their experience of bullying, they have been exposed to the whole world through the Internet.

Stewart and Fritsch (2011) examined relevant empirical studies along with case law and legislation designed to address the issue of cyber-bullying. Their qualitative analysis of the data revealed that although there were demographic fluctuations in the prevalence of cyber-bullying, like Snakenborg et al. (2011), they found a greater predominance of females as both aggressors and targets of cyber-bullying. In the authors' examination of the relevant research, they discovered that although they were unable to find much empirical evidence it had been suggested that the effects of cyber-bullying can have an even larger impact than traditional bullying because of its ability, both real and perceived, to reach an even larger audience. Additionally, social media sites and the online world are how teens in this digital age interact. No longer is bullying limited to the school day or bus ride home. Children who are the targets of cyber-bullying feel that they cannot escape and that everyone knows what is happening and is ridiculing them. No longer do bullies have to be face-to-face to torment their victims. Texts, emails, Facebook posts, and other cyber avenues allow bullies to access their target no matter their physical location.

Stewart and Fritsch (2011) found that the American belief in privacy and free speech made regulation of cyber-space difficult for legislators and law enforcement. It often falls to schools to police the behavior of their students on the Internet, but there is a lack of legal consensus surrounding just when, and if, school administrators have the right to intervene. Training for school administrators and law enforcement, updated criminal laws and, once again, fiscal support and resources are needed to adequately combat the issue of cyber-bullying.

Federal and state harassment laws are not sufficient to combat bullying nor do they provide remedies to victims of bullying for either the physical or psychological effects of the behavior. The Equal Protection Clause of the United States Constitution does provide reparation

for victims of bullying if they fall within a protected class and the bullying is because of their membership in that class, but most of the victims of bullying are not eligible for such protection (Sacks & Salem, 2009). Consequently, there remains the need for action by state legislatures to ensure that this issue is addressed.

### **The Massachusetts Anti Bullying Legislation**

Germane to the aims of this study, an examination of the Massachusetts antibullying legislation that became effective on May 3, 2010 illustrates both the strengths and weaknesses prevalent in many such legislative attempts focused on bullying. Although many states do not even define what constitutes bullying (Limber & Small, 2003), the Massachusetts statute defines bullying as follows:

"Bullying", the repeated use by one or more students or by a member of a school nurse, cafeteria worker, custodian, bus driver, athletic coach, advisor to an extracurricular activity or paraprofessional of a written, verbal or electronic expression or a physical act or gesture or any combination thereof, directed at a victim that: (i) causes physical or emotional harm to the victim or damage to the victim's property; (ii) places the victim in reasonable fear of harm to himself or of damage to his property; (iii) creates a hostile environment at school for the victim; (iv) infringes on the rights of the victim at school; or (v) materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school. For the purposes of this section, bullying shall include cyber-bullying. (Bullying in Schools, 2010, para. 3)

Although Massachusetts attempted to define bullying, that definition fails to contain two of the three elements most experts agree should be included. The Massachusetts definition neglects to

state that there must be an imbalance of power between the perpetrator and the target of bullying (Limber & Small, 2003). Bullying is at its core about power and control. The lack of this part of the definition leaves the door open for all types of negative peer interactions to be labeled as bullying, thus flooding administrators with incidents to investigate and effectively bogging down the very system established to handle incidents of bullying (Limber & Small, 2003).

An additional aspect of this definition that is lacking is that there is no reference to the fact that it is widely recognized that for altercations to be considered bullying behavior they must be repeated over time (Limber & Small, 2003). A single incident of teasing behavior might be mean, but it is not bullying. Bullying is a pervasive action that over time works to create a sense of fear and dread of another confrontation in the victim. One of the concerns often cited regarding antibullying legislation is the potential infringement on the first amendment right of free speech (Zehr, 2001). The inclusion of the requirement that incidents need to have occurred “over time” makes it consistent with antiharassment legislation that has been around for years and whose constitutionality has been thoroughly vetted by the courts.

Additionally, another area of this definition that is likely to create difficulty in its implementation is the phrase, “materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school.” The Massachusetts legislature has failed to define this aspect of its definition. Is the fact that a student refuses to come to school a disruption of the education process? What if none of the alleged bullying occurs at school, and yet they are still refusing to come? The ambiguity inherent in this aspect of the definition will almost certainly necessitate an interpretation by the courts.

An additional area of difficulty relates to incidents of bullying that occur outside of school. The law states that bullying is prohibited,



at a location, activity, function or program that is not school-related, or through the use of technology or an electronic device that is not owned, leased or used by a school district or school, if the bullying creates a hostile environment at school for the victim, infringes on the rights of the victim at school or materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school. Nothing contained herein shall require schools to staff any non-school related activities, functions, or programs. (Bullying in Schools, 2010, para. b)

Once again, what constitutes creating a “hostile environment at school”? If a student bullies another student online but does not do anything at school, yet the “victim” refuses to attend school because of the incident, does that create a “hostile environment at school”? The additional complication of this aspect of the law is that school administrators have limited authority to investigate occurrences outside of school. Threats can be reported to the police, but this legislation does not criminalize bullying behavior and much bullying behavior does not comprise threats. Consequently, this legislation thrusts administrators into a position of being held accountable for investigating occurrences outside of school, while absolving parents or the police from any responsibility for addressing those acts.

### **Synthesis of the Antibullying Legislation Implementation Research**

As the case studies and legislation examined in this section indicate, a single issue or problem, such as bullying, often generates a variety of approaches and solutions depending upon the viewpoint of those attempting to intervene. The work of Dayton and Dupre (2009) confirmed this piecemeal approach and, as with many legislative initiatives, found that the part that was often missing was the funding from the state government to support implementation in the schools.

The efforts of Snakenborg et al. (2011) support many of the findings in Dayton and Dupre (2009) while also examining the impact of the Internet and technology in general on the phenomenon of bullying. We live in a constantly changing, fast-paced culture, and policymakers struggle to react to changes in our society. The work of Snakenborg et al. (2011) effectively delineates the challenges technology poses for policymakers as they seek to address problems it creates or, as in the case of bullying, exacerbates. That study was reinforced by the work of Stewart and Fritsch (2011) as they examined the impact that privacy and free speech issues had upon attempts to address bullying. As previously stated, the creation of policies does not occur in a vacuum. The protection provided to individuals with regard to their right to speak freely presents challenges in the creation of policies to protect people from the speech of others that is damaging. Stewart and Fritsch effectively demonstrate the challenges prior legislative efforts and societal beliefs have in the enactment of new policies.

Those challenges are evident in the work of Limber and Small (2003) as they examined the characteristics of antibullying legislation across the United States. Although common characteristics were found, the end result of legislative efforts varied greatly between states. The Massachusetts legislation crafted to combat bullying provides an example of the challenges inherent in this process. As articulated above, the Massachusetts legislature satisfied many of the requirements that research says should be in policies designed to combat bullying. However, it still falls short in several areas, such as in the definition of the term bullying itself. Legislative shortcomings such as this are not unique to this policy regarding bullying. They occur in many, if not most, policies leaving gaps or ambiguities that must be filled or interpreted by those in charge of implementation.

Terry (2010) reinforced many of the findings in the aforementioned studies and also informed this research in that Terry sought to examine the perceptions of school administrators regarding the implementation of South Carolina's Safe School Climate Act. The difference between Terry's study and the present one lies in the fact that Terry's study focused on the act of bullying whereas this study has broader implications as it seeks to examine the implementation of educational policy in our schools. This study just happens to utilize a piece of antibullying legislation to accomplish that goal. Furthermore it was anticipated that the utilization of the high leverage policy framework (Cobb et al., 2010) would provide additional structure for the analysis of the implementation process to assist in the determination of where, if at all, a breakdown existed between enactment and implementation of policies. This study is an addition to the field in that, although there is a significant body of research on educational policy development, few studies examined the reports of district and school-level administrators regarding the implementation of new policies and none can be found that utilized the proposed high leverage policy framework designed by Cobb et al. (2010).

### **CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the design and methodology used in this study of Massachusetts public school administrators' perceptions of the development and implementation of educational policy. The high leverage policy framework designed by Cobb et al. (2010) provided the conceptual framework for the analysis of public school administrators' perceptions of the educational policy environment in this country and its impact on education in Massachusetts.

This chapter is organized in the following manner. It begins with a restatement of the problem and is followed by an examination of the conceptual framework applied in this study. Next, the research questions, design of the study, and sampling procedures are outlined. Finally, data collection and analysis procedures, protection of human subjects, and limitations of the study are delineated.

#### **Restatement of the Problem**

High profile, sensational issues will often attract the attention of local and national media, and their coverage of those incidents often spurs legislative action on the topic (Anderson, 2011). However, policymakers are often so focused on the creation of legislation, as well as the benefits they believe legislation will impart, that they give little thought to difficulties created by the implementation of these policies at the local level (Junge & Krvaric, 2011; Nudzor, 2009). This has been evident in recent years as we have witnessed the increased regulation of schools, in large part due to increasing numbers of federal and state mandates to an extent never before experienced (Haney, 2013).

State-level mandates designed to address the problem of bullying, such as the specific policy analyzed in this study, are an excellent example of educational policies that often present

challenges to implementation, because the proposed solution is far removed from the front lines of education and educators' day-to-day experiences (Nudzor, 2009). However well-intentioned, dealing with this difficult issue presents several immediate and challenging questions. Who should be responsible for developing policies, such as those designed to address bullying in our schools? Should state legislatures bear the primary responsibility for setting guidelines for how to address school issues, such as bullying? What is, or should be, the role of K-12 systems, districts, and individual schools in developing and enforcing policies?

Questions of this sort are not unique to the area of bullying. The line between the creation and implementation of educational policy is often indistinct. There is often a vast discrepancy between original legislative intent and actual outcomes subsequent to the implementation of a new policy (Junge & Krvaric, 2011; Nudzor, 2009). Trends in the creation of policies have included the construction of policy objectives that are “grander, programs [that are] more comprehensive, and implementation challenges [that are] more complex” (Odden, 1991, p. 4). This leads to situations where the actual impact of a policy differs from what the legislature intended because the very act of implementation by local administrators necessitates alterations to that policy in order to fit the reality of the world in which those administrators function (Hill & Hupe, 2005).

The current study examined this phenomenon (the development and implementation of policy) with regard to the Massachusetts antibullying legislation that was enacted on May 3, 2010, because it is a recently enacted piece of legislation and the problem of bullying is one that impacts all schools to varying degrees. Consequently, it is a topic ripe for examination and a policy with which public school administrators are intimately familiar and currently in the process of implementing.

National attention has focused state legislatures on this issue, and states are reviewing and updating current laws. There is a certain uniformity in the creation of policies to combat bullying. States that have passed antibullying legislation have required that schools (a) implement policies to prohibit bullying, (b) formulate procedures for handling bullying incidents, (c) set up procedures for the anonymous reporting of bullying incidents, (d) require reporting by teachers, and (e) establish procedures for investigating reported incidents (Elinoff et al., 2004). Furthermore, a number of states now require the implementation of bullying prevention programs as well as bans against retaliation toward those who report incidents of bullying (Elinoff et al., 2004).

The Massachusetts antibullying legislation that was passed on May 3, 2010 dictates actions that are in line with laws in most other states as described earlier with regard to the creation of comprehensive policies and reporting mandates for schools and districts. It further requires training for school staff in order to prevent, identify, and respond to bullying and requires that all students have grade-level instruction on bullying each year (Bullying in Schools, 2010). This policy is intended to strengthen the Massachusetts school districts' responses to bullying in order to create an environment where students are safe and able to learn (Bullying in Schools, 2010).

Consequently, the purpose of this study was twofold. First, this study sought to elicit public school administrators' perceptions of whether the overall policy environment in the United States is having the desired effect of improving the delivery of educational services to the nation's children through the creation of high leverage educational policies. Second, this study examined a specific policy, the Massachusetts antibullying policy enacted in 2010, to determine public school administrators' perceptions of whether that policy was a high leverage policy that

had the impact the legislature intended and whether it supported the primary role of schools (e.g., teaching, academic attainment, greater equity in learning for all students).

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual model of policy development and implementation that was employed in this study was developed in 2010 for the New England Secondary Schools Consortium. This high leverage policy framework allows for the analysis of education policy from inception and development through implementation. This framework is purposely goal oriented with a strong focus on desired results and the steps necessary to achieve those outcomes.

According to Cobb et al. (2010), a high leverage policy (a) increases academic aspirations, achievement, or attainment for all students; (b) promotes greater equity in learning, performance, or life outcomes for students; and (c) generates positive ripple effects throughout an educational system. The first two elements focus on the most important results to be accomplished by educational policy, the achievement of the desired student-centered outcomes. Those results can be evaluated through performance on standardized tests as well as a myriad of other assessment measures (e.g., student behavior reports) reflecting broader indicators of success depending upon the policy being explored, which in this study was the Massachusetts antibullying policy enacted in 2010. The third element outlines an essential component of a high leverage policy, namely that it have a universal impact on the system it is designed to affect. A policy is not considered to be high leverage if it only influences a narrow segment of the educational system. Cobb et al. (2010) explained, “The positive ripple effects of a high leverage policy should not be constrained to a small subset of students, but should be experienced by every student in the system” (p. 3).

There are three critical factors of the framework that are crucial to the development of effective policy—leverage points, design features, and implementation contingencies. These factors interact with each other and together have a direct effect on systems change, which in turn should lead to positive student outcomes. How effectively the three critical factors of the framework work together is essential to the success of any new policy and the policy-directed systems change it is intended to affect along with the resultant positive student outcomes.

### **Research Questions**

Two main research questions served as a guide for this exploratory cross-sectional study. The first question sought to understand the current educational policy environment in this country. The second focused on the implementation of a single policy (Massachusetts antibullying policy enacted in 2010). Consequently, the research questions for this study are as follows:

1. What are public school administrators' perceptions regarding whether policies being created in the current educational environment meet the criteria to be considered high leverage policies? There are six subquestions.
  - a) What are public school administrators' perceptions of whether current educational policy initiatives take advantage of *leverage points* in the educational policymaking environment?
  - b) What are public school administrators' perceptions of whether current educational policy initiatives contain appropriate *design features* to effectuate needed change?
  - c) What are public school administrators' perceptions of whether current educational policy initiatives allow flexibility for administrators to respond to *implementation contingencies* during implementation?



- d) What are public school administrators' perceptions of whether current educational policy initiatives promote *systems change*?
- e) What are public school administrators' perceptions of whether current educational policy initiatives lead to *positive student outcomes*?
- f) What are public school administrators' reports of their *theory of action* for current educational policy initiatives?

2. What are public school administrators' perceptions of whether the Massachusetts antibullying policy enacted in 2010 meets the criteria for a high leverage policy? There are six subquestions.

- a) What are public school administrators' perceptions of whether the Massachusetts antibullying policy meets the criteria for *leverage points*?
- b) What are public school administrators' perceptions of whether the Massachusetts antibullying policy meets the criteria for *design features*?
- c) What are public school administrators' perceptions of whether the Massachusetts antibullying policy meets the criteria for *implementation contingencies*?
- d) What are public school administrators' perceptions of whether the Massachusetts antibullying policy promotes *systems change*?
- e) What are public school administrators' perceptions of whether the Massachusetts antibullying policy leads to *positive student outcomes*?
- f) What are public school administrators' perceptions of the *theory of action* for reducing bullying in their schools?

## **Survey Research**

The primary function of survey research is to collect data to assess the relationship between individuals being sampled and the event under review (Sapsford, 2007). Surveys allow the researcher to collect data by asking questions that produce “quantitative or numerical descriptions about some aspect of the target population” (Fowler, 2009, p. 10). That data are then analyzed to describe the sample population’s perception of a phenomenon under review by the researcher. The first step in designing a survey is to have a firm grasp of the problem being studied. The researcher must establish firm objectives and research questions that the survey will seek to explore (Punch, 2003). The objectives of this study and the research questions were outlined previously in this chapter, and the survey instrument designed to collect the data will now be examined.

## **Design of the Study**

A cross-sectional survey was the method used to collect data for this study. Cross-sectional indicates that the survey “collects data from people at one point in time, rather than two or more points in time” (Punch, 2003, p. 3). The survey collected quantitative data through questions utilizing a 5-point Likert scale and open comment elements in each question to add richness and depth to the data collected. The purpose behind choosing a self-administered online survey method to collect the data was that it allowed the researcher to reach the greatest number of study participants to maximize the sample size.

The advantage of utilizing a Likert scale was that it is the best means to examine attitudes of respondents through the collection of ordinal data. Ordinal data is when “people or events are ordered or placed in categories along a single dimension” (Fowler, 2009, p. 99). This study sought to examine where administrators’ perceptions fell along a continuum from strongly agree

to strongly disagree. The Likert scale is thus an effective method of measuring those perceptions as it captures the relative strength of the opinions public school administrators held toward the policies being developed and put into effect in their schools. Each survey question also contained open comment opportunities for participants to help mitigate the limitations inherent in the use of such a scale. Kothari (2004) states that there are two main limitations to utilizing a Likert scale. First, although we can determine if respondents are more or less favorably inclined toward the assertion being examined by the question, we cannot adequately assess the degree to which that is true for each individual. Second, the degree between each variable may differ between respondents in the sample.

Utilization of a survey design model for this study provided a “quantitative or numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population by studying a sample of the population” (Creswell, 2009, p. 145). The High Leverage Policy Framework Questionnaire (HLPF-Q) was the survey used in this research and was developed specifically for this study, as this is likely to be the first time that the high leverage policy framework was applied to examine the impact of educational policy implementation efforts.

### **Instrumentation**

The HLPF-Q (see Appendix A) utilized in this study was constructed to align with the high leverage policy framework designed by Cobb et al. (2010; see Table 2). There are a total of 38 questions in this survey which can be divided into three sections. Section I of the HLPF-Q includes six items (1-7) and was designed to elicit demographic information from the participants.

Section II of the HLPF-Q includes 16 items (8-23) and examines public school administrators’ perceptions of the educational policy environment in this country and its impact

on schools. Each question in the HLPF-Q is based upon an element of the framework and designed to elicit participants' perceptions of the impact that specific framework elements have on the implementation of educational policies. Participants were asked to choose the alternative, from a list of five options, that most closely aligned with their perception of the impact of educational reform efforts (1 = *strongly agree*, 2 = *agree*, 3 = *neutral*, 4 = *disagree*, and 5 = *strongly disagree*). Furthermore, each quantitative question also contains an open-ended comment component in order to add richness and depth to the analysis by providing clarifying and supporting evidence to explain the participants' responses allowing for the triangulation of data.

The questions in Section II, which are an exploration of the educational policy environment, refer to the combined impact of the state and federal legislative efforts. Given the nature of our federal system where policies from the federal government generate a response at the state level, it is often difficult, if not impossible, to clearly determine whether the policy being implemented should be considered a state or federal policy. When the federal government ties funding to a state's creation and implementation of a policy in response to a certain situation is that a state or federal policy? Arguments can be made both ways, but the distinction is really immaterial to the implementation of these policies at the local level. It is the cumulative effect of these policies and the environment it creates in our schools that were being examined in this study, and therefore, it makes sense to analyze them as a whole.

Section III of the HLPF-Q includes 13 items (24-36) and is an examination of public school administrators' perceptions of the Massachusetts antibullying policy enacted in 2010 and its perceived impact on schools. Each question is linked to an element of the framework and designed to elicit participants' perceptions of the impact each element had on the implementation

of Massachusetts antibullying policy enacted in 2010 in their area of influence (i.e., district or school). Participants were again asked to choose from a list of five alternatives in order to select an answer that most closely aligned with their perception of the impact of educational reform efforts (1 = *strongly agree*, 2 = *agree*, 3 = *neutral*, 4 = *disagree*, and 5 = *strongly disagree*). As with Section II, each quantitative question contains an open-ended comment component in order to add richness and depth to the analysis by providing clarifying and supporting evidence to explain the participants' responses allowing for the triangulation of data. Two final questions (37+ 38) were included at the end of the survey to afford participants the opportunity to provide any additional comments they might want to make about the general policy environment and/or Massachusetts antibullying policy. Table 2 describes the link between the research questions, the conceptual framework, and the survey questions.

Table 2

*Relationship Between Research Questions, Conceptual Framework, and Survey Questions*

Research subquestion	Conceptual framework	HLPF-Q survey question
1a.	Leverage points	8, 10, 21
1b.	Design features	13, 16, 17
1c.	Implementation contingencies	14, 15
1d.	Systems change	11, 18, 22
1e.	Positive student outcomes	12, 19, 23
1f.	Theory of action	9, 20
2a.	Leverage points	24, 36
2b.	Design features	25, 28, 29
2c.	Implementation contingencies	26, 27
2d.	Systems change	30, 33
2e.	Positive student outcomes	34, 35
2f.	Theory of action	31, 32

When utilizing a survey design model, Fowler (2009) asserts that care must be taken in the crafting of questions to increase reliability, eliminate vague wording, and ensure consistent

meaning and understanding between participants. This is important because, unlike with interview questioning techniques, the researcher will not be present to clarify any ambiguities or ask probing questions to elicit further responses.

The fact that this was an instrument created for this study means that it was untested and had not been previously vetted with regard to its reliability and validity. The validity of a survey instrument is based upon the finding that it truly measures what it purports to measure and doing so consistently makes it a reliable instrument (Roberts, 2004). The HLPF-Q items in this study were tightly tied to the research questions, which were tied to the conceptual framework upon which the study was based.

In order to determine the reliability of the HLPF-Q a reliability test was conducted with survey items grouped according to the framework element with which they were originally aligned. Cronbach's alpha scores were obtained ranging from .66 to .77 for each element (see table 3). Typically, Cronbach alpha scores above .70 are interpreted as imparting good reliability to the instrument (Tavakol, & Dennick, 2011). However, many researchers report reliabilities in the .60's as adequate (Clark & Watson, 1995). One reason for this is articulated by Cortina (1993) who stated that the impact that the number of items being analyzed has upon that a Cronbach's alpha score is often overlooked by researchers and has a dramatic impact upon those scores. Cronbach's alpha scores are "very much a function of the number of items in a scale" (Cortina, 1993, p. 102). The larger the number of items, the higher it pushes the Cronbach's alpha scores and the inverse is true as well (Cortina, 1993). For this study, a small number of four to six survey items were grouped within each framework element for analysis.

Consequently, with a small number of survey items along each element of the framework,

Cronbach's alpha scores that range between .66 and .77, such as those obtained in this study, are acceptable (Clark & Watson, 1995; Cortina, 1993).

In further support of that conclusion Clark and Watson (1995) espouse the belief that Cronbach's alpha is too sensitive with regard to the impact of the number of items and prefer to use raw mean inter-item correlation to determine internal consistency. Clark and Watson advocate that sw, the average inter-item correlation fall in the range of .15 to .50. In this study inter-item correlation scores for all survey questions fell in a range from .27 to .62 (see Appendix B) adding strength to the presumption of the internal reliability of the instrument.

Table 3

*Summary of the Results of the Reliability Test on Participant Response Data Analyzed by Framework Element*

Framework Element	Number of Survey Questions	Cronbach's Alpha
Leverage Points	5	.66
Design Features	6	.74
Implementation Contingencies	4	.70
Systems Change	5	.69
Positive Student Outcomes	5	.77
Policy Theory of Action	4	.66

Additionally, the HLPF-Q instrument was designed to elicit responses from participants as ordinal data allowing for analysis along a single dimension, in this case the degree to which administrators agreed or disagreed with the statement made in the survey question. This allowed for a scale of responses by participants, which was then analyzed to determine overall impact on the phenomena being studied. The design of the HLPF-Q instrument helped to mitigate any researcher degree bias as this is a self-administered survey and the researcher was not be able to influence participants' responses. Additionally, open-ended comment opportunities for participants to elaborate on their answers added to the richness of the analysis by providing

clarifying and supporting evidence to explain the participants' responses allowing for the triangulation of data. The HLPF-Q was piloted with eight public school administrators (four superintendents and four principals) in order to test content validity, which according to Creswell means, "Do the items measure the content they were intended to measure?" (Creswell, 2009, p. 149).

### **Pilot Testing and Modifications to the Survey**

The HLPF-Q was piloted with eight administrators (4 superintendents and 4 principals). Each of these individuals was either retired or no longer in that role. For example, one of the principals was, at the time of the survey administration, an assistant superintendent. The comments made by these individuals were categorized as focusing on confusing language and ambiguous wording of some questions. Areas for improvement or clarification identified by those administrators piloting the survey were primarily focused on questions in the section of the survey dealing with the educational policy environment in general as opposed to those questions dealing with the specific policy. The feedback received from those individuals was used to refine the survey questions providing additional information and clarifying identified ambiguities.

### **Population and Sample**

The sample was drawn from the population of Massachusetts public school administrators who were responsible for implementing the 2010 Massachusetts antibullying policy at the district and school levels. This included every superintendent and principal in the State of Massachusetts. According to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and



Secondary Education (2014) there were 295 superintendents and 1,582 principals (elementary, middle, and high school) in Massachusetts. Thus, the total number in the population was 1,877.

### **Sources of Data and Data Collection**

Participant selection was accomplished by compiling a list of the e-mail addresses of public school administrators from publicly-available contact information on the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education website. Public school administrators, in the context of this study, refer to public school superintendents and principals. These are the individuals responsible for managing the implementation of new educational policies at the district and school levels. The HLPF-Q instrument was developed using Survey Monkey, and all data were collected using that platform. All data were kept in a secured online format for the duration of the study.

Additionally, in order to maximize the number of survey participants, Table 3 delineates the recruitment timeline that was used to communicate with research participants. The contact e-mail (see Appendix C) articulated the purpose of the study and contained a unique web address for participants to access the online survey. The initial contact e-mail and five reminder e-mails were distributed utilizing the capabilities of the Survey Monkey platform and according to the schedule outlined in Table 3. Reminder e-mails were then sent every 5 days to nonrespondents in order to maximize the survey return rate. The above strategy was articulated in Dillman, Smyth, and Christian (2009) as they found that the six contact strategy maximized the rate of return for online surveys.

Table 4

*Summary of Recruitment Timeline*

Contact	Timeline	Strategy
1	Day 1	E-mail #1: Initial contact – included description and purpose of the study and link to the Internet-based survey on Survey Monkey.
2	Day 5	Follow-up e-mail #1: Included description and purpose of the study and link to the Internet-based survey on Survey Monkey. Only sent to those who had not already completed the survey.
3	Day 9	Follow-up e-mail #2: Included description and purpose of the study and link to the Internet-based survey on Survey Monkey. Only sent to those who had not already completed the survey.
4	Day 13	Follow-up e-mail #3: Included description and purpose of the study and link to the Internet-based survey on Survey Monkey. Only sent to those who had not already completed the survey.
5	Day 17	Follow-up e-mail #4: Included description and purpose of the study and link to the Internet-based survey on Survey Monkey. Only sent to those who had not already completed the survey.
6	Day 21	Final reminder e-mail: Announced closing date and included link to the Internet-based survey on Survey Monkey. Only sent to those who had not already completed the survey.

By utilizing an electronic, Internet-based format for the survey, the researcher maximized the number of potential respondents in the sample and thus increased the potential reach and as a result the representative nature of that sample (Fowler, 2009). According to Fowler (2009), there is no minimum percentage for an acceptable response rate for survey research. One challenge inherent in utilizing an Internet-based survey method is that it can often be challenging to get a high percentage of participation (Fowler, 2009). It is hoped that this concern was mitigated in this instance because the development and implementation of educational policy is currently very much on the minds of district and school administrators and consequently is a topic of interest to

the participants. Furthermore, the survey was brief and was not expected to have incurred a large time commitment on the part of the participants.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

A descriptive analysis of the data was conducted to determine administrators' perceptions of the creation of educational policy at the state and federal levels and its implementation in districts and individual schools. Further analysis was then conducted around a specific state policy to determine administrators' perceptions of whether the Massachusetts antibullying legislation enacted in 2010 met the criteria of a high leverage policy.

The analysis and organization of the data was accomplished using the capabilities inherent in the Survey Monkey platform. The platform captured the number and percentages of participants' responses to formulate a complete picture of survey responses. Item frequencies, means, and percentages were calculated for the survey questions and results placed into a matrix created using the conceptual framework for this study. Alignment of the survey questions with both the research questions and the elements of the high leverage policy framework (Cobb et al., 2010) allowed the researcher to determine the relative strength or weakness of each element of the framework and its application to policy development in general as well as the Massachusetts anti bullying policy more specifically. This helped to identify particular elements of the framework that participants perceived as more problematic with regard to the development of educational policies.

Analysis of the data was also conducted to compare the percentages across respondents' answers to the HLPF-Q questions in order to ascertain where, if at all, the disconnect between the development and implementation of the policy occurred. Utilization of the high leverage policy framework (Cobb et al., 2010) as the lens through which to view this data provided an

opportunity to compare participant responses to the questions regarding the educational policy environment in general and the specific policy being studied (i.e., Massachusetts antibullying policy enacted in 2010). The researcher then examined if participants perceived this specific policy to be different from educational policies in general or whether this policy was representative of the problems inherent in the development and implementation of educational policies more generally.

Finally, an inferential data analysis was conducted in order to determine if perceptions between participants in different demographic categories. In order to compare variances in responses across demographic groups, the data were reviewed for completeness, and participants with missing responses were removed from the sample only for the purposes of the inferential data analysis. With respect to descriptive analysis however, no participant was eliminated as an incomplete response to one question would not affect the analysis of other questions.

This study utilized a two-tailed design at the .05 level of significance ( $\alpha$ ) to test all null hypotheses ( $H_0$ ). The rationale for using a two-tailed test is that, “The one-tailed test is more liberal and should be used only when the researcher is very confident that a result that is opposite the research hypothesis will not be obtained” (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997, p. 365). Moreover, Popham and Sirotnik (1992, pp. 53-54) and Welkowitz, Ewen, and Cohen (1982, pp. 146-149) argue that a nondirectional (i.e., two-tailed) approach allows the investigator to perform tests that are more mathematically sound than their nondirectional counterparts (i.e., one-tailed tests). In terms of published social science, behavioral science, and educational research literature, McMillan and Schumacher (1997) specify that, “Unless otherwise stated, significance tests can be assumed to be two-tailed” (p. 365).

This study used ranked survey data. Consequently, this investigation used a nondirectional, survey-based research design as it is difficult to predict public school administrators' perceptions of the development and implementation of educational policy and whether policies being implemented in the current educational reform environment meet the criteria for high leverage staff on an a priori basis.

Additionally, an alpha ( $\alpha$ ) or significance level of .05 was chosen over the .01 level in order to preclude a Type II error, which is defined as not rejecting a false null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ). The rationale for this decision was that researchers do not want to make published claims that turn out to be false given the construct of stringent peer review. Hence, it is deemed better to err on the side of caution rather than make a potentially embarrassing mistake (Hinton, 1995, pp. 94-95).

A Mann-Whitney U test (the nonparametric analog of the  $t$ -test) was employed to test the following generic null hypotheses ( $H_0$ ) and their alternates ( $H_A$ ) as they relate to the research questions of this dissertation:

#### **Position Held**

$H_0$ : There are no significant differences in the measures of central tendency based on position (i.e., principal or superintendent) as assessed by the ordinal level HLPF-Q.

$H_A$ : There are significant differences in the measures of central tendency based on Position (i.e., principal or superintendent) as assessed by the ordinal level HLPF-Q.

#### **Gender**

$H_0$ : There are no significant differences in the measures of central tendency based on gender as assessed by the ordinal level HLPF-Q.

$H_A$ : There are significant differences in the measures of central tendency based on

gender as assessed by the ordinal level HLPF-Q.

Subsequently, four Kruskal-Wallis nonparametric ANOVA's were run to inferentially test the following null and research hypotheses based on geography, experience, urbanicity, and district student population.

### **Geographic Region**

H<sub>0</sub>: There are no significant differences in the measures of central tendency based on geographical location in Massachusetts as assessed by the ordinal HLPF-Q

H<sub>A</sub>: There are significant differences in the measures of central tendency based on geographical location in Massachusetts as assessed by the ordinal level HLPF-Q.

### **Years of Experience**

H<sub>0</sub>: There are no significant differences in the measures of central tendency based on experience as assessed by the ordinal level HLPF-Q.

H<sub>A</sub>: There are significant differences in the measures of central tendency based on experience as assessed by the ordinal level HLPF-Q.

### **Urbanicity**

H<sub>0</sub>: There are no significant differences in the measures of central tendency based on the suburban, urban, and rural trichotomy as assessed by the ordinal level HLPF-Q.

H<sub>A</sub>: There are significant differences in the measures of central tendency based on the suburban, urban, and rural trichotomy as assessed by the ordinal level HLPF-Q.

### **District Student Population**

H<sub>0</sub>: There are no significant differences in the measures of central tendency based on the district school population as assessed by the ordinal level HLPF-Q.

H<sub>A</sub>: There are significant differences in the measures of central tendency based on

the district school population as assessed by the ordinal level HLPF-Q.

Given that the Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis tests are nonparametric and ordinal in nature, they do not require normal distributions; however, these tests do assume similarly-shaped distributions and homoscedasticity (i.e., equal variances). To assure that these two assumptions were met, histograms (see Appendix D) and Levene's nonparametric homogeneity of variances metrics were performed.

Specifically, the Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis calculations are nonparametric statistics that test whether  $k$  independent samples are from the same population, where  $k$  = the number of separate groups. Moreover, nonparametric tests are used for survey type data in that Likert scales only represent an ordinal level of measurement. In order to invoke a  $t$ -test or one-way ANOVA (i.e., the parametric analogs), the researcher has to have interval or ratio level data. Succinctly, the ordinal scale must contain data that can be ordered or ranked in a continuum or hierarchy [i.e., 1 = Strongly Disagree (SD), 2 = Disagree (D), 3 = Neutral (N), 4 = Agree (A), 5 = Strongly Agree (SA)].

The HLPF-Q is an affective assessment that represents *rating scale* ordinal data that reflects the magnitude of agreement not the simple or natural *rank order scoring* format where equal score differences do not necessarily reflect equal differences in the amount of an attribute (e.g., the order of runners finishing a race) being measured (Diekhoff, 1992, p. 9). Furthermore, even though there is no evidence that rating scale scores are interval in nature, many researchers use parametric tests (i.e., a one way ANOVA) to analyze Likert scale data. However, this dissertation used the conservative nonparametric Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis tests to answer and inferentially evaluate its research questions (Diekhoff, 1992, p. 11).

In terms of power, the Mann-Whitney U test between principals ( $n = 77$ ) and superintendents ( $n = 209$ ) elicited a post hoc power of 71% (effect size = .34) with an ideal of 141 individuals per group at 80% power. For the Kruskal-Wallis geography test, the generated post hoc ANOVA power was 33% (effect size = .13), which translates into 972 respondents for each area based on 80% power. For experience, the power was 20% (effect size = .09), which asks for 2,027 per group at the 80% power level.

For the unurbanicity characteristic Kruskal-Wallis test, the generated post hoc ANOVA power was 23% (effect size = .085), which requests 2,273 per group at 80% power. Next, for the district student population the post hoc ANOVA power was 35% (effect size = .12), which asks for 1,140 per group at 80% power. Lastly, for gender the Mann-Whitney U test power was 8% (effect size = .06), which calls for 4,775 per group. All final group sizes were calculated using the Pitman Asymptotic Relative Efficiency (ARE) correction divisor of 0.955.

Finally, all statistics for the Mann Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis tests and the associated descriptives were generated using SPSS (version 21), which accounts for excessive ties and unequal sample sizes. All power metrics were calculated using the G-Power statistical package version 3.1.9.2.

### **Ethical Considerations**

In order to ensure the protection of participants, all policies of the University of Hartford regarding this issue were strictly followed (see Appendix E). In the dissemination of the survey, an overview was given to each participant with the reasons for the survey, the purpose of the study, and the use of the data collected. Furthermore an informed consent form was sent to each participant with the survey (see Appendix F). Additionally, anonymity of participants was ensured through the survey method in which no names of participants, districts, or schools were



requested. Furthermore, qualitative data collected had all potentially identifiable information removed. All data collected through this study will be kept secure with only the researcher being provided access. The survey in this study was not collected by the researcher, but rather was conducted utilizing the online survey tool Survey Monkey.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study would be easily scalable and replicable in other states and nationwide as the impact of national education policy on the state policy environment is such that all public school administrators are experiencing the effects of this legislative and regulatory environment. Given the fact that all superintendents and principals in Massachusetts had the opportunity to respond to this survey, the results should be easily generalizable to administrators throughout Massachusetts. However, given the differences inherent in our federal system, I would hesitate to make generalizations about educational policy implementation to the country as a whole from the data compiled. This would be an appropriate area for additional study in the future.

The limitations of this study arise from its design, implementation, and potential researcher bias. This study utilized a primarily quantitative survey method and consequently this strategy prohibited the researcher from asking follow-up questions to delve deeper into aspects of the administrators' responses. There are also inherent limitations in the utilization of Likert scale type questions. According to Kothari (2004), there are two main limitations in utilizing a Likert scale. First, although we can determine if respondents are more or less favorably inclined toward the assertion being examined by the question, we cannot adequately assess the degree to which that is true for each individual. Furthermore, the degree between each variable may differ between respondents in the sample.

Although, there were open response opportunities provided for each question, this did not provide the same specificity or depth for probing questions by an interviewer. In this study, the open-ended comment element to the questions was merely intended to provide additional supporting evidence to triangulate data. This distinction is supported by Fowler (2009) who stated that open questions in a self-administered survey can be problematic because “with no interviewer present to probe incomplete answers for clarity and for meeting consistent question objectives, the answers will not be comparable across respondents and they will be difficult to code” (p. 72). However, Fowler also stated that such open-ended elements can produce valuable supporting evidence useful in the interpretation of quantitative data.

This would be an excellent area for future research and could include individual or focus group interviews on a smaller subset of the target population. The intent in relying on the quantitative method in this study was to reach a large representative sample of the target population to thereby identify statewide trends. Although the sample was derived from a potential target population of every superintendent and principal in Massachusetts, only a segment of this population responded. Potentially, this subsection could have strong feelings either in agreement or disagreement with the questions asked thus skewing the data. Additionally, the target population was limited to Massachusetts administrators thus limiting the ability to generalize the findings to a larger national group. A national study would also prove interesting to determine national trends with respect to the development and implementation of educational policy to ascertain differences among various regions of the country.

A further limitation of this study is that it only captured the perceptions of public school administrators. Teachers, staff, parents, school board members, and other stakeholders were not surveyed. Educational policies impact each of these groups and their perceptions of the

effectiveness of these policies might differ greatly. Additionally, no input was sought from those responsible for the development of educational policy either in the legislature or regulatory agencies. Those are all areas ripe for future studies. It would be interesting to perform a study of policymakers' perceptions of the impact of educational policy to compare those perceptions with public school administrators.

Another potential limitation of this study is researcher bias. The researcher is currently a public school administrator in Massachusetts. Consequently, the researcher has practical experience, knowledge, and private opinions regarding the development of educational policy and its implementation at the district and school level. Although every effort was made to minimize this bias in the interpretation of the data, the potential for bias remains through the design of the study and instrument, thus it cannot be completely discounted.

### **Summary of the Chapter**

The purpose of this study is to describe public school administrators' perceptions of the development and implementation of educational policy and whether policies being implemented in the current educational reform environment met the criteria for high leverage policies. The high leverage policy framework (Cobb et al., 2010) is the conceptual model of policy development and implementation employed in this study. This chapter outlined the research questions, design of the study, and sampling procedures employed by the researcher. Additionally, data collection and analysis procedures, protection of human subjects, and limitations of the study were explained.

## **CHAPTER 4: RESULTS**

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the results of this research. The goal of this study was to describe public school administrators' perceptions of the development and implementation of educational policy and whether policies being implemented in the current educational reform environment met the criteria for high leverage policies. The high leverage policy framework (Cobb et al., 2010) was the conceptual model of policy development and implementation utilized to help shape the development of the research questions, survey, and the analysis of the data.

This study was guided by two primary research questions:

1. What are public school administrators' perceptions regarding whether policies being created in the current educational environment meet the criteria to be considered high leverage policies?
2. What are public school administrators' perceptions of whether the Massachusetts antibullying policy enacted in 2010 meets the criteria to be considered a high leverage policy?

This chapter begins with an overview of the study methodology and a description of the individuals who participated. The chapter then goes on to present the results of the survey organized by the research questions and elements of the high leverage policy framework.

### **Overview of the High Leverage Policy Framework**

The conceptual framework of policy development and implementation employed in this study was developed in 2010 for the New England Secondary Schools Consortium by Cobb et al. at the Center for Education Policy Analysis. This high leverage policy framework allows for the precise analysis of education policy from inception and development through implementation.

This process offers a holistic view of the development of education policy to provide sustainable change and reform throughout an educational system. This framework is purposely goal-oriented with a strong focus on desired results and the steps necessary to achieve those outcomes. The framework served as a filter through which to view the contextual and political background surrounding the design and implementation of educational policy. The elements identified in the framework have a powerful influence on whether a policy will elicit the desired effects of systemic sustainable change in districts, schools, and classrooms with the ultimate goal of directly impacting student academic and/or social emotional achievement (Cobb et al., 2010). There are three factors of the framework that are critical to the development of effective policy—leverage points, design features, and implementation contingencies. These factors work together and have a direct effect on systems change, which in turn should lead to positive student outcomes. How effectively the three critical factors of the framework work together determines the success of any new policy and the policy-directed systems change the policy is intended to affect along with the resultant positive student outcomes

### **Overview of Study Methodology**

A cross-sectional survey was the method utilized to collect data for this study. The survey was developed by the researcher specifically for this study and collected superintendents' and principals' perceptions of the policymaking environment in Massachusetts through questions utilizing a 5-point Likert scale. Participants were asked to choose from a list of five options, the one that most closely aligned with their perception of the impact of educational reform efforts (*strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree*). Furthermore, each survey question also contained an open-ended comment component utilized to add richness and depth to the data collected. Survey collection was accomplished utilizing the online Survey Monkey

platform. After the survey was closed to further responses, the data was downloaded from Survey Monkey and imported into an SPSS file. Frequencies, means, and standard deviations were then calculated for each of the 29 questions (items 8-36) of the questionnaire.

Participant responses were converted to number scores with strongly agree being given the value of 5, agree = 4, neutral = 3, disagree = 2, and strongly disagree = 1. In order to compare variances in responses across demographic groups, the data were reviewed for completeness, and participants with any missing responses were removed from the sample for the purposes of the inferential data analysis. With respect to descriptive analysis, no participant was eliminated as an incomplete response to one question would not affect the analysis of other questions.

### **Sample Description**

The sample was drawn from the population of Massachusetts public school administrators who were responsible for implementing the 2010 Massachusetts antibullying policy at the district and school levels. This included every superintendent and principal in the State of Massachusetts. According to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2014), there are 295 superintendents and 1,582 principals (elementary, middle, and high school) in Massachusetts. Thus, the total number in the population was 1,877. Table 4 outlines respondent characteristics of the 319 individuals or 17% of the target population who responded to the survey. Of that sample, the response rate for principals was 14% ( $n = 226$ ) and for superintendents 28% ( $n = 83$ ). Ten (10) participants chose not to identify themselves as superintendents or principals hence the  $n = 309$  and not 319 for that question. See note to Table 4 for further clarification.

Table 5

*Sample Characteristics (N =319)*

Characteristic	<i>n</i>	Percentage of respondents
Position within the district		
Superintendent	83	26.9%
Principal	226	73.1%
Level		
Elementary	130	53.6%
Middle	56	23.1%
High	47	19.3%
Other	9	4.0%
Location		
Urban	58	18.9%
Suburban	188	61.2%
Rural	61	19.9%
Geographic Region		
Boston metro area	57	18.3%
South Shore (including the Cape and the Islands)	52	16.7%
North Shore	44	14.1%
Central	61	19.6%
Western	97	31.3%
Student population in district		
<1,000 students	57	18.3%
1,000-3,000 students	128	41.0%
3,001-6,000 students	79	25.3%
6,001-10,000 students	26	8.3%
10,001 + students	22	7.1%
Years in current role		
0-5	129	41.5%
6-10	107	34.4%
11-15	39	12.5%
16-20	21	6.8%
21+	15	4.8%
Gender		
Male	138	44.5%
Female	172	55.5%

Note. Within the table the number of participants in each demographic category may not equal 319 as some participants skipped questions.

### Survey Results

This section details the results of the data analysis for the survey instrument. The results of the survey are first organized by research question and then by each of the six elements of the

high leverage policy framework developed by Cobb et al. (2010). The high leverage policy elements as articulated by Cobb et al. (2010) are (a) leverage points, (b) design features, (c) implementation contingencies, (d) systems change, (e) positive student outcomes, and (f) theory of action. For each element of the high leverage policy framework those questions which align with that element are analyzed and then the findings are reported for each element.

### **Descriptive Analysis**

#### **General Education Policy Development Environment**

Policies are not static, and the changing political climate in the United States often alters the direction of the public's will as expressed through the laws passed by its legislators. High leverage policies, by definition, have a larger impact on the learning environment in schools and by extension can positively affect student achievement. Their effect is systemic, and they work to increase educational equity for all students. Consequently, "Policy makers need to consider the leverage points the policy will address and what design features are most likely to be effective given existing contextual conditions and any foreseeable factors that might influence its implementation" (Cobb et al., 2010, p. 6). This is often where the breakdown occurs as legislators are regularly focused on the perceived benefits of the proposed policy rather than the challenges or problems that might be experienced during its implementation.

More to the point, "policy-directed change" is ultimately dependent upon individual local-level implementers who are faced with competing policies, goals, and priorities and approach the task with their own unique experiences, beliefs, motivations, interpretations, and capacities (McCloughlin, 1987). Thus, this study sought to answer the question of what are public school administrators' perceptions regarding whether policies being created in the current educational environment meet the criteria to be considered high leverage policies?



**Leverage points.** A leverage point can be either an entry point into the educational system or the desired objectives of a piece of educational policy. These leverage points can be attributes of the educational system, such as teacher-quality regulations and assessment practices, or performance objectives, such as increasing college enrollment or reducing achievement gaps. Survey questions 8, 10, and 21 align with this element. Table 5 displays the frequencies and percentages of participants' responses relative to the leverage point elements.

Table 6

*Survey Questions Related to the Overall Policy Environment Linked to the Framework Element Leverage Points*

Question	M	SD	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
8. The number of educational policies developed by policymakers for implementation in local districts and schools is necessary for effective change in the public education system.	2.34	0.98	1.3% (3)	16.3% (52)	15.3% (49)	50.9% (163)	16.3% (52)
10. The areas targeted by educational policies are necessary to elicit positive educational change.	3.18	0.98	2.8% (9)	46.1% (146)	24.0% (76)	23.0% (73)	4.1% (13)
21. Current educational policy efforts have been effective in assisting school administrators in addressing the issue of student achievement in your district or school.	2.4	0.92	3.4% (11)	9.4% (30)	5.9% (19)	45.9% (147)	35.3% (113)

**Findings related to leverage points.** The analysis of the participants' responses to survey questions 8, 10, and 21, which aligned with the framework element of leverage points, generated the following findings:

**Finding 1.** The data revealed that only 27.1% ( $n = 86$ ) of respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed that the areas targeted by educational policies are necessary to elicit positive educational change.

**Finding 2.** The data showed that 67.2% of administrators strongly disagreed or disagreed that educational policy efforts are assisting school administrators in addressing the issue of student achievement in their district or school with 91.2% ( $n = 260$ ) stating that they strongly disagreed or disagreed that the number of mandates is necessary for effective change in the public education system.

The qualitative data generated by the open comments reinforced the results of the quantitative findings. Generally, participants reported that the number of policies being created inhibited their effective implementation. One principal stated, "When everything is important, nothing is important. None of the individual policies developed is necessarily bad, but they all come through my office, which is completely overwhelming!"

The quantitative survey data for question 10 demonstrated that participants were less negative in their responses, when compared to questions 8 and 21, regarding the areas targeted by educational policies developed are necessary to elicit positive educational change. This is supported by the open comments for question 10. A principal stated, "It isn't so much that the goals/areas are not relevant . . . it's the fact that with so many initiatives and priorities- . . . nothing is important. You can't possibly address everything at once. The punitive nature of so many mandates make[s] many policies nearly impossible to address effectively." One

superintendent commented that educational policy efforts have not been assisting school administrators in addressing the issue of student achievement stating, “The current mandates have gotten in the way of improvement in our district and have taken up much precious time.” However, another superintendent stated, “Yes, external pressure is helpful. It allows for a broader conversation. It allows leverage in some instances where there may be no local appetite for specific changes.”

**Design features.** Design features are the deliberate, purposely planned features of a policy, both written and implied, that clearly articulate the purpose for which the policy was created. Design features may contain “the specific language in a statute, guidance on how a policy should to be enacted, the requirements for compliance, or the implementation timeline” (Cobb et al., 2010, p. 4). Survey questions 13, 16, and 17 align with this element. Table 6 displays the frequencies and percentages of participants’ responses relative to the leverage point element.

Table 7

*Survey Questions Related to the Overall Policy Environment Linked to the Framework Element Design Features*

Question	M	SD	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
13. Current educational policy efforts are effectively designed (i.e., language in statutes, guidance on how a policy should be implemented, the requirements for compliance) to improve schools.	2.39	0.98	0.9% (3)	14.7% (47)	22.9% (73)	43.9% (140)	17.6% (56)
16. Current educational policy efforts provide administrators with enough resources to effectively implement policies in their district or school.	1.54	0.73	0.3% (1)	2.5% (8)	4.1% (13)	38.1% (120)	54.9% (173)
17. Current educational policy efforts provide administrators with enough time to effectively implement policies in their district or school.	1.64	0.78	0.0% (0)	4.4% (14)	6.3% (20)	39.6% (126)	49.7% (158)

**Findings related to design features.** The analysis of the participants' responses to survey questions 13, 16, and 17, which aligned to the framework element of design features, generated the following findings:

**Finding 3.** The data revealed that 61.5% ( $n = 196$ ) of respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed that the educational policy efforts are effectively designed to improve schools.

***Finding 4.*** The data shows that 93.0% ( $n = 293$ ) of administrators strongly disagreed or disagreed that educational policy efforts provide administrators with enough resources to effectively implement policies with 89.3% ( $n = 284$ ) stating that they strongly disagreed or disagreed that they are given enough time to effectively implement policies in their district or school.

The qualitative data generated by the open comments once again reinforced the results of the quantitative findings. An analysis of the qualitative open comment data for question 13 demonstrated that several participants thought that guidance and support was lacking or not given in a timely manner for the implementation of new policies. One principal stated, “We usually wait for version 3.0 before we take what the state tells us. The first and second tries are usually very poorly rolled out-lack any useful details.”

Overwhelmingly, participants stated that they were not given enough time and/or resources to implement new policies. A superintendent stated, “There is value in some of this work. However, the implementation timelines discount the need to build capacity and ownership in the district. This leads to watered down approaches rather than thoughtful implementation and training that will lead to actual growth for faculty and students.” Additionally, one principal felt that the state was merely “Chasing the RTTT [Race to the Top] and other federal dollars, “We can do it, sign us up!” Which then rolls down hill to people in the trenches who actually work when there aren't cameras around.” Additionally, a superintendent commented with respect to resources, “Most policies are initiated without resources for implementation and integration into the work of the district. In those cases where resources are available, they do not allow for scale or sustainability. The policy itself is vulnerable because of this.” Even when administrators agreed with the areas which policies targeted, they still commented, “Unfunded mandates, such

as the Common Core, Educator Evaluation, and DDMs, are unfunded. These mandates, while extremely effective and warranted, have a slower implementation and success rate when there are no funding or resources to support the mandate.”

**Implementation contingencies.** Implementation contingencies are problems that arise and unintended consequences that are generated that inhibit successful implementation efforts. These implementation contingencies are created many times by a disconnect between the requirements of the policy and the practicality of compliance at the point of execution. Survey questions 14 and 15 align with this element. Table 7 displays the frequencies and percentages of participants’ responses relative to the leverage point element.

Table 8

*Survey Questions Related to the Overall Policy Environment Linked to the Framework Element Implementation Contingencies*

Question	M	SD	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
14. Current educational policy efforts effectively anticipate potential difficulties that administrators might encounter in implementing policies in their district or school.	1.72	0.76	0.6% (2)	2.50% (8)	8.5% (27)	47.6% (152)	40.8% (130)
15. Current educational policy efforts effectively provide flexibility for administrators to react to unanticipated difficulties when implementing policies in their district or school.	2.01	0.80	0.6% (2)	5.0% (16)	13.5% (43)	55.8% (178)	25.1% (80)

**Findings related to implementation contingencies.** The analysis of the participants' responses to survey questions 14 and 15, which align to the framework element of implementation contingencies, generated the following finding:

*Finding 5.* The data shows that 88.4% ( $n = 282$ ) of administrators strongly disagreed or disagreed that educational policy efforts effectively anticipate potential difficulties that administrators might encounter in implementing policies with 80.9% ( $n = 258$ ) responding that they strongly disagreed or disagreed that they are given enough flexibility to react to unanticipated difficulties when implementing policies in their district or school.

The qualitative data generated by those comments reinforced the results of the quantitative findings. An analysis of the qualitative open comment data for question 14 demonstrated the opinion held by many participants that those responsible for developing educational policy demonstrate a lack of understanding on how schools actually operate. One superintendent stated, "I personally feel there is no thought given to the many 'What if's' that are directed to the department during our opportunities to provide input during policy presentations. Which by the way are usually AFTER the department establishes the policy."

Once again, a preponderance of participants who chose to leave a comment remarked upon the failure of policymakers to both anticipate potential difficulties in implementation and give administrators the flexibility to respond. A superintendent wrote, "I think it's just the opposite; it stifles flexibility in favor of compliance." Another commented, "There is no flexibility of any kind merely the constant threat that they will once again reduce our already inadequate funding."

**Systems change.** The concept of systems change “refers to transformative actions that produce organizational and pedagogical innovations, which in turn positively affect the quality of student learning, opportunities, and outcomes” (Cobb et al., 2010, p. 5). The strength of the affiliation between the three success factors previously discussed will determine the extent to which the intended policy has a positive effect on the system as a whole. Survey questions 11, 18, and 22 align with this element. Table 8 displays the frequencies and percentages of participants’ responses relative to the leverage point element.

Table 9

*Survey Questions Related to the Overall Policy Environment Linked to the Framework Element Systems Change*

Question	M	SD	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
11. Current educational policy efforts inhibit districts' and schools' ability to implement local goals and initiatives.	2.20	0.99	23.0% (73)	48.1% (153)	16.4% (52)	11.0% (35)	1.6% (5)
18. Current educational policy efforts effectively promote positive systemic change with regard to public education in the United States.	2.51	0.94	0.0% (0)	17.4% (55)	31.6% (100)	37.0% (117)	13.9% (44)
22. Current educational policy efforts have been responsible for promoting greater equity for students regarding student achievement in your district or school.	2.82	0.99	1.9% (6)	29.1% (92)	27.5% (87)	34.8% (110)	6.6% (21)



**Findings related to systems change.** The analysis of the participants' responses to survey questions 11, 18, and 22, which align to the framework element of systems change, generated the following findings:

**Finding 6.** The data showed that 71.1% ( $n = 226$ ) of participants strongly agreed or agreed that educational policy efforts inhibit districts' and schools' ability to implement local goals and initiatives.

**Finding 7.** The data showed that 17.4% ( $n = 55$ ) agreed that current educational policy efforts effectively promote positive systemic change with 0.0% ( $n = 0$ ) giving a strongly agree response. Additionally, 31.0% of participants responded strongly agree or agree when asked whether current educational policy efforts have been responsible for promoting greater equity for students regarding student achievement.

The data generated by the open comments reinforced the results of the quantitative findings. An analysis of the qualitative open comment data for question 11 demonstrated that participants thought that there was a lack of autonomy and flexibility in the current educational policy environment that was inhibiting districts' ability to respond to the local needs of their schools or district. One principal stated, "The current state of educational policies are prescriptive in nature; address specific areas of concern in ways that have not been proven to be successful; and require so much time, effort, and resources locally that local control over goals and initiatives have essentially been removed."

An analysis of the open comments generated by questions 18 and 22 observed that participants discussed the issues of a lack of cohesion between policies and the appearance often times that satisfying political goals and constituencies is more important than progress. One superintendent stated, "If positive systemic change includes more support for charter, private,

and school choice; a reduction in time and efforts towards promoting the education of the whole child with 21st century skills; a move away from immersion in real-life situations; and a reduction in positive school culture for students and staff then they've succeeded. Otherwise this is a dismal failure.” Another commented, “Systemic change would need to involve the practitioners to be effective.” Furthermore, with regard to educational policies creating equity, the statement by another superintendent sums up the sentiments of most who commented, “I think that one of the best things has been highlighting the discrepancy between the different cohorts of students . . . but creating greater equity . . . not really.”

**Positive student outcomes.** Cobb et al. (2010) noted that the ultimate goal of any educational policy and systems change is to enhance the opportunity for substantive and quantifiable student achievement. Positive student outcomes relate “to higher educational aspirations, achievement, or attainment; enhanced learning opportunities and instructional quality; and greater equity in learning, performance, or life outcomes for students” (Cobb et al., 2010, p. 5). Survey questions 12, 19, and 23 align with this element. Table 9 displays the frequencies and percentages of participants’ responses relative to the leverage point element.

Table 10

*Survey Questions Related to the Overall Policy Environment Linked to the Framework Element Positive Student Outcomes*

Question	M	SD	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
12. Current educational policy efforts are effective in creating a positive educational system for students.	2.58	0.90	0.9% (3)	16.1% (51)	34.4% (109)	39.1% (124)	9.5% (30)
19. Current educational policy efforts work to further legislative intent to create a stronger educational system in the United States.	2.86	0.98	0.9% (3)	30.4% (96)	31.6% (100)	28.5% (90)	8.5% (27)
23. Current educational policy efforts have had a positive impact on student achievement in your district or school.	2.69	0.88	0.3% (1)	17.7% (56)	42.1% (133)	31.0% (98)	8.9% (28)

**Findings related to positive student outcomes.** The analysis of the participants' responses to survey questions 12, 19, and 23, which align to the framework element of positive student outcomes, generated the following finding:

**Finding 8.** The data indicated that, with regard to educational policies creating a positive educational system and having a positive impact on student achievement, participants' responses for questions in this element were the most neutral of any element. Neutral,

response rates were 34.4% ( $n = 109$ ) with an M of 2.58 for question 12, 31.6% ( $n = 100$ ) with an M of 2.86 for question 19, and 42.1% ( $n = 133$ ) with an M of 2.69 for question 23.

Consequently, an analysis of this findings suggests that, although the questions related to positive student outcomes were largely neutral, the mean for these questions demonstrate that respondents tended towards the negative end of the Likert scale. An analysis of the qualitative open comment data for question 12 demonstrated that participants thought that the current educational efforts were creating overwhelming pressure on educators. A principal stated, “Teachers feel overwhelming pressure and continuously comment that they ‘just want to teach kids’ and that there is now little room for them to teach creatively or model creativity.” Additionally, a superintendent commented, “Our faculty are overwhelmed and disenchanted. Our students are over tested. The combination leads to a lackluster approach to teaching and learning.”

Although participants’ seemed willing to concede good intentions, for the most part, in the development of policy, some skepticism remained as evidenced by the following comment by one elementary principal, “Some of these initiatives and/or the way compliance has been mandated sometimes make me question whether the legislature is working to undermine the effectiveness of public schools. It feels as if the point of the system is to create failure. Few big organizations would attempt to change so much so fast with so few resources.”

Furthermore, comments reflected trepidation regarding politics driving the agenda more than concern for student progress. One principal commented, “Future results may prove differently, but right now I feel as though we are making educational decisions based on politics, and not necessarily on what our students need.” Additionally, one principal stated, “I would like

to think this isn't true, but can't help thinking that education has become big business, and the changes being made are very far away from impacting students in a positive manner.”

**Policy theory of action.** Policy theory of action “refers to the undergirding logic, beliefs, and assumptions that describe what a policy will produce and how it will achieve its intended objectives” (Cobb et al., 2010, p. 5). Alternatively, a policy theory of action clearly articulates what policymakers have determined are the most appropriate leverage points that they intend the policy to target, the particular design features of that policy, and any anticipated implementation contingencies that might arise during execution of the policy. A well-crafted policy theory of action will also express how the policy will constructively yield systems change and positive student outcomes. Survey questions 9 and 20 align with this element. Table 10 displays the frequencies and percentages of participants’ responses relative to the leverage point element.

Table 11

*Survey Questions Related to the Overall Policy Environment Linked to the Framework Element Policy Theory of Action*

Question	M	SD	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
9. The pace at which new educational policies are developed is effective for successful implementation.	2.01	1.06	3.4% (11)	9.4% (30)	5.9% (19)	45.9% (147)	35.3% (113)
20. Current educational policy efforts effectively generate a comprehensive and effective plan for improving student achievement in U.S. schools.	2.36	0.89	0.3% (1)	12.6% (40)	25.9% (82)	47.0% (149)	14.2% (45)

**Findings related to policy theory of action.** The analysis of the participants' responses to survey questions 9 and 20, which align to the framework element of policy theory of action, generated the following finding:

***Finding 9.*** The data showed that 81.2% ( $n = 194$ ) of participants responded that they disagreed or strongly disagreed that the pace at which new educational policies are developed is effective for successful implementation. Additionally, 61.2% strongly disagreed or disagreed that current educational policy efforts effectively generate a comprehensive and effective plan for improving student achievement in U.S. schools.

The open comments for these two questions reinforced the concerns already expressed regarding a lack of a cohesive plan. Additionally, participants' comments to question 9 strongly reinforced previous findings regarding the number and pace of implementation of educational policies. One principal commented, "Currently, we have taken on too many initiatives and have expected completion at too fast a pace . . . the stress levels for all are through the roof." Another reflected, "Too many policies are made too quickly. Policies are changed too quickly, and often I feel it is change merely for the sake of change. I personally am frustrated by being told to change before we have fully implemented a previous policy."

Participants' comments for question 20 reflected concern regarding a lack of focus or a cohesive plan in the development and implementation of educational policy. One principal stated, "Good ideas are usually in the plans in some way, but the way they play out in the schools have the potential to bog the schools down. I think that policy cannot create a comprehensive and effective plan. I think that needs to be done at the local level. I think policy can provide overarching goals/guidance and the schools/school districts need to generate the comprehensive and effective plans."

### **Massachusetts Anti Bullying Policy Enacted in 2010**

The second part of this study examined a specific policy, Massachusetts anti bullying policy enacted in 2010, to uncover public school administrators' perceptions of whether this policy was a high leverage policy that had the impact the legislature intended and supported the primary role of schools (e.g., teaching, academic attainment, greater equity in learning for all students). The research question that guided the development of this section of the survey was: What are public school administrators' perceptions of whether the Massachusetts antibullying policy enacted in 2010 meets the criteria to be considered a high leverage policy?

**Leverage points.** A leverage point can be either an entry point into the educational system or the desired objectives of a piece of education policy. These leverage points can be attributes of the educational system, such as teacher-quality regulations and assessment practices, or performance objectives, such as increasing college enrollment or reducing achievement gaps. Survey questions 24 and 36 align with this element. Table 11 displays the frequencies and percentages of participants' responses relative to the leverage points element.

Table 12

*Survey Questions Related to Massachusetts Antibullying Policy Aligned With the Framework Element Leverage Points*

Question	M	SD	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
24. The requirements of Massachusetts antibullying policy enacted in 2010 (e.g., investigating, documenting, reporting) are effective in working to create a safer school environment.	3.31	0.96	3.90% (12)	50.50% (157)	24.40% (76)	16.70% (52)	4.50% (14)
36. The focus of Massachusetts antibullying policy enacted in 2010 (e.g., investigating, documenting, reporting) is necessary to address the issue of bullying in schools.	3.28	1.00	4.90% (15)	47.40% (146)	24.00% (74)	17.50% (54)	6.20% (19)

**Findings related to leverage points.** The analysis of the participants' responses to survey questions 24 and 36, which align to the framework element of leverage points, generated the following finding:

**Finding 10.** The data for question 24 showed that 54.4% ( $n = 169$ ) of participants agreed or strongly agreed that the requirements of Massachusetts antibullying policy are effective in working to create a safer school environment. Additionally, an analysis of participant responses for question 36 revealed that 52.3% ( $n = 161$ ) of respondents agreed



or strongly agreed that the focus of Massachusetts antibullying policy is necessary to address the issue of bullying in schools.

A review of the open comment aspects of these two questions revealed that administrators agreed that bullying is a problem that needs to be addressed and believed some type of policy is needed. However, the current policy may not be the most effective given the heavy administrative demands with many participants expressing the opinion that they found the reporting and documentation requirements to be burdensome and overly bureaucratic. One principal commented, “The investigating, documenting, and reporting consume a tremendous amount of time, time that could be better spent on prevention programs, especially at the elementary level.” However, the qualitative data also revealed that participants feel that this policy has helped build awareness of this problem. A superintendent stated that this policy helped build “awareness, attention and intentionality support actions, establishment of effective protocols, and a higher degree of support for students.” Participants’ comments to question 36 reinforced those two themes.

**Design features.** Design features are the deliberate, purposely planned features of a policy, both written and implied, that clearly articulate the purpose for which the policy was created. Design features may contain “the specific language in a statute, guidance on how a policy should to be enacted, the requirements for compliance, or the implementation timeline” (Cobb et al., 2010, p. 4). Survey questions 25, 28, and 29 align with this element. Table 12 displays the frequencies and percentages of participants’ responses relative to the leverage point element.

Table 13

*Survey Questions Related to Massachusetts Antibullying policy Aligned With the Framework Element Design Features*

Question	M	SD	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
25. Massachusetts antibullying policy enacted in 2010 is effectively designed (i.e., language in statute, guidance on how a policy should be implemented, the requirements for compliance) to reduce bullying in schools.	3.14	0.94	3.2% (10)	40.4% (126)	29.5% (92)	23.4% (73)	3.5% (11)
28. Massachusetts antibullying legislation enacted in 2010 provides administrators with enough resources to effectively implement this policy.	2.15	0.97	1.0% (3)	10.9% (34)	16.1% (50)	45.7% (142)	26.4% (82)
29. Massachusetts antibullying legislation provides administrators with enough time to effectively implement this policy in their district or school.	2.67	1.09	0.6% (2)	30.0% (93)	21.0% (65)	32.6% (101)	15.8% (49)

**Findings related to design features.** The analysis of the participants' responses to survey questions 25, 28, and 29, which align to the framework element of design features, generated the following findings:

***Finding 11.*** The data revealed that only 26.9% ( $n = 84$ ) of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that Massachusetts antibullying policy is effectively designed to reduce bullying in schools.

***Finding 12.*** The data showed that 72.1% ( $n = 224$ ) of administrators disagreed or strongly disagreed that educational policy efforts provide administrators with enough resources to effectively implement this policy. However, only 48.4% ( $n = 150$ ) stated that they disagreed or strongly disagreed that they are given enough time to effectively implement this policy.

The open comments once again reinforced the results of the quantitative findings. One principal stated, “The investigation and due diligence component [in relation to antibullying policy] can swallow up huge swaths of time; in a building without an assistant principal, it is difficult to complete all other required tasks a principal must do, including evaluation, another state mandate.” In contrast, one superintendent said, “Truthfully, following the policy was extremely helpful in enabling us to put together a powerful rebuttal to a parent/student series of allegations of bullying.” However, the area of consistency in the qualitative comments to these questions was a resentment about the lack of resources to support implementation by districts. This sentiment is best summed up by the principal who stated, “The biggest problem with the antibullying legislation is that it is an unfunded mandate.” Another principal reinforced that attitude declaring, “If we are hoping to work on this issue we will need to make an investment not just a policy.”

**Implementation contingencies.** Implementation contingencies are problems that arise and unintended consequences that are generated that inhibit successful implementation efforts. These implementation contingencies are created many times by a disconnect between the

requirements of the policy and the practicality of compliance at the point of execution. Survey questions 26 and 27 align with this element. Table 13 displays the frequencies and percentages of participants' responses relative to the leverage point element.

Table 14

*Survey Questions Related to Massachusetts Antibullying policy Aligned With the Framework Element Implementation Contingencies*

Question	M	SD	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
26. Massachusetts antibullying legislation enacted in 2010 effectively anticipates potential difficulties that administrators might encounter in implementing this policy in their district or school.	2.42	0.89	0.6% (2)	12.3% (38)	27.1% (84)	47.1% (146)	12.9% (40)
27. Massachusetts antibullying legislation enacted in 2010 provides flexibility for administrators to react to unanticipated difficulties when implementing this policy in their district or school.	2.55	0.93	0.0% (0)	19.4% (60)	28.7% (89)	39.7% (123)	12.3% (38)

**Findings related to implementation contingencies.** The analysis of participants' responses to survey questions 26 and 27, which align to the framework element of design features, generated the following finding:

**Finding 13.** The data showed that 60.0% ( $n = 186$ ) of administrators disagreed or strongly disagreed that Massachusetts antibullying legislation enacted in 2010 effectively

anticipates potential difficulties that administrators might encounter in implementing this policy in their district or school with 52.0% ( $n = 161$ ) responding that they disagreed or strongly disagreed that they are given enough flexibility for administrators to react to unanticipated difficulties when implementing this policy in their district or school.

The following example left by one principal outlines one of the unanticipated consequences of this policy.

The level of documentation required is extraordinary, particularly when everyone wants to call everything ‘bullying.’ Last week, I spent 2 hours on the phone with a parent who insists that the second grader on the bus who ‘yells’ - I’ve seen the video and I’d say speaks loudly, on occasion, like 1-2 times per bus trip to his friend a few seats over - is a bully. The child is not actually talking to her daughter, mind you, but her ‘ears hurt’ when he talks loudly to his friends on the bus and because he is in second grade and she is in kindergarten, the parent argues that he is older and, therefore, has a differential of power, and he has been told to stop yelling and doesn’t, so it’s repeated. You see where I’m going. It’s not bullying by any stretch, yet it opens us up to a full and complete investigation and documentation because the parent insists that the bus ride should be more pleasant for her 5 year old and she knows calling it ‘bullying’ requires more school involvement. I argue that this is a colossal waste of time.

This example illustrates how a lack of flexibility for those responsible for putting a policy into practice can impact implementation.

**Systems change.** The concept of systems change “refers to transformative actions that produce organizational and pedagogical innovations, which in turn positively affect the quality

of student learning, opportunities, and outcomes” (Cobb et al., 2010, p. 5). Survey questions 30 and 33 align with this element. Table 14 displays the frequencies and percentages of participants’ responses relative to the leverage point element.

Table 15

*Survey Questions Related to Massachusetts Antibullying policy Aligned With the Framework Element Systems Change*

Question	M	SD	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
30. Massachusetts antibullying legislation enacted in 2010 effectively promotes systemic change in order to build and sustain a safe bully free school environment.	3.02	0.98	1.6% (5)	36.6% (113)	29.4% (91)	26.2% (81)	6.1% (19)
33. Massachusetts antibullying policy enacted in 2010 aids school administrators in effectively addressing the issue of bullying in Massachusetts schools.	3.01	1.0	1.0% (3)	38.9% (121)	25.1% (78)	27.7% (86)	7.4% (23)

**Findings related to systems change.** The analysis of the participants’ responses to survey questions 30 and 33, which aligned to the framework element of systems change, generated the following finding.

**Finding 14.** The data shows very similar responses to questions 30 and 33. On question 30, 38.2% ( $n = 118$ ) of participants agreed or strongly agreed and 32.3% ( $n = 100$ )

disagreed or strongly disagreed that Massachusetts antibullying legislation enacted in 2010 effectively promotes systemic change in order to build and sustain a safe bully free school environment. For question 33, 39.9% ( $n = 124$ ) of participants strongly agreed or agreed and 35.1% ( $n = 109$ ) disagreed or strongly disagreed that Massachusetts antibullying legislation enacted in 2010 aids school administrators in effectively addressing the issue of bullying. A relatively high percentage of participants, 29.4% ( $n=91$ ) with an M of 3.02 for question 30 and 25.1% ( $n=78$ ) with an M of 3.01 for question 33, were neutral.

An analysis of this finding suggests that, although the questions related to systems change generated both positive and negative responses, the mean for these questions demonstrate that overall trend for responses to these questions were largely neutral. Respondents made positive comments regarding how the policy forced schools to address the issue of bullying. One principal stated, “It does bring attention to the problem and the systemic change comes from school administrators.” However, others pointed out challenges that the law has either created or exacerbated with one principal stating, “Definitely not, it actually places the administrator in an uncomfortable position because they ultimately have put a plan in place that identifies a victim which the parents then perceive as ‘you don't like my child, you think my child is a problem. You're taking the other kid's side.’ It can then be difficult to address future issues with the family because they perceive you as having ‘labeled’ their child.”

**Positive student outcomes.** Positive student outcomes relate “to higher educational aspirations, achievement, or attainment; enhanced learning opportunities and instructional quality; and greater equity in learning, performance, or life outcomes for students” (Cobb et al.,

2010, p. 5). Survey questions 34 and 35 align with this element. Table 15 displays the frequencies and percentages of participants' responses relative to the leverage point element.

Table 16

*Survey Questions Related to Massachusetts Antibullying policy Aligned With the Framework Element Positive Student Outcomes*

Question	M	SD	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
34. Massachusetts antibullying policy enacted in 2010 has been responsible for promoting greater equity for students regarding the issue of bullying in Massachusetts schools.	3.07	0.88	1.0% (3)	35.4% (109)	39.6% (112)	18.8% (58)	5.2% (16)
35. Massachusetts antibullying policy enacted in 2010 has had a positive impact leading to a reduction in the number of incidents of bullying in your district or school.	2.98	0.91	1.9% (6)	29.5% (91)	38.6% (119)	24.7% (76)	5.2% (16)

**Findings related to positive student outcomes.** The analysis of the participants' responses to survey questions 34 and 35, which align to the framework element of positive student outcomes, generated the following finding:

**Finding 15.** The data revealed very similar responses to questions 34 and 35. On question 34, 36.4% ( $n = 112$ ) of participants agreed or strongly agreed and 24.0% ( $n = 74$ ) disagreed or strongly disagreed that Massachusetts antibullying legislation enacted in 2010 has been responsible for promoting greater student equity. For question 35, 31.4%



( $n = 97$ ) of participants strongly agreed or agreed and 29.9% ( $n = 92$ ) disagreed or strongly disagreed that Massachusetts antibullying legislation enacted in 2010 has had a positive impact leading to a reduction in the number of incidents of bullying. A relatively high percentage of participants, 39.6% ( $n=112$ ) with an M of 3.07 for question 34 and 38.6% ( $n = 119$ ) with an M of 2.98 for question 35, were neutral.

An analysis of this finding suggests that, although the questions related to systems change generated both positive and negative responses, the mean for these questions demonstrate that overall trend for responses to these questions were largely neutral. It was evident from the data that participants saw the importance of the antibullying legislation; however, frustration in its implementation led some to be dissatisfied with the policy. Whether they agreed or disagreed with the assertions made in Questions 34 and 35 appeared to depend upon their personal experiences in implanting this policy in their district or school. The following comment by an elementary principal summarizes the participants' view, "I think all the awareness and education around bullying has made kids more aware of the consequences of bullying, but I also hear the word 'bullying' thrown around inappropriately by both parents and students." Thus, although it may not have led to a reduction of incidents, the increased awareness has led to more instances being addressed.

**Policy theory of action.** Policy theory of action "refers to the undergirding logic, beliefs, and assumptions that describe what a policy will produce and how it will achieve its intended objectives" (Cobb et al., 2010, p. 5). Alternatively, a policy theory of action articulates what policymakers have determined are the most appropriate leverage points that they intend the policy to target, the particular design features of that policy, and any anticipated implementation contingencies that might arise during implementation of the policy. A well-crafted policy theory

of action will also express how the policy will constructively yield systems change and positive student outcomes. Survey questions 31 and 32 align with this element. Table 16 displays the frequencies and percentages of participants' responses relative to the leverage point element.

Table 17

*Survey Questions Related to Massachusetts Antibullying policy Aligned With the Framework Element Policy Theory of Action*

Question	M	SD	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
31. Massachusetts antibullying policy enacted in 2010 works to further legislative intent to create a safe bully free school environment.	3.30	0.92	3.9% (12)	47.4% (147)	29.0% (90)	15.5% (48)	4.2% (13)
32. Massachusetts antibullying policy enacted in 2010 generates a comprehensive and effective plan for reducing the incidents of bullying in Massachusetts schools	2.89	0.96	1.9% (6)	28.2% (87)	31.8% (98)	32.5% (100)	5.5% (17)

**Findings related to policy theory of action.** The analysis of the participants' responses to survey questions 31 and 32, which align to the framework element of positive student outcomes, generated the following finding:

***Finding 16.*** The data revealed similar responses to questions 31 and 32, but weighted toward disagree for 31 and agree for 32. On question 31, 51.3% ( $n = 159$ ) of participants agreed or strongly agreed and 19.7% ( $n = 61$ ) disagreed or strongly disagreed that

Massachusetts antibullying legislation enacted in 2010 generates a comprehensive and effective plan for reducing the incidents of bullying. For question 32, 30.1% ( $n = 93$ ) of participants strongly agreed or agreed and 38.0% ( $n = 117$ ) disagreed or strongly disagreed that Massachusetts antibullying legislation enacted in 2010 generates a comprehensive and effective plan for reducing the incidents of bullying.

Comments by participants once again indicated a variety of views on this policy. One principal pointed out, “The policy is a record keeping system that was intended to promote positive student/student and student/adult socialization. The enforcement component is deficient for true bullying situations.” Another recognized, “Schools are microcosms of society and despite having strong antibullying policies and protocols we cannot reasonably expect to be 'bully free.’”

### Summary of Descriptive Analysis

Table 17 displays the summary of the descriptive analysis of the survey responses. An average mean score was taken of all survey questions in each framework category.

Table 18

#### *Summary of Descriptive Analysis of Survey Questions by Framework Element*

Framework element	Mean score of responses for general policy environment	Mean score of responses got MA antibullying policy
Leverage points	2.64	3.30
Design features	1.86	2.65
Implementation contingencies	1.87	2.49
Systems change	2.51	3.02
Positive student outcomes	2.71	3.03
Policy theory of action	2.91	3.10

As previously explained, number values were assigned to the Likert scale participant responses with strongly agree being given the value of 5, agree = 4, neutral = 3, disagree = 2, and strongly disagree being given the value of 1. Therefore, the lowest possible score a participant could receive was 29 and the highest possible score was 145. Consequently, the lower the mean score for responses in each framework element, the more negative the participants were in their responses to those questions. Accordingly, the lower the mean score for an individual element, the more this evidences a concern on the part of administrators with that aspect of policy development.

Additionally, a Mann-Whitney U test (the nonparametric analog of the *t*-test) was employed to determine if the difference in participant responses for questions that related to the overall policy environment and those that related specifically to the antibullying policy for each element of the framework were statistically significant. Table 18 displays the results of that analysis. Once again, an alpha ( $\alpha$ ) or significance level of .05 was chosen over the .01 level in order to preclude a Type II error, which is defined as not rejecting a false null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ). In all instances, the results of the test found the difference to be significant for each element at the  $< 0.001$  level.

Table 19

*Summary of the Results of the Mann-Whitney U Test on Participants' Responses, Grouped by Framework Element, to Determine Whether the Difference was Significant*

Framework element	Z score	p
Leverage points	-11.57	<0.001
Design features	-15.40	<0.001
Implementation contingencies	-11.78	<0.001
Systems change	-9.71	<0.001
Positive student outcomes	-6.35	<0.001
Policy Theory of action	-14.59	<0.001

Furthermore, a Mann-Whitney U test was run comparing both sets of responses, overall policy environment and Massachusetts antibullying policy, and the results of that test ( $z = -24.98$ ,  $p = <0.001$ ) demonstrated that the difference in participants' responses were also significant when taken the survey was analyzed as a whole.

**Finding 17:** Table 17 indicates that, overall, participants held a more negative view of the overall policy environment ( $M = 2.33$ ) than they did of the Massachusetts antibullying policy enacted in 2010 ( $M = 2.91$ ). Additionally, with respect to the high leverage policy framework, they saw the elements of design features and implementation contingencies as the point in the system where the breakdown between the development and implementation of educational policies was most apparent. This held true in participants' responses to the questions regarding Massachusetts antibullying policy as well. Furthermore, the data in table 18 indicates that the difference was significant for each element as well at the  $< 0.001$  level.

## **Inferential Analysis**

### **Analysis of Differences Between Demographic Groups**

An inferential data analysis was conducted in order to determine if perception differed between participants from different demographic categories. In order to compare variances in responses across demographic groups, the data were reviewed for completeness, and participants with missing responses were removed from the sample only for the purposes of the inferential data analysis. With respect to the descriptive analysis however, no participant was eliminated as an incomplete response to one question would not affect the analysis of other questions.

### **Total Score Results**

The Mann-Whitney U test and Kruskal-Wallis test were employed to determine if the difference in participants' responses by demographic category were statistically significant. The Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis calculations are nonparametric statistics that test whether  $k$  independent samples are from the same population, where  $k$  = the number of separate groups. Table 19 displays the results of that analysis. Once again, an alpha ( $\alpha$ ) or significance level of .05 was chosen over the .01 level in order to preclude a Type II error, which is defined as not rejecting a false null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ). In all instances, except the demographic category of superintendents and principals, the results of the tests found no significant differences between participants' responses.

Table 20

*Summary of the Results of the Mann-Whitney U Test and Kruskal-Wallis Test to Determine if Differences in Participants' Responses by Demographic Category Were Statistically Significant.*

Demographic Category	Z score <sup>a</sup> /chi-square <sup>b</sup>	<i>p</i>
Superintendents vs. principals:	-2.64 <sup>a</sup>	0.008
Gender	-0.90 <sup>a</sup>	0.367
Geographic region	4.29 <sup>b</sup>	0.368
Experience	7.46 <sup>b</sup>	0.114
Sociological	2.62 <sup>b</sup>	0.269
District student population	7.35 <sup>b</sup>	0.119

**Finding 18:** Analysis of the data showed statistically significant variation between the responses of superintendents and principals to the survey questions. Analysis of the data also showed that there was no statistically significant variation in the responses of any other of the demographic characteristics of the surveyed population.

The responses of superintendents and principals displayed statistically significant variation in their overall responses. An analysis of the totality of the survey response data demonstrates that superintendents' responses to the questions ( $M = 71.2$ ) were more negative than were those of principals ( $M = 76.6$ ). However, with regard to the other demographic categories (e.g., experience, geographic location, size of district) none of the other categories showed a difference in the responses of participants that was statistically significant.

### **Summary of the Chapter**

The purpose of this study was to describe public school administrators' perceptions of the development and implementation of educational policy and to determine whether policies being implemented in the current educational reform environment meet the criteria for high leverage policies. Data analysis led to 18 findings regarding administrators' perceptions of the development and implementation of educational policy. Those findings were based upon a review of the participants' responses to the HLPF-Q conducted according to the procedures outlined in Chapter 3. Chapter 5 includes a discussion of those findings, conclusions drawn from the research, and recommendations for practice and future research.



## **CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, MAJOR FINDINGS, AND IMPLICATIONS**

The purpose of this chapter is to present the conclusions and implications based upon an analysis of the HLPF-Q responses. The data for this study was collected in a single cross-sectional survey that sought to describe public school administrators' perceptions of the development and implementation of educational policy and whether policies being implemented in the current educational reform environment meet the criteria for high leverage policies. The six elements of the high leverage policy framework (Cobb et al., 2010) that guided this study include leverage points, design features, implementation contingencies, systems change, positive student outcomes, and policy theory of action.

This chapter is comprised of five parts. The first is a summary of the study. Next, the findings are listed organized by research question. Those findings provide the basis for the next section that outlines the major findings and implications for practice. The final section of this chapter proposes implications for future research.

### **Summary of the Study**

Dramatic issues often attract the attention of local and national media, and their coverage of those incidents often spurs legislative action on the topic (Anderson, 2011). In the process of reacting however, policymakers are frequently so focused on the creation of legislation, as well as the advantages they believe legislation will impart, that they give little thought to complications that may emerge during the implementation of these policies at the local level (Junge & Krvaric, 2011; Nudzor, 2009). This has been evident in recent years with the increased regulation of schools, in large part due to increasing numbers of federal and state mandates to an extent never before experienced (Haney, 2013).

The line between the creation and implementation of educational policy is often indistinct. There is often a large discrepancy between original legislative intent and actual outcomes subsequent to the implementation of a new policy (Junge & Krvaric, 2011; Nudzor, 2009). Trends in the creation of policies have included the construction of policy objectives that are “grander, programs [that are] more comprehensive, and implementation challenges [that are] more complex (Odden, 1991, p. 4). This leads to situations where the actual impact of a policy differs from what the legislature intended because the very act of implementation by local administrators necessitates alterations to that policy in order to fit the reality of the world in which those administrators function (Hill & Hupe, 2005).

This study examined this phenomenon (the development and implementation of policy) with regard to both the overall policy environment in this country as well as the Massachusetts antibullying legislation enacted on May 3, 2010. The antibullying policy was chosen because it is a relatively recently enacted piece of legislation and the problem of bullying is one that impacts all schools to varying degrees. Consequently, it was a topic ripe for examination and a policy with which public school administrators were intimately familiar and currently in the process of implementing.

Accordingly, the purpose of this study was twofold. First, this study sought to elicit public school administrators’ perceptions of whether the overall policy environment in the United States is having the desired effect of improving the delivery of educational services to the nation’s children through the creation of high leverage educational policies. Second, this study examined a specific policy, the Massachusetts antibullying policy enacted in 2010, in order to determine public school administrators’ perceptions of whether this policy is a high leverage

policy that had the impact the legislature intended and whether it supports the primary role of schools (e.g., teaching, academic attainment, greater equity in learning for all students).

### **Research Questions and Findings**

Analysis of the data yielded 18 notable findings. The findings from the analysis of the HLPF-Q are organized by research question.

#### **1. What are public school administrators' perceptions regarding whether policies being created in the current educational environment meet the criteria to be considered high leverage policies?**

##### **a) What are public school administrators' perceptions of whether current educational policy initiatives take advantage of *leverage points* in the educational policymaking environment?**

*Finding 1.* The data revealed that only 27.1% ( $n = 86$ ) of respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed that the areas targeted by educational policies developed are necessary to elicit positive educational change.

*Finding 2.* The data showed that 67.2% of administrators strongly disagreed or disagreed that educational policy efforts are assisting school administrators in addressing the issue of student achievement in their district or school with 91.2% ( $n = 260$ ) stating that they strongly disagreed or disagreed that the number of mandates is necessary for effective change in the public education system.

**b) What are public school administrators' perceptions of whether current educational policy initiatives contain appropriate *design features* to effectuate needed change?**

*Finding 3.* The data revealed that 61.5% ( $n = 196$ ) of respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed that the educational policy efforts are effectively designed to improve schools.

*Finding 4.* The data illustrated that 93% ( $n = 293$ ) of administrators strongly disagreed or disagreed that educational policy efforts provide administrators with enough resources to effectively implement policies with 89.3% ( $n = 284$ ) stating that they strongly disagreed or disagreed that they are given enough time to effectively implement policies in their district or school.

**c) What are public school administrators' perceptions of whether current educational policy initiatives allow flexibility for administrators to respond to *implementation contingencies* during implementation?**

*Finding 5.* The data showed that 88.4% ( $n = 282$ ) of administrators strongly disagreed or disagreed that educational policy efforts effectively anticipate potential difficulties that administrators might encounter in implementing policies with 80.9% ( $n = 258$ ) responding that they strongly disagreed or disagreed that they are given enough flexibility to react to unanticipated difficulties when implementing policies in their district or school.

**d) What are public school administrators' perceptions of whether current educational policy initiatives promote *systems change*?**

*Finding 6.* The data showed that 71.1% ( $n = 226$ ) of participants strongly agreed or agreed that educational policy efforts inhibit districts' and schools' ability to implement local goals and initiatives.

*Finding 7.* The data showed that only 17.4% ( $n = 55$ ) agreed that current educational policy efforts effectively promote positive systemic change with 0% ( $n = 0$ ) giving a strongly agree response. Additionally, 31% of participants responded strongly agree or agree when asked whether current educational policy efforts have been responsible for promoting greater equity for students regarding student achievement.

**e) What are public school administrators' perceptions of whether current educational policy initiatives lead to *positive student outcomes*?**

*Finding 8.* The data indicated that, with regard to educational policies creating a positive educational system and having a positive impact on student achievement, participants tended strongly to the neutral and disagree side of the Likert scale. The combined score for neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree was 83% ( $n = 263$ ) for question 12, 68.6% ( $n = 217$ ) for question 19 and 82% ( $n = 259$ ) for question 23. Neutral, response rates were 34.4% ( $n = 109$ ) with an M of 2.58 for question 12, 31.6% ( $n = 100$ ) with an M of 2.86 for question 19, and 42.1% ( $n = 133$ ) with an M of 2.69 for question 23.

**f) What are public school administrators' reports of the *policy theory of action* for current educational policy initiatives?**

*Finding 9.* The data showed that 81.3% ( $n = 194$ ) of participants responded that they disagreed or strongly disagreed that the pace at which new educational policies are

developed is effective for successful implementation. Additionally, 61.2% strongly disagreed or disagreed that current educational policy efforts effectively generate a comprehensive and effective plan for improving student achievement in U.S. schools.

The second research question focused on the analysis of a specific policy, Massachusetts antibullying policy enacted in 2010.

**2. What are public school administrators' perceptions of whether the Massachusetts antibullying policy enacted in 2010 meets the criteria for a high leverage policy? There were six subquestions.**

**a) What are public school administrators' perceptions of whether the Massachusetts antibullying policy meets the criteria for *leverage points*?**

*Finding 10.* The responses to survey question 24 showed that 54.4% ( $n = 169$ ) of participants agreed or strongly agreed that the requirements of Massachusetts antibullying policy are effective in working to create a safer school environment. Additionally, an analysis of participant responses for survey question 36 revealed that 52.3% ( $n = 161$ ) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the focus of Massachusetts antibullying policy is necessary to address the issue of bullying in schools.

**b) What are public school administrators' perceptions of whether the Massachusetts antibullying policy meets the criteria for *design features*?**

*Finding 11.* The data revealed that only 26.9% ( $n = 84$ ) of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that the antibullying policy is effectively designed to reduce bullying in schools.

*Finding 12.* The data showed that 72% ( $n = 224$ ) of administrators disagreed or strongly disagreed that educational policy efforts provide administrators with enough resources to

effectively implement this policy; however, only 48.4% ( $n = 150$ ) stated that they disagreed or strongly disagreed that they are given enough time to effectively implement this policy.

**c) What are public school administrators' perceptions of whether the Massachusetts antibullying policy meets the criteria for *implementation contingencies*?**

*Finding 13.* The data showed that 60% ( $n = 186$ ) of administrators disagreed or strongly disagreed that Massachusetts antibullying legislation enacted in 2010 effectively anticipates potential difficulties that administrators might encounter in implementing this policy in their district or school with 52% ( $n = 161$ ) responding that they disagree or strongly disagree that they are given enough flexibility for administrators to react to unanticipated difficulties when implementing this policy in their district or school. A relatively high percentage of participants, 27% for question 26 and 28% for question 27, were neutral.

**d) What are public school administrators' perceptions of whether the Massachusetts antibullying policy promotes *systems change*?**

*Finding 14.* The data showed very similar responses to questions 30 and 33. On question 30, 38.2% ( $n = 118$ ) of participants agreed or strongly agreed and 32.3% ( $n = 100$ ) disagreed or strongly disagreed that Massachusetts antibullying legislation enacted in 2010 effectively promotes systemic change in order to build and sustain a safe bully free school environment. For question 33, 39.9% ( $n = 124$ ) of participants strongly agreed or agreed and 34.8% ( $n = 109$ ) disagreed or strongly disagreed that Massachusetts antibullying legislation enacted in 2010 aids school administrators in effectively addressing the issue of bullying. A relatively high percentage of participants, 29.4%

( $n=91$ ) with an M of 3.02 for question 30 and 25.1% ( $n=78$ ) with an M of 3.01 for question 33, were neutral.

**e) What are public school administrators' perceptions of whether the Massachusetts antibullying policy leads to *positive student outcomes*?**

*Finding 15.* The data displayed very similar responses to questions 34 and 35. On question 34, 36.4% ( $n = 112$ ) of participants agreed or strongly agreed and 24.0% ( $n = 74$ ) disagreed or strongly disagreed that Massachusetts antibullying legislation enacted in 2010 has been responsible for promoting greater student equity. For question 35, 31.4% ( $n = 97$ ) of participants strongly agreed or agreed and 29.9% ( $n = 92$ ) disagreed or strongly disagreed that Massachusetts antibullying legislation enacted in 2010 has had a positive impact leading to a reduction in the number of incidents of bullying. A relatively high percentage of participants, 39.6% ( $n=112$ ) with an M of 3.07 for question 34 and 38.6% ( $n = 119$ ) with an M of 2.98 for question 35, were neutral.

**f) What are public school administrators' perceptions of the *policy theory of action* for reducing bullying in their schools?**

*Finding 16.* The data displayed similar responses to questions 31 and 32, but weighted toward disagreed for 31 and agreed for 32. On question 31, 51.3% ( $n = 159$ ) of participants agreed or strongly agreed and 19.7% ( $n = 61$ ) disagreed or strongly disagreed that Massachusetts antibullying legislation enacted in 2010 generates a comprehensive and effective plan for reducing the incidents of bullying. For question 32, 30.1% ( $n = 93$ ) of participants strongly agreed or agreed and 38.0% ( $n = 117$ ) disagreed or strongly disagreed that Massachusetts antibullying legislation enacted in 2010 generates a comprehensive and effective plan for reducing the incidents of bullying.



### **Descriptive Analysis Summary Findings**

In analyzing the descriptive findings, an average mean score was taken of all survey questions in each framework category. The lower the mean score for responses in each framework element, the more negative the participants were in their responses to those questions. Accordingly, the lower the mean score for an individual element, the more this was evidence of a concern on the part of administrators with that aspect of policy development. Additionally, a Mann-Whitney U test (the nonparametric analog of the *t*-test) was employed to determine if the difference in participant responses for questions related to the overall policy environment and questions related specifically to the antibullying policy for each element of the framework were statistically significant.

*Finding 17.* Overall, participants held a more negative view of the overall policy environment than they did of the Massachusetts antibullying policy enacted in 2010. Additionally, with respect to the high leverage policy framework, they saw the elements of design features and leverage points as the point in the system where the breakdown between the development and implementation of educational policies was most apparent. This held true for participants' responses to the questions regarding Massachusetts antibullying policy as well.

### **Inferential Analysis Findings: Analysis of Differences Between Demographic Groups**

Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis tests were employed to determine if the differences in participant responses by demographic category were statistically significant. In all instances, except the demographic category of superintendents and principals, the results of the tests found no significant difference in between participants' responses.

*Finding 18:* Analysis of the data showed statistically significant variation between the responses of superintendents and principals to the survey questions. Analysis of the data also showed that there was no statistically significant variation in the responses of any other of the demographic characteristics of the surveyed population.

### **Conclusions, Recommendations for Practice, and Recommendations for Research**

This section contains four major findings drawn from an analysis of the HLPF-Q data. Connections to the literature are also established for each conclusion. Additionally, this section contains three recommendations for policy and three recommendations for future research.

#### **Conclusion 1**

Eighty to 93% of the Massachusetts public school administrators who participated in this study reported that the number and pace of the creation of educational policies overwhelm administrators and inhibit effective implementation. Furthermore, participants reported that they are not given enough resources to effectively implement these policies. Nor are they afforded the flexibility to react to unanticipated obstacles as policymakers fail to anticipate any potential difficulties involved in the implementation process as 61.2% of administrators fail to see evidence that current educational policy efforts effectively generate a comprehensive and effective plan for improving student achievement in U.S. schools. This conclusion is based upon the following findings: 2, 4, 5, and 9.

A high leverage policy is one that increases academic aspirations, achievement, or attainment for all students; promotes greater equity in learning, performance, or life outcomes for students; and generates positive ripple effects throughout an educational system (Cobb et al., 2010). The framework is predicated upon the understanding that the development of educational policy is part of a larger political and social context, which must be taken into account by those

creating those policies. However, research shows that legislators frequently give little thought to the challenges presented by implementation of their policies at the local level (Anderson, 2011; Junge & Krvaric, 2011; Nudzor, 2009). Participants articulated concern for this commenting that they believed that those who created policy were out of touch with the everyday reality of running a district or school. The result of this is that unintended consequences occur when both state and federal policies are implemented at the district and school level, creating unforeseen costs or new challenges to be overcome (Hill & Hupe, 2005; Lipsky, 1980).

Implementation of externally defined accountability standards, such as those imposed by the federal government on states and schools, often meet with resistance (Arens, 2005) as they are frequently blind to the realities confronting local public school administrators. Policies that affect a school environment must be adaptable to the individual needs of the specific school community in which they are to be implemented (Noell & Gansle, 2009). Participants were clear in their responses that policies are often created without giving administrators the flexibility to respond to unforeseen situations that may arise during local implementation. The research points out that such unanticipated obstacles are inherent in the policy process as the final form that legislation takes is the result of a series of compromises between various political factions and interest groups (Edwards, 2010). The outcome of these compromises frequently creates vague or ambiguous terms or desired actions that cause difficulty in implementation (Anderson, 2011). Consequently, the difficulties experienced during implementation and failure to anticipate and provide flexibility for superintendents and principals to respond may inhibit the impact of these policies.

## **Conclusion 2**

Seventy-two percent of Massachusetts public school administrators who participated in this study reported that they were not given enough resources to effectively implement the Massachusetts antibullying policy enacted in 2010. Additionally, 60% of participants responded that policymakers failed to anticipate any potential difficulties that administrators might experience during the implementation of this policy. This conclusion is based upon the following findings: 12 and 13.

Case studies and an examination of legislation indicate that a single issue or problem, such as bullying, often generates a range of approaches and solutions depending upon the perspective of those attempting to intervene. The work of Dayton and Dupre (2009) confirmed this piecemeal approach and, as with many legislative initiatives, found that the part that was often missing was the funding from the state government to support implementation in the schools. This problem was clearly identified by the participants of this study. The legislature often fails to realize the financial impact associated with the implementation of policies. Consequently, schools are forced to deal with unfunded mandates to which they are obliged to comply even without the necessary resources made available. This not only affects the implementation of the policy in question, but further puts stress on the system as the money must come from somewhere and this causes other initiatives to be affected.

Additionally, state-level mandates designed to address the problem of bullying are an excellent example of education policies that are often difficult to implement because the proposed solution is far removed from the front lines of education and educators' day-to-day experiences (Nudzor, 2009). Participants' responses that policymakers failed to consider potential barriers to the implementation of this policy reinforces that finding. The elimination of

bullying within a school requires a systemic approach that is not merely reactionary but takes proactive measures to eliminate bullying (Juvonen, 2005). Terry (2010) revealed that merely passing a law was not enough. Implementation strategies must engage those involved in that implementation in order to achieve systemic change. Engaging administrators while these policies are being drafted is essential for helping to avoid some of the obstacles policies will inevitably face upon implementation. Failing that, after implementation, policymaking bodies, or more appropriately regulatory agencies, must set up a process to evaluate the effectiveness of the policy being implemented and make any necessary changes upon advice from the field.

### **Conclusion 3**

A descriptive and inferential statistical analysis of the totality of the data indicated that participants held a more negative view of the overall policy environment than they did of the Massachusetts antibullying policy enacted in 2010. Additionally, with respect to the high leverage policy framework, participants' responses indicated the elements of design features and implementation contingencies were the points within the system where the breakdown between the development and implementation of educational policies was most apparent. This held true in participants' responses to the questions regarding Massachusetts antibullying policy as well. This conclusion is based upon the following finding: 17.

Anderson (2011) stated that policymakers and implementers both have the power to shape policy implementation efforts. Through accountability measures in legislation and the distribution of resources, policymakers can try and force compliance with new policies (Consiglio, 2009; Haney, 2013). It was evident from the data that participants saw the importance of the antibullying legislation and this helped to mitigate, to some extent, the discontent prevalent when they considered the overall policy environment. This phenomenon is

readily apparent in the field of education today. Participants in this study clearly demonstrated their concern with the atmosphere created by the number of policies impacting their schools, the pace at which those policies are forced to be implemented, and the lack of resources provided by the government to accomplish that task. However, they also went on to demonstrate agreement with at least some aspects of many policies impacting them in their professional lives.

Studies consistently prove that legislation alone is not enough to compel sustainable effective change in a school environment (Arens, 2005; McClaughlin, 1987; Noell & Ganske, 2009). Noell and Ganske (2009) revealed that policies that affect a school environment must be adaptable to the individual needs of the specific school community in which they are to be implemented. Educators must be engaged in the process of change and their input valued in order for a program to be successful. Arens's (2005) work illustrates the challenge of externally defined accountability standards imposed by the federal government on states and schools. Implementers often felt disenfranchised, which impeded effective execution of the desired policy initiative. The responses of those administrators who took part in this study further reinforces this finding as they reported feeling that their input was not valued and that policymakers were disconnected from the practicalities of running a school.

Participant responses in this study clearly identified that the disconnect between the development and implementation of educational policy occurs in the design features of the policy and failure to anticipate implementation contingencies that may arise during implementation. Failure on the part of policymakers to engage educators in the creation of educational policies leads to an inability to foresee potential difficulties and thus attempt to proactively address those obstacles. Garn (1999) demonstrated that under certain conditions, with appropriate thought given to implementation contingencies, legislators could put safeguards

into place to ensure the intent of the policy is carried into practice by implementers. However, barring that, administrators must be given the flexibility to respond to circumstances that are unanticipated during the development of the policy.

Oftentimes policymakers focus on leverage points, such as financial incentives/disincentives, to compel compliance as well as accountability measures within the design features to induce desired outcomes. However, failure to plan for the implementation contingencies inherent in the process, the largest being the perception and priorities of the local implementing authority, creates a situation where these initiatives will fail or at least have their intended impact minimized. Participants' responses in this study clearly demonstrate that policymakers must give careful thought to potential difficulties when designing policies thus allowing flexibility for educators to respond to unforeseen contingencies that occur during implementation. For the implementation of policies to be successful, Conner and Rabovsky (2011) point out that flexibility must be given for local priorities to be realized in order to overcome resistance by implementers.

#### **Conclusion 4**

An inferential analysis of the differences between demographic groups revealed a statistically significant variation between the responses of superintendents and principals to the survey questions. Analysis of the data also revealed that there was no statistically significant variation in the responses of any other of the demographic group characteristics of the surveyed population. This conclusion is based upon the following finding: 18.

One of the most powerful aspects of this study was the consistency among responses of superintendents and principals involved. It did not matter if respondents were male or female, the size of the district, geographic location in the state, or how long the participant had been an

administrator. There was no statistically significant difference found when running an inferential analysis of the various demographic groups. This led to the conclusion that the concerns expressed in the responses to the questions asked in this study are strongly held and diffused among public school administrators in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

In examining the one statistically significant difference between groups, that being between superintendents and principals, it is possible that the differences in their roles accounts for the differences in their responses. The responses made by superintendents reflected a more negative overall view of the relationship between the development and implementation of educational policy. A possible reason for the difference in responses between superintendents and principals could be that, in their role as a district administrator, superintendents are impacted by every policy that is enacted for schools. Principals on the other hand, as administrators of usually just one building and grade level span, have fewer policies with which to be concerned. Further research would be warranted to explore this variation in participant responses.

### **Recommendation for Practice 1 – Open a Dialogue With Educators**

McCloughlin (1987) asserts that implementation of a policy is in effect a bargaining process and that is exactly what makes it so difficult for policy analysts to assess the effect of a given policy since inherently local concerns dictate the course of that bargaining. This study sought to accomplish this by applying the high leverage policy framework to try and identify the disconnect that occurs when policies are implemented in local districts.

Participants in this study clearly articulated that the pace, number, and manner in which educational policies are being enacted today is placing an enormous amount of stress on educators and the system as a whole. Educators are often perceived as resistant to change when this is frequently a reflection of their professional assessment that the new initiatives are not as



valuable as the ones they are replacing. It is thus that the macro (big picture) world of policymakers collides with the micro (district, school, and classroom) world of ground-level implementers as both strive to achieve their own goals and agendas (McLaughlin, 1987). After more than a decade of the current educational reform, achievement gaps still exist and schools are still consistently labeled as failing. Policy makers need reevaluate the theory of action which controls the creation of these policies rather than just propagating more of the same type of policies.

An effective approach to policy implementation that incorporates appropriate pressure to focus local implementers' attention and support to facilitate implementation is needed to maximize the chance for success. Individual interpretation is the linchpin upon which all policy implementation turns and "change ultimately is a problem of the smallest unit" (McLaughlin, 1987, p. 174) of an organization. The current political environment in which educators work has policymakers applying more than enough pressure. That was evident from the participants' responses. What is lacking is the support. Support in terms of resources, time, and respect. Educators are professionals and must be included in the policymaking process in order for effective systemic change to occur. Right now the system is burdened both with overlapping and competing policy initiatives and with stress from punitive compliance measures. Effective implementation involves finding a balance between these concerns and opening a dialogue that allows for negotiation and compromise. It is time for policymakers to open that dialogue with educational professionals in a meaningful way if lasting change is to be realized.

### **Recommendation for Practice 2 – Provide Adequate Resources**

Change does not come without cost. Every action within a system costs something whether that cost is reflected in terms of money, time, or reallocation of resources away from

another area. Participants in this study clearly demonstrated that one of the biggest problems facing public education in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts today is a lack of resources to implement the myriad of policy initiatives being imposed by the state.

Noell and Gansle's (2009) examination of NCLB (2001) of educational reform initiatives found that for comprehensive school reform movement's efforts to be successful, there should be both resources and buy-in. Noell and Gansle asserted that successful policy initiatives allow for flexibility to adapt to the needs of individual schools and solicit teacher input into the implementation at the local level. Once again, nothing is free, and it is time that policymakers come to this understanding. The strength of the nation's economy is always subject to fluctuation and that cannot help but affect availability of resources. However, during recent challenging fiscal times resources have been used as leverage to impose policies upon the educational system. Although this can compel outward superficial compliance, it does not effectuate meaningful, lasting, and systemic change.

### **Recommendation for Practice 3 – Allow Flexibility to Respond to Unanticipated Difficulties**

Former United States Secretary of State, General Colin Powell once stated, “No battle plan survives contact with the enemy” (Daft, 2013, p. 164). Policymakers need to recognize that policies are plans that need to be implemented in a local setting. Unanticipated difficulties will arise during the implementation process, and administrators must be given the flexibility to respond.

Little and Houston (2003) found that, “The role of the state agency in education reform has shifted from focusing solely on monitoring and ensuring compliance with regulations to setting policy directions and providing assistance for implementation of reform efforts” (p. 55). This shift has increased the challenges of developing policy in this realm as state legislatures get

more involved with the details of school curriculum design and governance. Local autonomy has been largely removed or at least greatly impinged upon as policies have become “central commitments or even political mandates to achieve new social goals” (Hill & Hupe, 2005, p. 40). If policymakers want to increase the effectiveness of the policies they create, and remove much of the stress on the system, they must afford public school administrators the flexibility to shape those policies to the realities of their local districts. This may result in policies that are not uniform in implementation or result, but they will allow for more success as those policies fulfill the unique needs of the local community while meeting the broad goals set by the state.

#### **Recommendation for Practice 4 – Advocacy**

There is an inherent separation involved in the development and implementation of educational policy. Implementers are, of necessity, on location in school districts putting policy into practice in our schools. Oftentimes, they see their role as mitigating or buffering staff against the perceived negative impact which these overlapping and often competing policies propagate. Consequently, administrators must do a better job of voicing their concerns. They must continue their advocacy efforts in order to make those responsible for creating policy aware of administrators’ professional concerns.

The practice of education is different today than in the past and increasingly policies that direct how schools function and are organized are being made further from those schools where implementation must occur. State and even federal policy makers are directing what happens in our local community schools and, unless those impacted speak up, those policy makers will fail to understand the true impact of their work. Administrative preparation programs should begin to include policy courses as part of their masters’ level programs so that administrators are aware of how policies are developed and how to more effectively work to shape and influence that

process. The vehicles and state organizations are there for administrators to voice their professional opinions. Administrators just need to be more forceful in utilizing them to advocate for their schools.

### **Recommendation for Research 1**

Another researcher should repeat this study with a larger sample of public school administrators. The sample for this study was drawn from the population of public school principals and superintendents in Massachusetts. Although efforts were made to increase the sample size using strategies outlined by Dillman et al (2013) there was a relatively low response rate (17%). Alternate strategies could be utilized to draw a larger sample of the target population.

Additionally, another avenue for future pursuit would be to replicate this study using teachers or school boards as participants. It would be interesting to compare and contrast perceptions of administrators, teachers and school boards with regard to the development and implementation of educational policies.

### **Recommendation for Research 2**

Another investigator could expand this study to include a representative sample of public school administrators from across the United States. This study is easily replicable and scalable and designed to accomplish that task. It would be interesting then to view the national data derived from that study to identify what if any were the regional differences in how public school administrators across the nation viewed the development and implementation of educational policy. Additionally, any state or local policy could be supplemented for the Massachusetts anti bullying policy and the HLPF-Q instrument used to determine if it was a high leverage policy.

Lastly, as with recommendation 1, applying this study to teachers nationally could generate interesting and informative data and results.

### **Recommendation for Research 3**

Other researchers could use qualitative research methods, such as focus groups and interviews, to expand upon and delve deeper into public school administrators' perceptions of the development and implementation of educational policy. Interview questions utilizing the high leverage policy framework as a guide could further refine the determination of exactly where and how the disconnect occurs between the development and implementation of policy. Although open comment opportunities were afforded to participants in this study, there was not a chance for follow up or probing questions. An interview-based qualitative study would have much to add to this field of study.

### **Summary of the Chapter**

The purpose of this study was to describe public school administrators' perceptions of the development and implementation of educational policy and whether policies being implemented in the current educational reform environment meet the criteria for high leverage policies. Study participants completed the High Leverage Policy Framework Questionnaire (HLPF-Q). This chapter reported the major results based upon the findings of the study. Implications for policy and recommendations for future research were also presented.

In this study, public school administrators identified that the two major areas where, according to the high leverage policy framework, a disconnect between the development and implementation of educational policies exist are in the design features of the policy and the failure to account for implementation contingencies. Policy makers are often insulated from the environment in which the policies they create are implemented. Administrators however, are on

the front lines and thus responsible for making the policies work regardless of any flaws that might be present. It is essential to develop processes and open appropriate avenues of communication so that a dialogue can occur whereby administrators have input into the creation of educational policies.

Furthermore, if those responsible for developing the policies which shape our educational system truly want to succeed, administrators need to be given the necessary resources and support to accomplish that task. Administrators were united in their responses during this study that all too often new mandates and initiatives are being imposed without adequate funding to ensure effective implementation. This is adding stress to an already overburdened system and inhibiting progress.

The development and implementation of policy does not occur in a vacuum. Consequently, it is essential that policies be developed which afford implementers the flexibility to adapt the policy to their local reality while maintaining the integrity of its goals and objectives. This is not an easy task, but it is an essential one if we are truly to make the systematic and sustainable educational reforms necessary to ensure our educational system meets the needs of our students.

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Appendix A

The High Leverage Policy Framework Questionnaire (HLPF-Q)

# Public School Administrators' Perceptions of the Relationship Between

## Welcome Participants

The purpose of this study is to explore and describe public school administrators' perceptions of the relationship between development and implementation of educational policy and whether policies being implemented in the current educational reform environment meet the criteria for high leverage policies.

- Completion of this survey is voluntary.
- Your completion of the survey constitutes consent to participate in the study and to use the information you supply for the dissertation as well as any presentations or publication of the findings.
- Risks of participation in the survey are not greater, considering probability and magnitude, than those ordinarily encountered in daily life. There are no apparent physical risks.
- It will take you about 10 to 15 minutes to complete the survey.
- By participating in this study, you may add to the existing knowledge base on administrators' perceptions of the relationship between development and implementation of educational policy.
- Your name will not be associated with your answers.
- All your answers will be grouped with the answers of others.
- The data will not be coded in any identifiable way.
- All survey data will be reported in aggregate.
- All survey responses will be stored and password protected in a Survey Monkey account to which only the researcher has access.
- All survey responses will be destroyed upon completion of the study.
- If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact the University of Hartford Human Subjects Committee (HSC) at 860.768.4721. The HSC is a group of people that reviews research studies and protects the rights of people involved in research.

Thank you for participating.

If you have any questions please don't hesitate to contact my research advisor or me.

### Researcher

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190 Mohawk Dr.  
West Hartford, CT  
Cell (413) 454-7096  
Email: [t\\_gazda@ludlowps.org](mailto:t_gazda@ludlowps.org)

### Faculty Advisor

Kenny Nienhusser, Ed.D.  
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Department of Educational Leadership  
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# Public School Administrators' Perceptions of the Relationship Between

There are a total of 38 questions in this survey which can be divided into four parts.

1. Demographic information (1-7)
2. Exploration of the educational policy environment (8-23)
3. Specific questions regarding the Massachusetts anti-bullying policy enacted in 2010 (24-36)
4. Two final open-ended questions for participants to include any additional thoughts on the Educational policy environment in the U.S. and the implementation of Massachusetts anti-bullying policy enacted in 2010. (37-38)

Sections 2 and 3 are answered utilizing a five-point Likert-type scale. The questions in section 2 which explore "educational policy efforts" refer to the combined impact of the State and Federal endeavors upon local districts and schools. Furthermore, each question affords participants the opportunity to make open-ended comments should they choose to elaborate upon their response.

Your participation is voluntary and anonymous. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions; I merely seek to gain your insight into legislative policy implementation at the district and school level.

Please DO NOT place your name on this survey (or the name of your school). Your answers will not be associated with your name and analyzed in the aggregate to determine overall trends.

If you have questions about this questionnaire, please contact Todd Gazda at 413-454-7096 or [t\\_gazda@ludlowps.org](mailto:t_gazda@ludlowps.org).

## 1. Position within the School District

- Superintendent
- Principal

## 2. If your response to question 2 was "Principal", what level(s)?

- Elementary
- Middle
- High

## 3. Location

- Urban
- Suburban
- Rural

## Public School Administrators' Perceptions of the Relationship Between

### 4. Please choose the geographic region of Massachusetts that best applies to your school district.

- Boston Metro Area
- South Shore (including the Cape and the Islands)
- North Shore
- Central
- Western

### 5. Student Population in your District

- <1,000 Students
- 1,001-3,000 Students
- 3,001-6,000 Students
- 6,001-10,000 Students
- 10,001 + Students

### 6. Years in Current Role (Regardless of whether you have changed districts or schools)

- 0-5
- 6-10
- 11-15
- 16-20
- 21+

### 7. Gender

- Male
- Female

# Public School Administrators' Perceptions of the Relationship Between

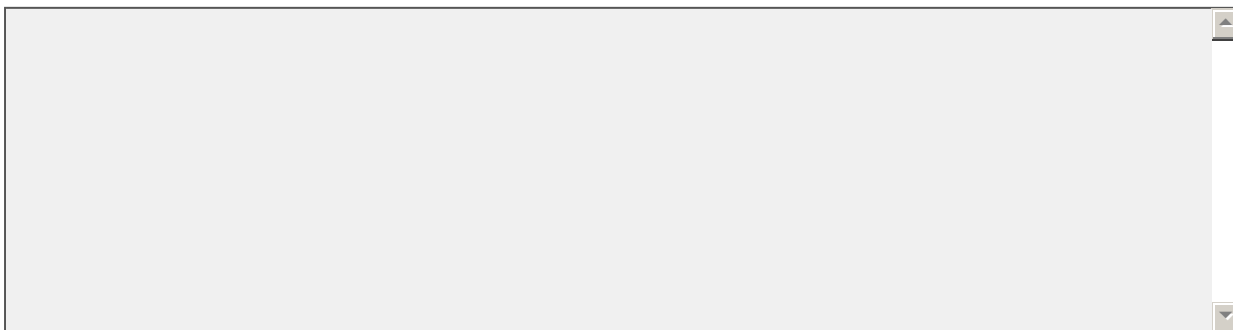
## Questions 8 - 24

The following questions relate to the impact of the OVERALL educational policy environment (i.e. combined effect of state and federal policies) in the United States today.

**8. The NUMBER of educational policies developed by policy makers for implementation in local districts and schools is necessary for effective change in the public education system.**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Comments

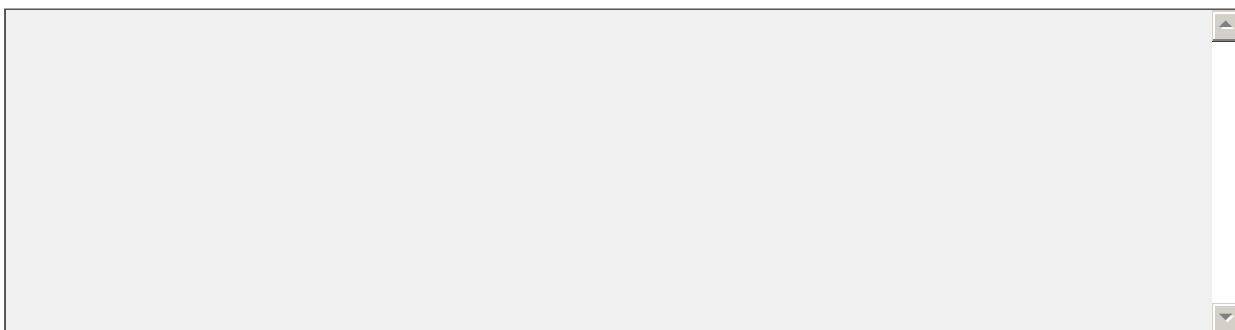


## Public School Administrators' Perceptions of the Relationship Between

**9. The PACE at which new educational policies are developed is effective for successful implementation.**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

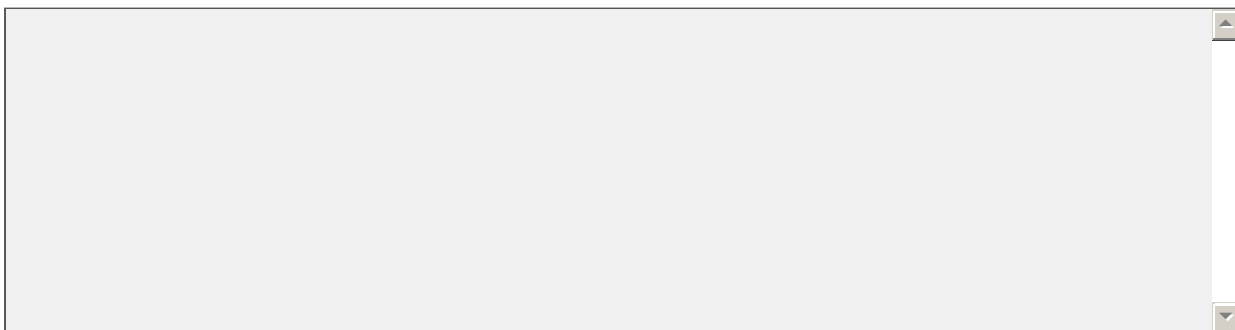
Comments



**10. The AREAS targeted by educational policies developed are necessary to elicit positive educational change.**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Comments



# Public School Administrators' Perceptions of the Relationship Between

## **11. Current educational policy efforts inhibit districts' and schools' ability to implement LOCAL GOALS AND INITIATIVES.**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Comments

## **12. Current educational policy efforts are effective in creating a POSITIVE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM for students.**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Comments

## Public School Administrators' Perceptions of the Relationship Between

**13. Current educational policy efforts are effectively DESIGNED (i.e. language in statutes, guidance on how a policy should to be implemented, the requirements for compliance) to improve schools.**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Comments

**14. Current educational policy efforts effectively ANTICIPATE potential difficulties that administrators might encounter in implementing policies in their district or school.**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

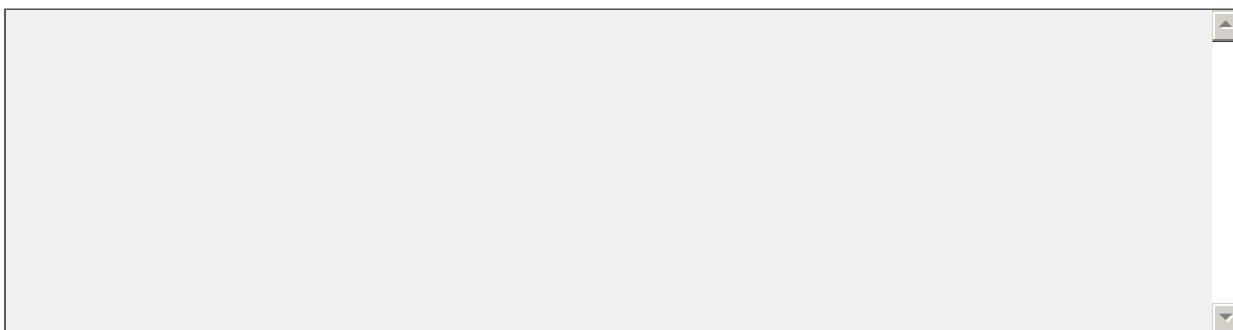
Comments

## Public School Administrators' Perceptions of the Relationship Between

**15. Current educational policy efforts effectively provide FLEXIBILITY for administrators to react to unanticipated difficulties when implementing policies in their district or school.**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

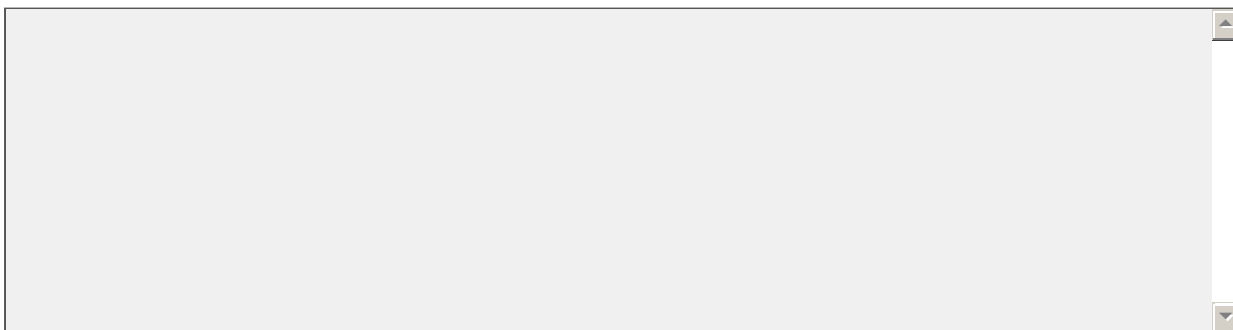
Comments



**16. Current educational policy efforts provide administrators with enough RESOURCES to effectively implement policies in their district or school.**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Comments

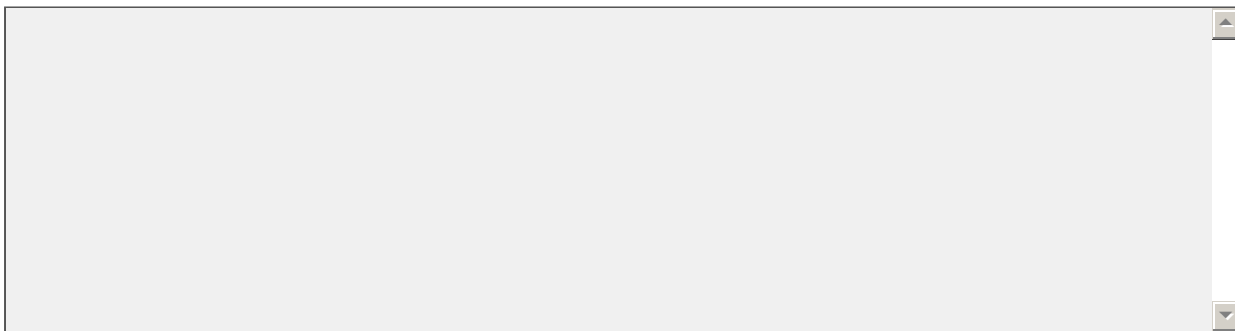


## Public School Administrators' Perceptions of the Relationship Between

**17. Current educational policy efforts provide administrators with enough TIME to effectively implement policies in their district or school.**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

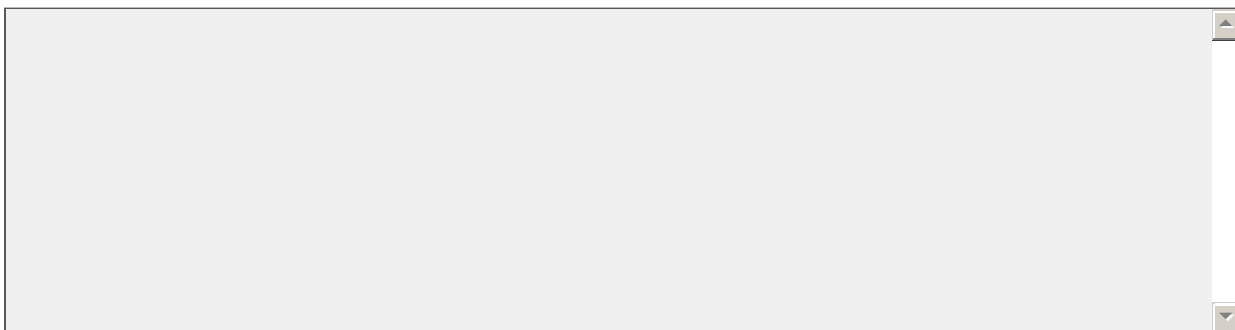
Comments



**18. Current educational policy efforts effectively promote positive SYSTEMIC CHANGE with regard to public education in the United States.**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Comments





## Public School Administrators' Perceptions of the Relationship Between

**19. Current educational policy efforts work to further legislative intent to CREATE a stronger educational system in the United States.**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Comments

**20. Current educational policy efforts effectively generate a COMPREHENSIVE AND EFFECTIVE plan for improving student achievement in U.S. schools.**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Comments

## Public School Administrators' Perceptions of the Relationship Between

**21. Current educational policy efforts have been effective in ASSISTING SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS in addressing the issue of student achievement in your district or school.**

- AStrongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Comments

**22. Current educational policy efforts have been responsible for promoting greater EQUITY for students regarding student achievement in your district or school.**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

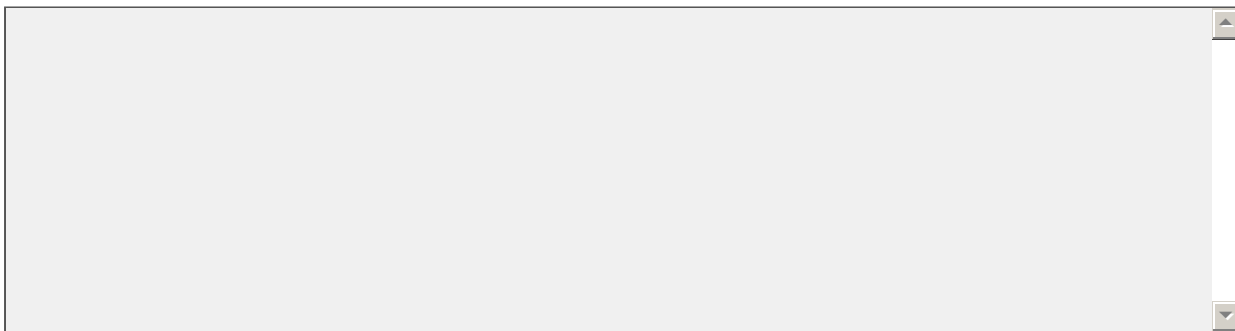
Comments

## Public School Administrators' Perceptions of the Relationship Between

**23. Current educational policy efforts have had a POSITIVE IMPACT on student achievement in your district or school.**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Comments



# Public School Administrators' Perceptions of the Relationship Between

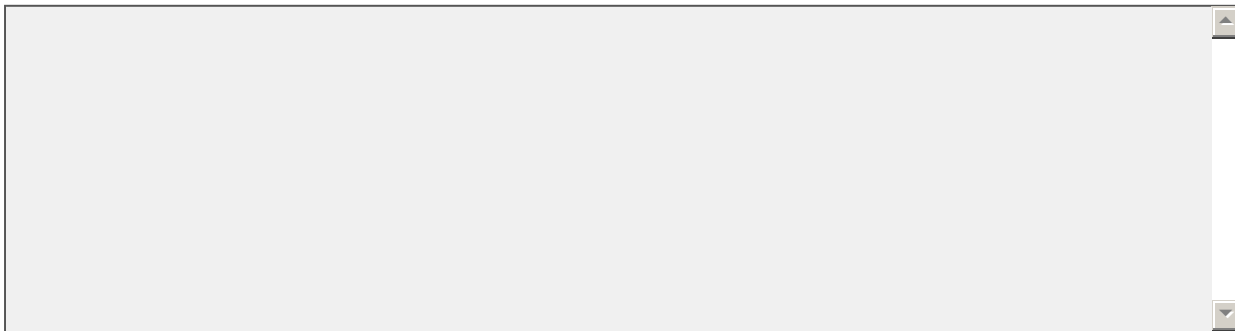
## Questions 24 - 36

The following questions are specific to Massachusetts anti bullying policy enacted in 2010.

**24. The REQUIREMENTS of Massachusetts' anti bullying policy enacted in 2010 (e.g., investigating, documenting, reporting) are effective in working to create a safer school environment.**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Comments



## Public School Administrators' Perceptions of the Relationship Between

**25. Massachusetts' anti bullying policy enacted in 2010 is effectively DESIGNED (i.e. language in statute, guidance on how a policy should to be implemented, the requirements for compliance) to reduce bullying in schools.**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Comments

**26. Massachusetts' anti bullying legislation enacted in 2010 effectively ANTICIPATES potential difficulties that administrators might encounter in implementing this policy in their district or school.**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

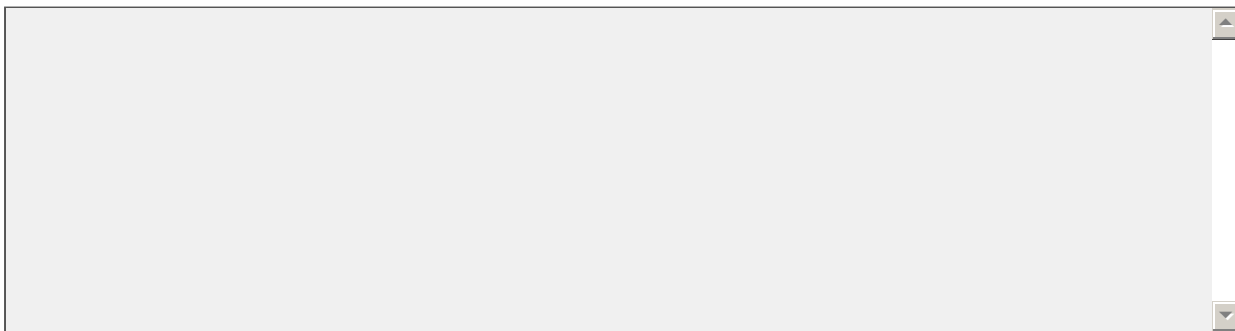
Comments

## Public School Administrators' Perceptions of the Relationship Between

**27. Massachusetts' anti bullying legislation enacted in 2010 provides FLEXIBILITY for administrators to react to unanticipated difficulties when implementing this policy in their district or school.**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

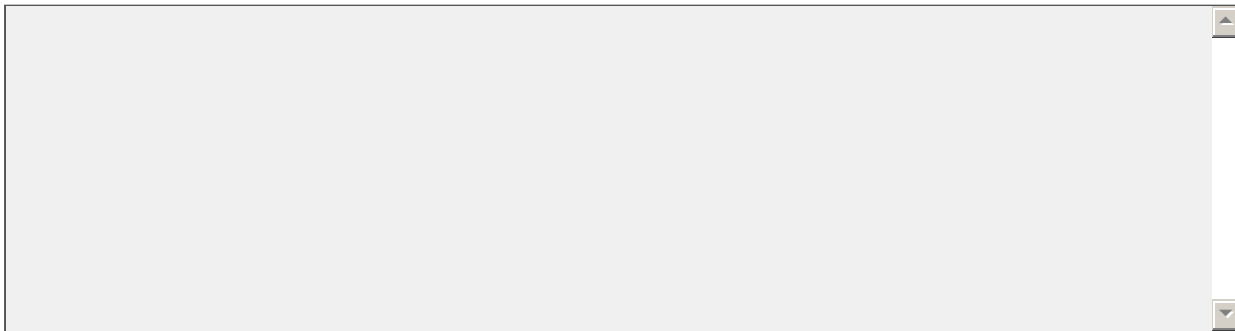
Comments



**28. Massachusetts' anti bullying legislation enacted in 2010 provides administrators with enough RESOURCES to effectively implement this policy.**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Comments



## Public School Administrators' Perceptions of the Relationship Between

**29. Massachusetts' anti bullying legislation provides administrators with enough TIME to effectively implement this policy in their district or school.**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Comments

**30. Massachusetts' anti bullying legislation enacted in 2010 effectively promotes SYSTEMIC CHANGE in order to build and sustain a safe bully free school environment.**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

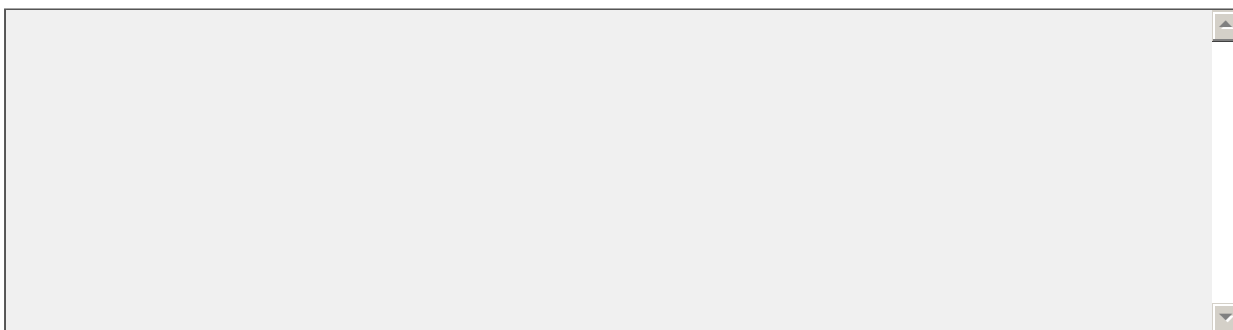
Comments

## Public School Administrators' Perceptions of the Relationship Between

**31. Massachusetts' anti bullying policy enacted in 2010 works to further legislative intent to CREATE a safe bully free school environment.**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

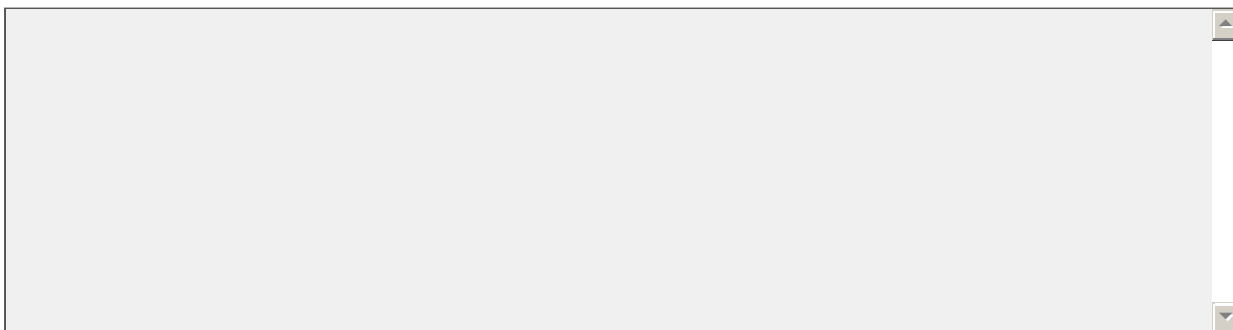
Comments



**32. Massachusetts' anti bullying policy enacted in 2010 generates a COMPREHENSIVE AND EFFECTIVE plan for reducing the incidents of bullying in Massachusetts' schools.**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Comments





## Public School Administrators' Perceptions of the Relationship Between

### **33. Massachusetts' anti bullying policy enacted in 2010 aids SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS in effectively addressing the issue of bullying in Massachusetts' schools.**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Comments

### **34. Massachusetts' anti bullying policy enacted in 2010 has been responsible for promoting greater EQUITY for students regarding the issue of bullying in Massachusetts' schools.**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Comments

## Public School Administrators' Perceptions of the Relationship Between

**35. Massachusetts' anti bullying policy enacted in 2010 has had a POSITIVE IMPACT leading to a reduction in the number of incidents of bullying in your district or school.**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Comments

**36. The FOCUS of Massachusetts' anti bullying policy enacted in 2010 (e.g., investigating, documenting, reporting) is necessary to address the issue of bullying in schools.**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Comments

## Public School Administrators' Perceptions of the Relationship Between

Questions 37-38 are for any additional information not captured in the surv...

**37. Please use the space below to share any additional thoughts regarding the Current Educational Policy Environment in the United States not captured by the previous questions.**

**38. Please use the space below to share any additional thoughts regarding Massachusetts' Anti bullying policy enacted in 2010 not captured by the previous questions.**

## Appendix B

## Reliability Test Data and Tables

**Leverage Points:****Reliability Statistics**

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.660	5

**Item-Total Statistics**

Survey Item	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item- Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
8.	12.20	7.000	.389	.619
10.	11.35	7.267	.332	.645
21.	12.13	6.895	.461	.587
24.	11.22	6.636	.494	.570
36.	11.26	6.914	.395	.617

**Design Features:****Reliability Statistics**

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.735	6

**Item-Total Statistics**

Survey Item	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item- Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
13.	11.17	10.044	.357	.732
16.	12.01	10.309	.510	.693
17.	11.92	10.582	.405	.716
25.	10.42	9.570	.480	.695
28.	11.41	8.762	.615	.653
29.	10.89	8.837	.497	.692

**Implementation Contingencies:****Reliability Statistics**

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.695	4

**Item-Total Statistics**

Survey Item	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item- Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
14.	6.98	3.961	.489	.628
15.	6.70	3.911	.455	.645
26.	6.29	3.533	.506	.613
27.	6.16	3.476	.475	.636

**Systems Change:****Reliability Statistics**

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.668	5

**Item-Total Statistics**

Survey Item	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item- Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
11.	11.37	7.882	.269	.683
18.	11.06	6.824	.534	.566
22.	10.75	7.424	.354	.647
30.	10.56	6.690	.529	.566
33.	10.56	7.026	.439	.609

**Positive Student Outcomes:****Reliability Statistics**

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.766	5

**Item-Total Statistics**

Survey Item	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item- Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
12.	11.59	7.568	.477	.744
19.	11.32	6.849	.575	.710
23.	11.50	7.219	.587	.707
34.	11.12	7.415	.534	.725
35.	11.20	7.390	.510	.733

**Policy Theory of Action:****Reliability Statistics**

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.655	4

**Item-Total Statistics**

Survey Item	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item- Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
9.	8.55	4.880	.270	.709
20.	8.20	4.808	.426	.594
31.	7.27	4.343	.540	.517
32.	7.67	4.228	.541	.512

## Appendix C

### Recruitment E-mails #1-6

#### E-mail #1

Dear Colleagues:

I am currently a doctoral candidate in the University of Hartford Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership, and I am hoping you will take a few minutes to assist me with the research process. The purpose of my study is to describe public school administrators' perceptions of the relationship between development and implementation of educational policy and whether polices being implemented in the current educational reform environment have the impact in our schools intended by policymakers. **This is an opportunity for you to express your opinions, the results of which have the potential to shape the policymaking process.**

It is my hope that you will consider participating in this study. Your participation in this study is voluntary, and your responses will be kept confidential. Those responses will not be associated with your name or your district and will only be reported in the aggregate. It is my hope that you will consider participating in this study.

Below you will find a link to an Internet-based survey utilizing Survey Monkey. If you choose to participate, it will take approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete the survey. Your completion of the survey constitutes consent to participate in the study and to use the information you supply for the dissertation as well as any presentations or publication of the findings.

Thank you in advance for taking the time to be a part of this research study. It is only with your support that this study can generate useful data that will hopefully be used to influence the policy development process. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me at any time. You may also contact my research advisor, Dr. Nienhusser, by e-mail at [nienhusse@hartford.edu](mailto:nienhusse@hartford.edu).

SURVEY LINK

Sincerely,

Todd H Gazda  
Doctoral Candidate  
[t\\_gazda@ludlowps.org](mailto:t_gazda@ludlowps.org)  
413-454-7096 (cell)

E-mail #2 – E-mail #5

Dear Colleagues:

You recently received an invitation from me to participate in a study designed to describe public school administrators' perceptions of the relationship between development and implementation of educational policy and whether policies being implemented in the current educational reform environment have the impact in our schools intended by policymakers.

It is my hope that you will consider participating in this study. Your participation in this study is voluntary, and your responses will be kept confidential. Those responses will not be associated with your name or your district and will only be reported in the aggregate. It is my hope that you will consider participating in this study.

To participate in the study, simply click on the link below, and you will be directed to the online survey. Simply follow the directions outlined at the top of the survey that should take approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete. Your completion of the survey constitutes consent to participate in the study and to use the information you supply for the dissertation as well as any presentations or publication of the findings.

Thank you in advance for taking the time to be a part of this research study. It is only with your support that this study can generate useful data that will hopefully be used to influence the policy development process. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me at any time. You may also contact my research advisor, Dr. Nienhusser, by e-mail at [nienhusse@hartford.edu](mailto:nienhusse@hartford.edu).

SURVEY LINK

Sincerely,

Todd H Gazda  
Doctoral Candidate  
[t\\_gazda@ludlowps.org](mailto:t_gazda@ludlowps.org)  
413-454-7096 (cell)



## E-mail #6

Dear Colleague:

This is your **final opportunity** to participate in a study designed to describe public school administrators' perceptions of the relationship between development and implementation of educational policy and whether policies being implemented in the current educational reform environment have the impact in our schools intended by policymakers.

It is my hope that you will consider participating in this study. Your participation in this study is voluntary, and your responses will be kept confidential. Those responses will not be associated with your name or your district and will only be reported in the aggregate. It is my hope that you will consider participating in this study.

To participate in the study, simply click on the link below, and you will be directed to the online survey. Simply follow the directions outlined at the top of the survey that should take approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete. Your completion of the survey constitutes consent to participate in the study and to use the information you supply for the dissertation as well as any presentations or publication of the findings.

Thank you in advance for taking the time to be a part of this research study. It is only with your support that this study can generate useful data that will hopefully be used to influence the policy development process. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me at any time. You may also contact my research advisor, Dr. Nienhusser, by e-mail at [nienhusse@hartford.edu](mailto:nienhusse@hartford.edu).

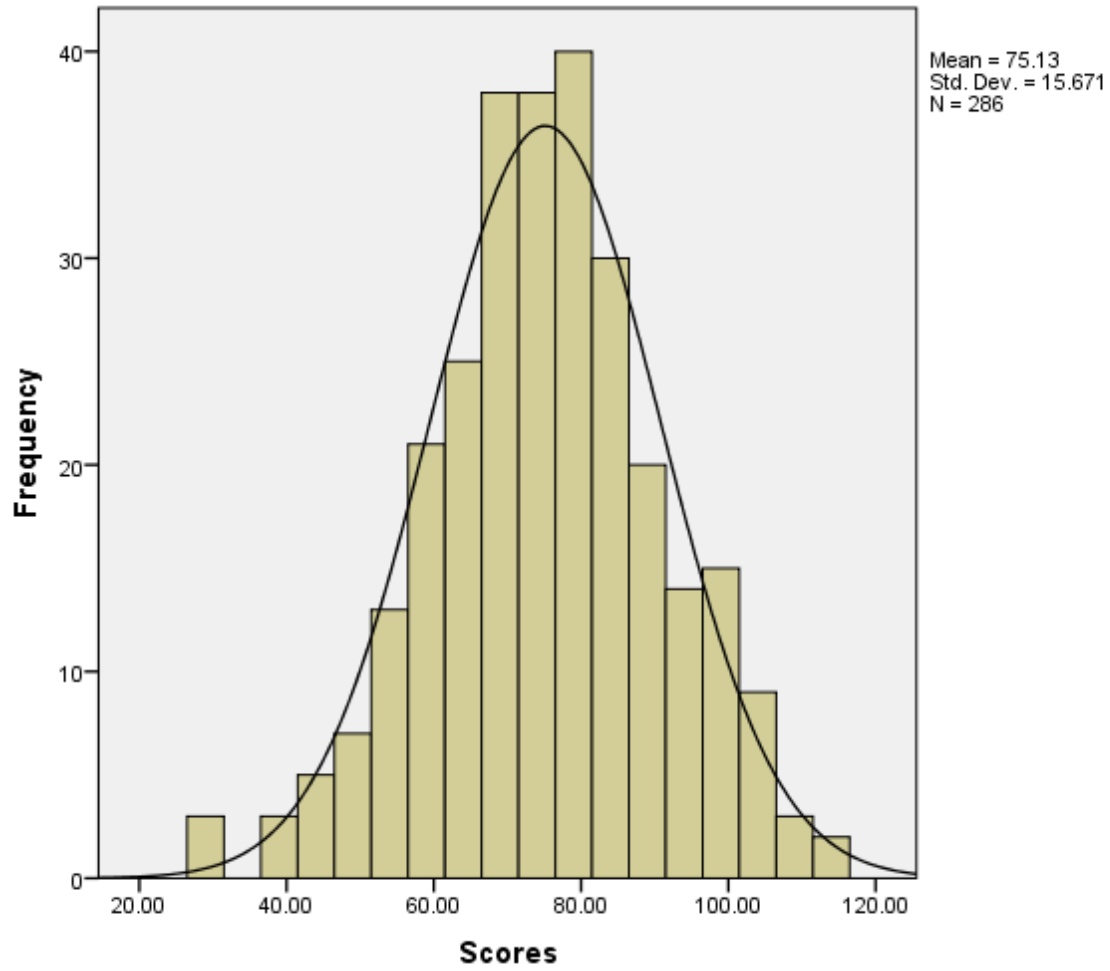
SURVEY LINK

Sincerely,

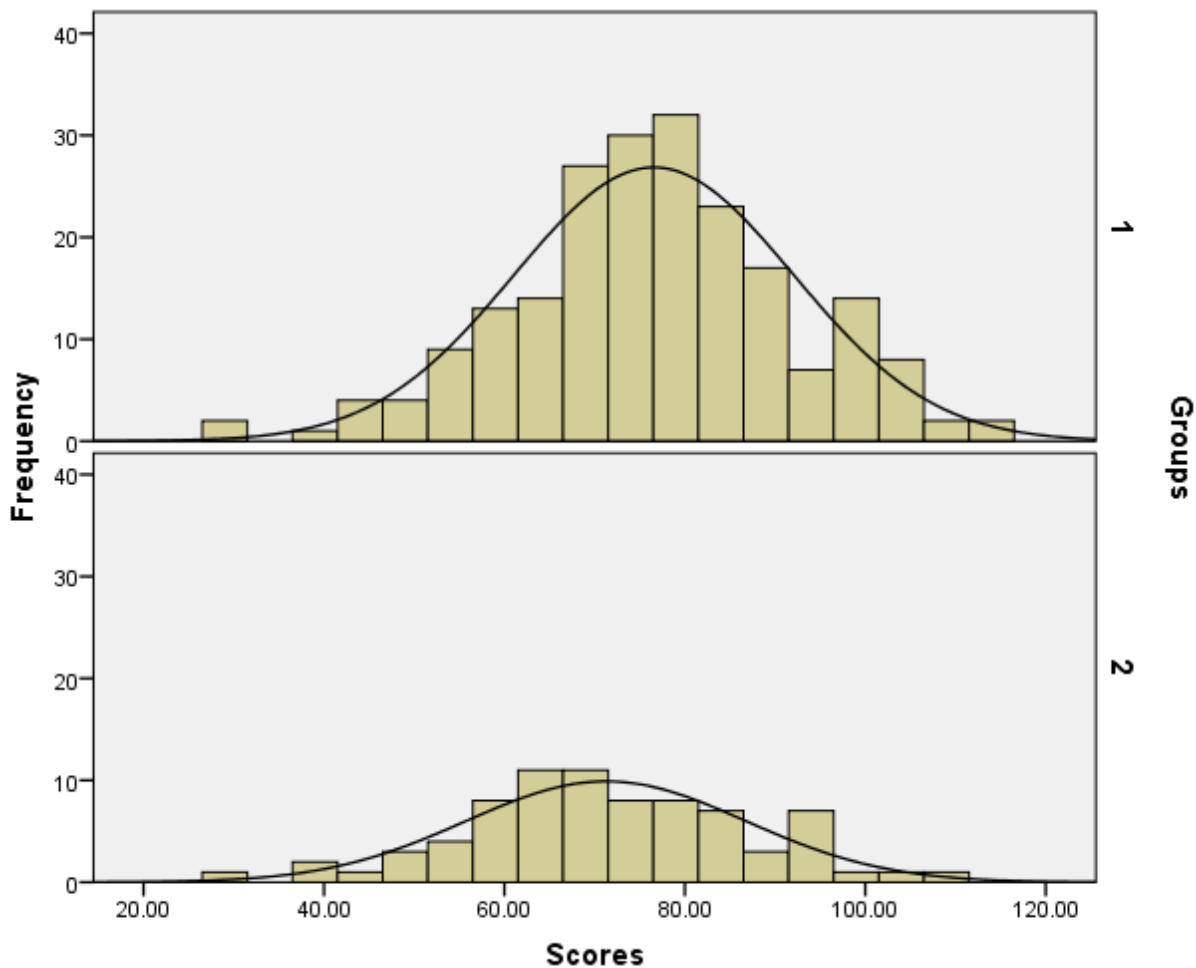
Todd H Gazda  
Doctoral Candidate  
[t\\_gazda@ludlowps.org](mailto:t_gazda@ludlowps.org)  
413-454-7096 (cell)

## Appendix D

## Demographic Group Histograms and Normal Distribution Test Tables

**All Participants:**

### Superintendent and Principal



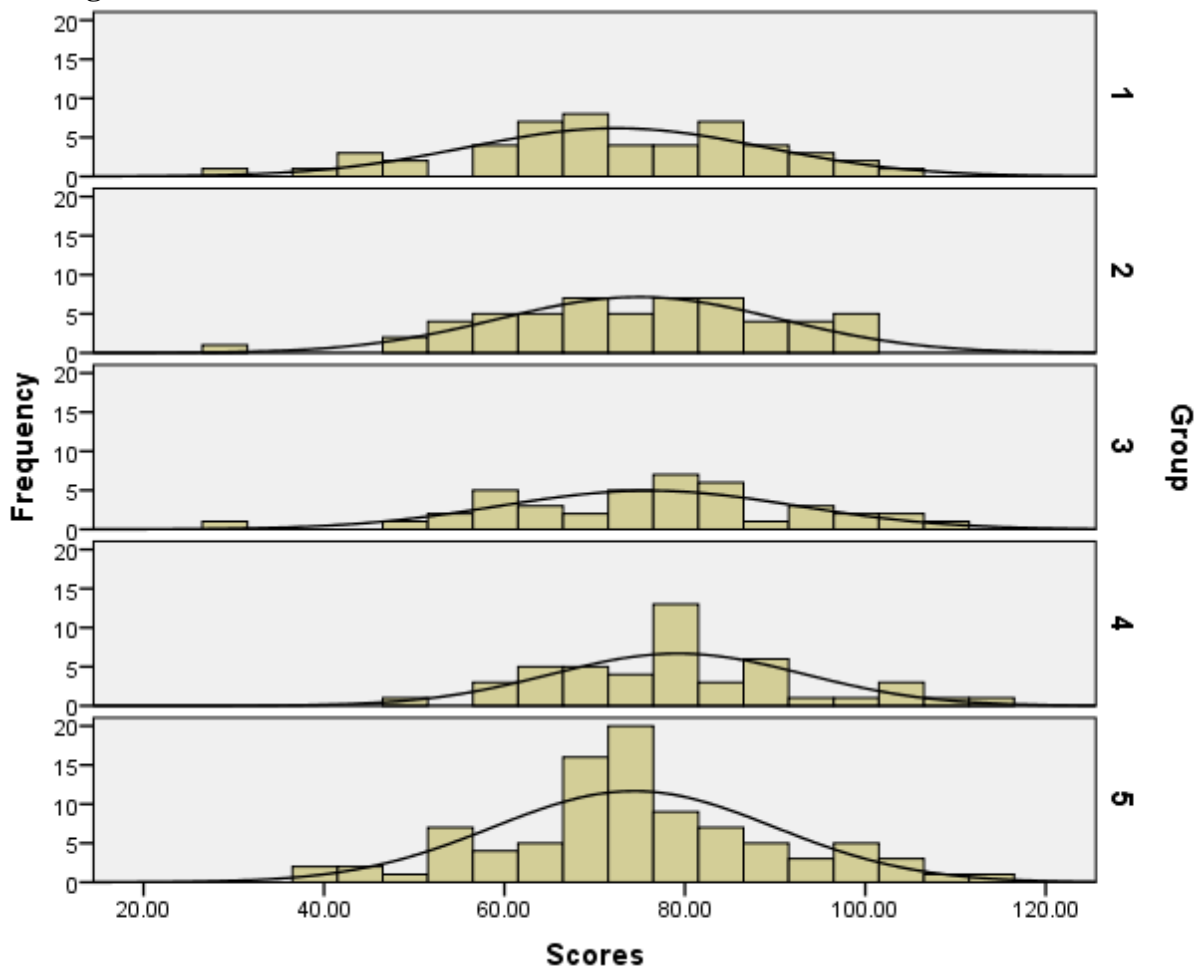
Group 1 = Principals  
 Group 2 = Superintendents

Ranks				
	Groups	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Scores	1.00	209	151.35	31631.50
	2.00	77	122.20	9409.50
	Total	286		

Test Statistics <sup>a</sup>	
	Scores
Mann-Whitney U	6406.500
Wilcoxon W	9409.500
Z	-2.644
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.008

a. Grouping Variable: Groups

**Geographic Region**



Group 1 = Boston Metro Area  
 Group 2 = Central  
 Group 3 = North Shore  
 Group 4 = South Sho  
 Group 5 = Western

Ranks			
	Group	N	Mean Rank
Scores	1.00	51	131.69
	2.00	56	143.54
	3.00	41	149.50
	4.00	47	162.76
	5.00	91	137.45
Total		286	

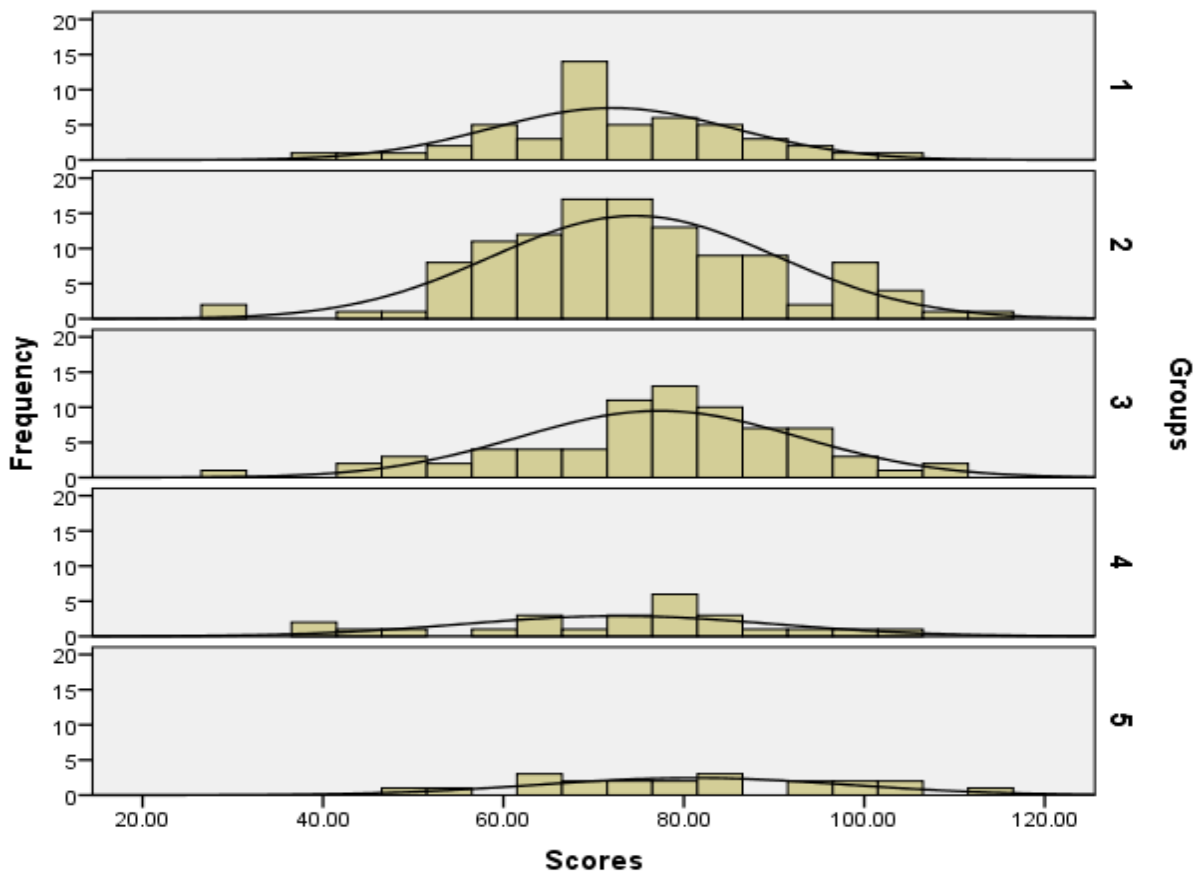
Test Statistics <sup>a,b</sup>	
	Scores
Chi-Square	4.294
df	4
Asymp. Sig.	.368

a. Kruskal Wallis Test

b. Grouping Variable:

Group

### District Student Population



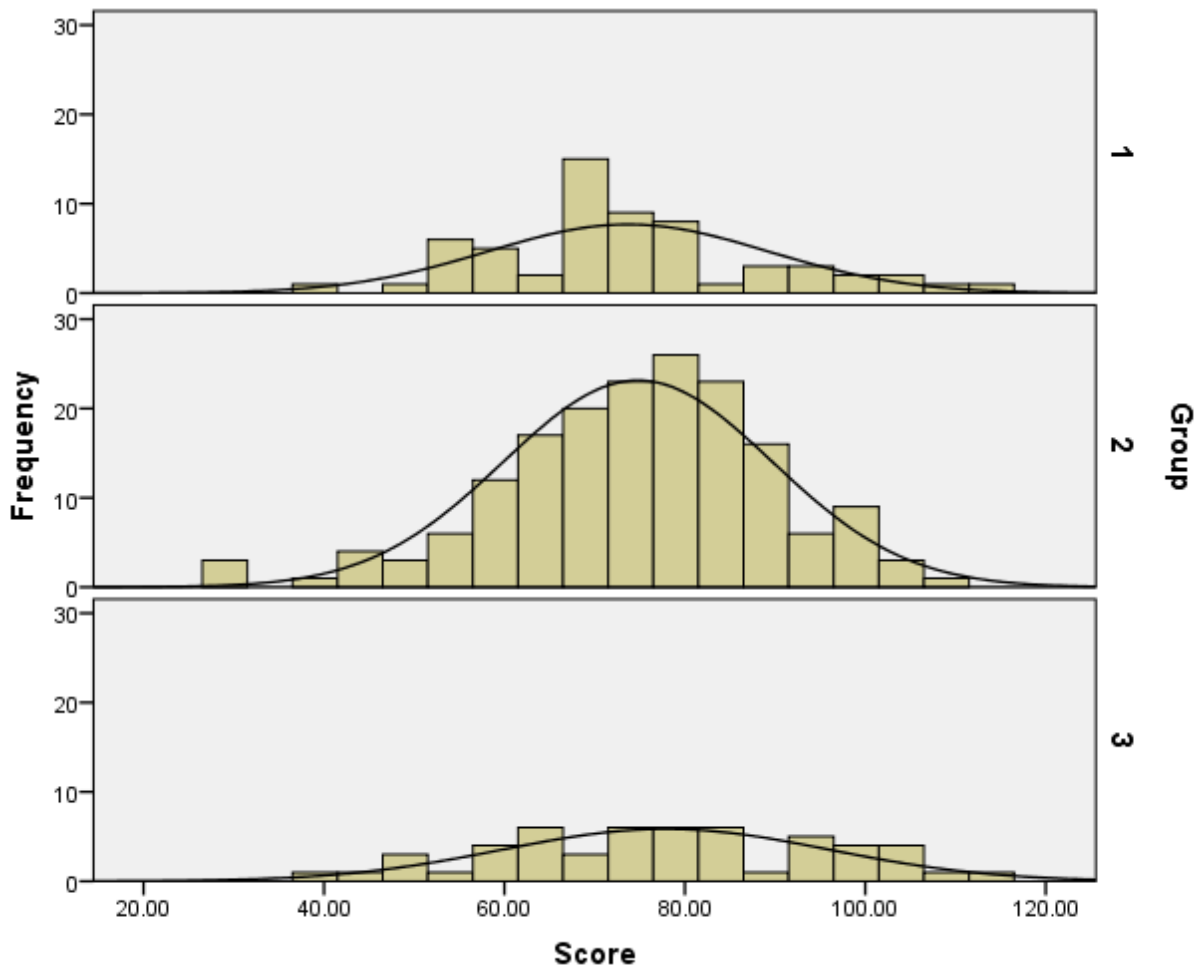
- Group 1 = < 1000 students
- Group 2 = 10010 – 3000 students
- Group 3 = 3001 – 6000 students
- Group 4 = 6001 – 10,000 students
- Group 5 = 10,001 + students

Ranks			
	Groups	N	Mean Rank
Scores	1.00	50	125.70
	2.00	116	138.19
	3.00	74	158.53
	4.00	25	137.88
	5.00	21	168.95
Total		286	

Test Statistics <sup>a,b</sup>	
	Scores
Chi-Square	7.349
df	4
Asymp. Sig.	.119

a. Kruskal Wallis Test  
 b. Grouping Variable:  
 Groups

### Suburban, Urban, and Rural Districts



Group 1 = Rural  
 Group 2 = Suburban  
 Group 3 = Urban

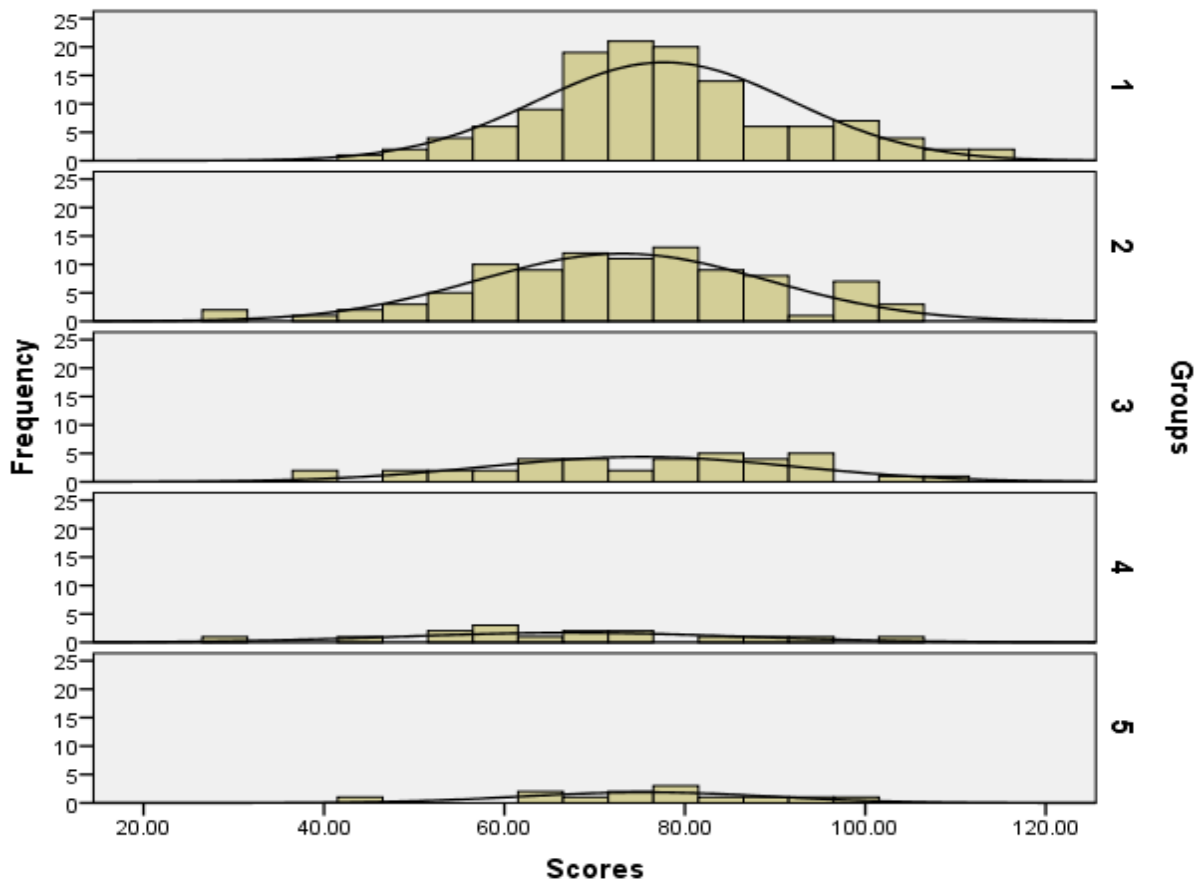
Ranks			
	Group	N	Mean Rank
Score	1.00	60	130.96
	2.00	173	143.98
	3.00	53	156.13
	Total	286	

Test Statistics <sup>a,b</sup>	
	Score
Chi-Square	2.624
df	2
Asymp. Sig.	.269

a. Kruskal Wallis Test

b. Grouping Variable:  
 Group

### Years of Experience in Position



- Group 1 = 0 – 5 years
- Group 2 = 6 – 10 years
- Group 3 = 11 – 15 years
- Group 4 = 16 – 20 years
- Group 5 = 21 + years

Ranks			
	Groups	N	Mean Rank
Scores	1.00	123	154.68
	2.00	96	133.52
	3.00	38	147.14
	4.00	16	103.91
	5.00	13	149.50
Total		286	

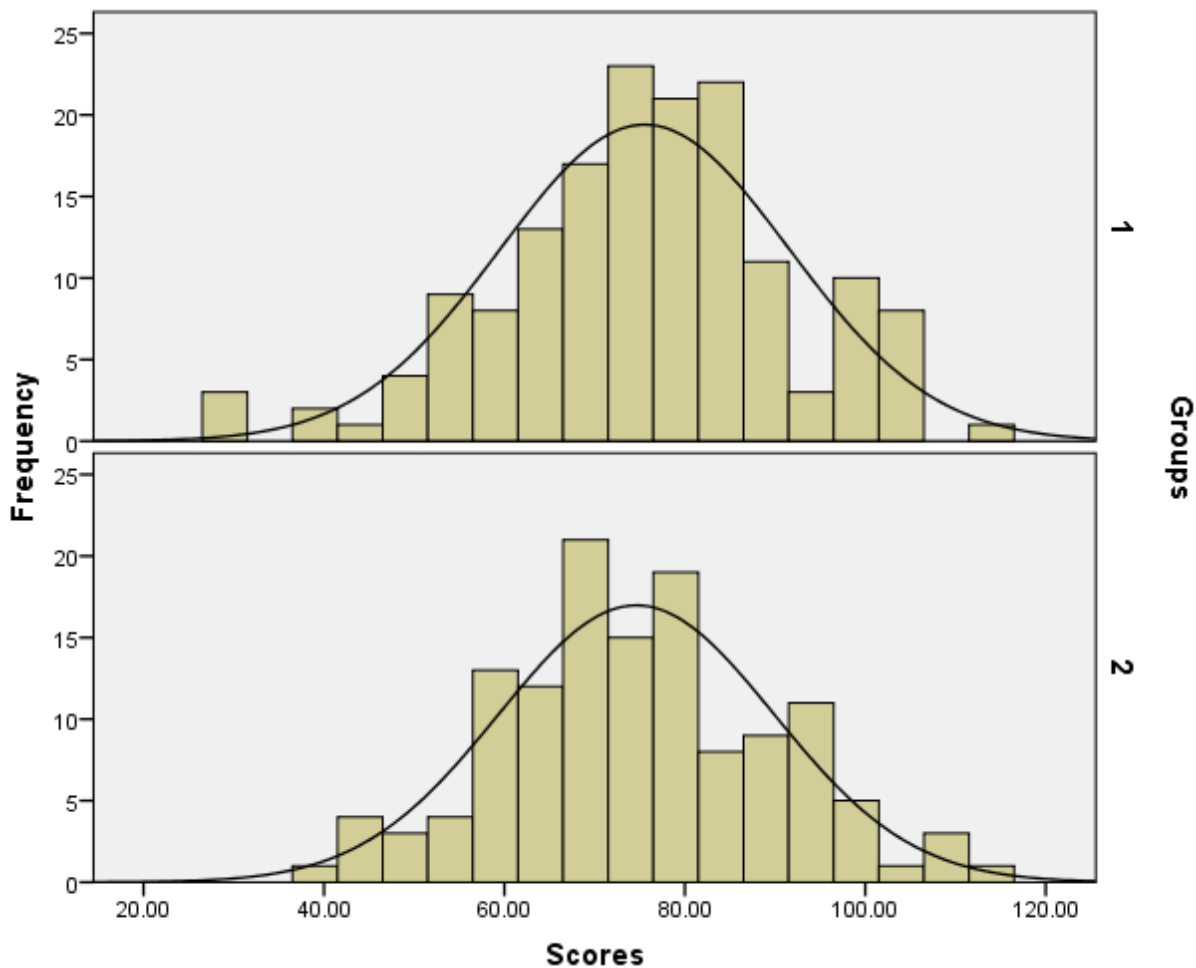
Test Statistics <sup>a,b</sup>	
	Scores
Chi-Square	7.459
df	4
Asymp. Sig.	.114

a. Kruskal Wallis Test

b. Grouping Variable:

Groups

**Male and Female**



Group 1 = Female  
 Group 2 = Male

Ranks				
	Groups	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Scores	1.00	156	147.53	23014.00
	2.00	130	138.67	18027.00
	Total	286		

Test Statistics <sup>a</sup>	
	Scores
Mann-Whitney U	9512.000
Wilcoxon W	18027.000
Z	-.902
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.367

a. Grouping Variable: Groups



## Appendix E

### Permission to conduct the study



UNIVERSITY OF HARTFORD

Human Subjects Committee

November 24, 2014

Todd H. Gazda  
190 Mohawk Road  
West Hartford, CT 06117

Dear Todd Gazda:

Upon review by the Human Subjects Committee of your modifications/clarifications, your research "*Massachusetts Public School Administrators' Perceptions of the Development and Implementation of Educational Policy*," has been approved according to conditions set forth in federal regulation 45 CFR 46.101(b), and is exempt from further review by this Committee.

This approval expires November 24, 2015. If you plan to continue the research after that date, please notify the HSC at least one month in advance.

Please keep in mind that it is your responsibility to notify and seek approval from this Committee of any modifications to your project, and that it is your responsibility to report to this Committee, any adverse events that occur related to this project. Reporting forms are available online at the HSC website, [www.hartford.edu/hsc](http://www.hartford.edu/hsc).

This institution has an Assurance of Compliance on file with the Office of Human Research Protections (Federalwide Assurance FWA00003578).

Congratulations and good luck.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "S. Misovich", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Stephen J. Misovich, Ph.D.  
Chair, Human Subjects Committee  
Cc: K. Nienhusser

## Appendix E

### Informed Consent Form

#### **Informed Consent Form: Questionnaire**

The purpose of this study is to describe public school administrators' perceptions of the relationship between development and implementation of educational policy and whether policies being implemented in the current educational reform environment meet the criteria for high leverage policies.

- Completion of this survey is voluntary and withdrawal from participation in this study will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.
- Your completion of the survey constitutes consent to participate in the study and to use the information you supply for the dissertation as well as any presentations or publications of the findings.
- Risks of participation in the survey are not greater, considering probability and magnitude, than those ordinarily encountered in daily life. There are no apparent physical risks.
- It will take you about **10 to 15 minutes** to complete the survey.
- By participating in this study, you may add to the existing knowledge base on administrators' perceptions of the relationship between development and implementation of educational policy.
- Your name will not be associated with your answers.
- All your answers will be grouped with the answers of others.
- The data will not be coded in any identifiable way.
- All survey data will be reported in aggregate.
- All survey responses will be stored and password protected in a Survey Monkey account to which only the researcher has access.
- All research data will be retained for 5 years from completion of the study.
- If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the University of Hartford Human Subjects Committee (HSC) at 860.768.4721. The HSC is a group of people who review research studies and protect the rights of people involved in research. Thank you for participating. If you have any questions about this survey, you may contact:

**If you have any questions please don't hesitate to contact my research advisor or me.**

**Researcher**

Todd H. Gazda  
190 Mohawk Dr.  
West Hartford, CT  
Cell: (413) 454-7096  
E-mail: t\_gazda@ludlowps.org

**Faculty Advisor**

Kenny Nienhusser, Ed.D.  
Assistant Professor  
Department of Educational Leadership  
Phone: (860) 768-4411  
E-mail: nienhuse@hartford.edu

**Thank You!**