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The Perceptions of Missouri High School
Principals in Regard to the Missouri
Learning Standards

by

Christopher Lee Kell

October 2016

A Dissertation submitted to the Education Faculty of Lindenwood University in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education
School of Education

The Perceptions of Missouri High School
Principals in Regard to the Missouri
Learning Standards

by

Christopher Lee Kell

This Dissertation has been approved as partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education
Lindenwood University, School of Education



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Declaration of Originality

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree.

Full Legal Name: Christopher Lee Kell

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to elicit the perceptions of high school principals regarding state education standards and whether or not increasing education standards has a positive impact on student achievement. Missouri adopted a new set of standards which placed academic focus on fewer topics per subject and required teachers to create lessons that increased critical thinking within the classroom (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [MODESE], 2013b). To identify how the new standards might affect student achievement, four research questions were asked as part of this study. As a result of these questions, findings showed perceptions of the Missouri Learning Standards were more favorable than those associated with Common Core. It was believed among participants of this study that school districts have to develop professional development programs which provide information relevant to instruction and are organized around district goals. Data collected exposed student achievement is more likely to increase if new standards cause school districts to focus on specific goals and if teachers fully understand how to teach the new standards. By failing to adequately prepare teachers, school districts will struggle to properly prepare students for life after high school. Through a renewed focus on teacher comprehension of education standards, school districts can increase student achievement deficiencies and increase the number of students who graduate college- and career-ready.

Table of Contents

Abstract	iii
List of Tables	vii
Chapter One: Introduction	1
Background of the Study	1
Theoretical Framework	6
Statement of the Problem	7
Purpose of the Study	9
Research Questions	10
Significance of the Study	11
Definition of Key Terms	11
Limitations and Assumptions	13
Summary	14
Chapter Two: Review of Literature	16
Theoretical Framework	17
The History of Common Core.....	19
What is Common Core?.....	20
States Make a Switch to Common Core	23
Preparing for and Implementing Common Core	25
Common Core Loses Support	27
Missouri Votes to Reject Common Core	28
The Missouri Learning Standards	30
Preparing for and Implementing the Missouri Learning Standards.....	32

Professional Development and Student Achievement	34
Common Core’s Effects on Student Achievement	36
Common Core’s Positive Effects on Student Achievement..	37
Common Core’s Negative Effects on Student Achievement	39
College and Career Readiness.....	41
The Importance of College Readiness	43
The Importance of Career Readiness	44
Summary	46
Chapter Three: Methodology	48
Problem and Purpose Overview.....	49
Research Questions	49
Research Design.....	50
Ethical Considerations.....	51
Population and Sample	52
Instrumentation	53
Data Collection.....	54
Data Analysis	55
Summary	55
Chapter Four: Analysis of Data.....	57
Organization of Data Analysis.....	58
Analysis of Qualitative Data	58
Interview Question One.....	61
Interview Question Two.....	63

Interview Question Three.....	68
Interview Question Four.....	71
Interview Question Five	75
Interview Question Six.....	78
Interview Question Seven.....	81
Interview Question Eight.....	83
Interview Question Nine.....	86
Interview Question 10	89
Summary	93
Chapter Five: Summary and Conclusions	94
Findings	95
Conclusions	98
Implications for Practice	102
Recommendations for Future Research	104
Summary	105
Appendix A	108
Appendix B	110
Appendix C	111
Appendix D	112
Appendix E	113
References	114
Vita	125

List of Tables

Table 1. <i>Interview Participants</i>	53
Table 2. <i>Participants' Years of Administrative Experience</i>	60

Chapter One: Introduction

Preparing students for success after high school has been revealed as one of the more difficult tasks asked of public educators today (Blackburn & Williamson, 2013). In 2010, in an attempt to meet the needs of today's students and to better prepare students for college expectations, the Missouri legislature voted to implement the Common Core State Standards across the state (Grossman, Reyna, & Shipton, 2011). As a direct link between education standards and student achievement became difficult to determine, many states rethought how they would approach student transition into the college classroom (Deloza, 2013). Unable to adequately prove how increasing education standards affect student achievement, researchers have continued to look for answers (Firmender, Gavin, & McCoach, 2014).

In an attempt to find these answers and to identify the impact state education standards have on student achievement, perceptions of high school principals in regards to education standards were analyzed. Chapter One of this study includes background information relating to how increased education standards impact student achievement, the purpose of the study, and an introduction of the theoretical framework behind the research. Chapter One also includes definitions of terms relevant to the study and an introduction of four research questions.

Background of the Study

In 2010, the Missouri legislature voted to implement a new education curriculum centered on the Common Core State Standards Initiative in an attempt to increase student achievement (Campbell, 2014). The Common Core State Standards were established in 2010 in a united effort led by the National Governors Association, the Council of Chief

State School Officers, and other not-for-profit groups who were interested in increasing student achievement (Bidwell, 2014a). Backers of the initiative believed providing students with a set of standards that increased instructional rigor would promote creativity in the classroom, increase depth of classroom lessons, allow for additional collaborative learning, and foster equity within the public school system (Long, 2013). With the belief a more challenging set of standards would reinforce education goals across the state, Missouri's state board of education elected to approve the use of the Common Core State Standards to help improve college and career readiness (Berry, 2014).

The Common Core State Standards, more commonly referred to as Common Core, originated from the collective work of teachers, administrators, and education experts in an attempt to create a more consistent classroom setting (Grossman et al., 2011). The idea behind a common set of standards was to present parents and teachers with a collective understanding of classroom expectations and to provide students a curriculum that would help them graduate college- and career-ready (Bidwell, 2014c). Making the switch to Common Core was meant to be beneficial to the educational process and was never intended to overwhelm administrators or classroom teachers by completely changing what was taught (Schaffhauser, 2013).

By the start of 2014, the Common Core State Standards had been adopted by 44 states (Baker, 2014). Missouri voted to implement Common Core in order to align state standards to college and career readiness, to provide higher-level thinking skills, and to take advantage of a shared curriculum among states (Grossman et al., 2011). Initially, classes affected by the changes only included math and language arts, with the potential

of other classes being added in the future if the standards proved to be successful (Willard, 2013). Despite strong efforts by state politicians to convince voters to support Common Core, many educators in Missouri questioned the initiative and argued for politicians to address state curriculum concerns in a different manner (Berry, 2014).

In the end, the potential of receiving part of \$4.35 billion of federal funding for “Race to the Top” was not enough to convince the state to change the educational goals of Missouri (Miller & Hanna, 2014). Common Core was never fully implemented in Missouri, as parents and school districts turned against the initiative and started demanding drastic changes to the state curriculum (Crouch, 2013). During the summer of 2014, the Missouri legislature voted not to implement Common Core and instead began work on developing a set of more rigorous standards that would be used exclusively by Missouri schools (Thompson, 2015).

After turning down Common Core, Missouri’s board of education chose not to overhaul all curriculum but instead looked to make changes that could be applied with little effect on everyday classroom operations (Reischman, 2015). Aiming to keep curriculum changes to a minimum, Missouri school districts aligned curriculum for the upcoming school year with standards which were already in place, the Common Core State Standards (Stuckey, 2014). As education committees worked to revise and approve new education standards for the state, Missouri’s board of education launched the Missouri Learning Standards in all public schools, with the intention these standards would serve as a model for instruction (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [MODESE], 2015c).

By signing a bill to revise standards, Missouri Governor Jay Nixon showed he agreed with constituents Common Core was flawed and demonstrated to the people of Missouri he was committed to improving rigor and accountability in classrooms across the state (Bidwell, 2014b). Placing the focus on teaching skills and knowledge students would need prior to graduating high school, the 2014 version of the Missouri Learning Standards continued to incorporate portions of Common Core and addressed course material in the following areas:

1. English Language Arts Common Core State Standards.
2. Mathematics Common Core State Standards.
3. New Generation Science Standards.
4. New Generation History/Social Studies Standards.
5. Non-content Core Standards. (MODESE, 2013a, p. 22)

By including portions of Common Core, the 2014 version of Missouri Learning Standards outlined what knowledge and skills were required for a student to be successful in college or a career (MODESE, 2015b).

The 2014 version of the standards aligned with the Show-Me Standards, which were adopted in 1996, and provided school administrators and teachers a route to achieve educational expectations in each grade (MODESE, 2015b). A newer version of the Missouri Learning Standards was approved in April of 2016 by the Missouri State Board of Education and were implemented in Missouri classrooms at the beginning of the 2016-2017 school year (MODESE, 2016a, 2016b). Throughout the writing process for the new standards, the Missouri State Board of Education received more than 3,600 comments from lawmakers, educators, and parents regarding proposed changes with hope the new

Missouri Learning Standards would lead to increased student achievement (MODESE, 2016b).

The idea increased expectations for students would result in higher productivity after graduation forced many states to adopt more rigorous education standards within their school districts (Barone, 2014). As districts looked for ways to increase student achievement, various federal programs were created which promised encouraging results for districts as long as certain implementation guidelines were followed (Jacobsen & Saultz, 2012). Despite all the planning that took place prior to implementing state-mandated standards, many questions were left unanswered about the impact increased standards would have on education (Krashen, 2014).

The lack of evidence that Common Core or similar standards would have a positive effect on increasing student achievement was a cause for concern among many in the education community (Firmender et al., 2014). Supporters of increased rigor in education standards claimed schools needed higher academic requirements, as students were not graduating college- and career-ready (Bidwell, 2014c). Those against increasing education standards argued the current push for increased standards was no different than past attempts to reform education (Krashen, 2014). Other educators believed to achieve a successful implementation of more rigorous education standards, school districts would not only need to increase instructional rigor, but raise student expectations and promote increased support from the community as a whole (Blackburn & Williamson, 2013).

Research conducted by Kingsley Davis and Wilbert Moore (1945) was utilized for this study to gain a better understanding of the perceptions held by high school

principals toward state education standards and whether or not increasing education standards will have a positive impact on student achievement. Through their research, Davis and Moore (1945) theorized one's level of education is directly linked to his or her placement in society and that motivated individuals achieve more than non-motivated individuals. Individuals who have acquired more skills during their lifetimes are then rewarded within society with more socially appealing positions than those who fail to achieve these skills (Davis & Moore, 1945).

Theoretical Framework

In 1945, noted sociologists Kingsley Davis and Wilbert Moore argued society was divided into different classes because of the abilities and skills individuals possess. Together they developed the Functional Theory of Stratification on the premise individuals have a pre-determined placement in society based on their motivation to acquire skills, and these individuals will either move up the social hierarchy or be forced to accept lower positions within society (Davis & Moore, 1945). Davis and Moore (1945) believed if all positions of employment involved duties that required equal talent and abilities, it would make no difference to society who held those jobs. Furthermore, Davis and Moore (1945) claimed unequal social and economic rewards are an “unconsciously evolved device” in which society ensures talented individuals supply the motivation to undertake training, which guarantees important social roles are filled by qualified individuals (p. 242).

Adding to Davis and Moore's theory, researcher Randall Collins (1971) looked to clarify how technological changes can impact the societal importance of education. By using the Functional Theory of Stratification, researchers developed a subtype category

known as the Technical-Function Theory to better explain education's importance in a modern society (Collins, 1971). It was argued under the Technical-Function Theory skill requirements for jobs constantly increase, which in turn causes a decrease in the number of jobs available to individuals who do not possess skills necessary for more demanding employment (Collins, 1971).

Due to continued advancement in technology and the higher skill levels required for the workforce, education requirements for employment have continually risen, requiring more of the population to obtain some post-secondary education (Collins, 1971). Collins (1971) believed by increasing opportunities for education, it should be expected educational requirements for employment will continue to increase as well. For more rigorous education standards to have an impact on student achievement and to provide the skills required for all students to find success after graduation, school administrators and professional development opportunities must focus on the interests of the entire district instead of the interests of a few (Elmore, 2002). By utilizing pre-existing research to form the theoretical approach for this study, it is possible to provide a more precise idea of how students can obtain the skills needed to be employed in an ever-changing technological society and to show what impact increased education standards can have on academic achievement.

Statement of the Problem

Missouri's acceptance of Common Core and then the state's quick withdrawal from the program created great confusion and anxiety among the educational community (Stuckey, 2014). Many suggestions on how to improve the standards in Missouri were presented, but a decision on what type of changes would benefit Missouri's students the

most took time to pinpoint (Crouch, 2013). In addition, confusion was amplified within school districts as researchers failed to provide an exact understanding of how increased education standards would impact student achievement (Crouch, 2013).

The state's attempt to increase education standards has created a challenge for teachers (Martin, 2015). As new standards were being finalized and introduced, a need developed for educators to identify what type of learning was taking place in their classrooms and for teachers to adjust expectations in order to meet the needs of an ever-changing world (Tomlinson, 2013). To meet these needs, improvements to district priorities were essential to produce more applicable professional development opportunities for teachers, to provide better instructional materials to teachers and students, and to encourage district administrators to improve technology use (Meeder & Suddreth, 2012). For districts to see success from new standards, educators must identify how to decrease the achievement gap that exists among districts and find ways to create equality within the classroom (Kaplan & Peterson, 2013).

By placing a focus on fewer topics, Common Core was intended to reduce the disparity that existed across districts lines and to increase parity among school districts (Burroughs & Schmidt, 2012). The Common Core State Standards Initiative claimed students would no longer have their long-term academic futures determined by one teacher challenging students with difficult content, while another classroom teacher spent time focusing on less challenging material (Blackburn & Williamson, 2013). If the vision of Common Core had been realized in Missouri, the achievement gap between classrooms could have decreased and all students within the state might have been provided an equal opportunity for success after graduation (Grossman et al., 2011). By

implementing the new Missouri Learning Standards at the beginning of the 2016-2017 school year, Missouri aimed to decrease the achievement gap among districts by promoting more rigorous and demanding standards across the state (MODESE, 2014).

A need has existed for school administrators to identify ways to improve professional development within Missouri's education system (Frazer, Porter, & Ramsey, 2014). For the new standards to be successful, the needs of students must be identified, and the standards must lead to increased student achievement in ways that better prepare high school graduates to be college- and career-ready (Barone, 2014). To solve the existing curricular problems districts face, it is necessary the opinions of school administrators be analyzed to pinpoint thoughts on how increasing standards impact student achievement (Bonner, 2014).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify the perceptions of high school principals regarding state education standards and whether or not increasing education standards has a positive impact on student achievement. Many advocates for increased education standards have expressed opinions new standards will solve several of the problems educators have faced (Kelly, Napierala, & Uecker, 2014). In a study conducted by the Fordham Foundation, an advocate group for Common Core acknowledged the new standards were no more rigorous than some state standards already being taught (Barone, 2014). Some educators believed to effectively implement higher education standards, emphasis must be placed on increasing teacher desire and the level of instructional rigor within the classroom (Blackburn & Williamson, 2013). By identifying possible deficiencies in more rigorous education standards, school districts have been provided an

opportunity to address any shortcomings of new standards before negative impact on student learning occurs (Kibbe, 2014).

The current desire for increasing education standards originated as a goal to aid all students in gaining the understanding and abilities they would need to be college- and career-ready at the time of graduation (Barone, 2014). Community discontent has often coincided with state government attempts to introduce new criteria for schools to follow, as reform is often questioned by individuals against the change (Barone, 2014). School districts hold a responsibility to design, implement, and instruct curriculum which provides a quality education to all students (McLaughlin & Overturf, 2012). Because of this responsibility, school administrators must differentiate between success and failure of curriculum changes (Schaffhauser, 2013).

This study included the opportunity for review of how an ever-changing society can increase education standards to better prepare high school graduates to be college- and career-ready. The researcher allowed for recommendations to be made for how to minimize potential damage that could result if the new standards do not increase student achievement, as advocates claim it will do. An obligation exists to identify reasons why new state standards may fail to be successful, and it is essential for the success of the public school system that these problems are identified through studies such as this one.

Research questions. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are high school principals' perceptions of the Missouri Learning Standards in comparison to the Common Core Standards?
2. What are the perceptions of high school principals in regard to professional development and the Missouri Learning Standards?

3. What are high school principals' perceptions of the Missouri Learning Standards and student achievement?

4. What are high school principals' perceptions of the Missouri Learning Standards and college and career readiness?

Significance of the Study

There is an importance for all district stakeholders to understand what impact education standards have on increasing student achievement. This study provided an opportunity to review the differing opinions of high school principals in regard to the role education standards play in preparing high school graduates to be college- and career-ready. Educators must recognize and identify the potential growth that could occur if researchers prove that by increasing education standards in the classroom, student achievement will also increase.

To address the educational needs of all students, states have explored ways to improve the lowest-achieving school districts (Morgan & Raines, 2015). School systems do not need to create students who are good at school, but instead create an environment that engages learners (Wright, 2013). For this to happen, school districts must work together with parents, elected officials, and all other district stakeholders to identify issues preventing potential increases in student achievement. The information collected in this study will hold high value to educators, because by identifying the factors that lead to increased student achievement, school districts will graduate students who are college- and career-ready.

Definition of Key Terms

For the purposes of this study, the following terms are defined:

American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) was legislation passed by the Obama Administration aimed at encouraging economic growth, creating jobs, and providing more money to education (Rust, 2013).

Career readiness. Career readiness is being able to effectively navigate pathways that connect education and employment to achieve a fulfilling, financially secure, and successful career (Deloza, 2013).

Instructional rigor. Instructional rigors are actions occurring in the classroom that result in students learning at high levels (Blackburn & Williamson, 2013).

Missouri Learning Standards (MLS). The Missouri Learning Standards (MLS) are standards that define the knowledge and skills Missouri students need in each grade level and course for success in college and other post-secondary training or careers (MODESE, 2015b).

Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC). The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers is a state-led consortium that has worked to develop next-generation assessments aligned with the Common Core (Slover, 2013).

Race to the Top. Race to the Top is a federal program mandating states to advance reforms in four specific educational areas: adopting standards that prepare students for college and careers, building data systems that measure student growth, ensuring schools recruit qualified teachers and administrators, and turning around low-achieving schools (United States Department of Education, 2016).

Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC). The Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) is a state-led consortium working to develop next-generation assessments that accurately measure student progress toward college and career readiness (Fink, 2014).

Limitations and Assumptions

The following limitations were identified in this study:

Interview questions. Questions were created for the interviews by the researcher and might have failed to elicit information needed to answer the research questions.

Participant responses. Questions asked during the interviews might not have been fully understood, which might result in inaccurate answers from participants.

Researcher analysis. Data collected by the researcher might not have been correctly analyzed.

Sample demographics. The study was limited to high school principals from one Midwest state.

Time constraints. Participation in the study depended on participants being able to find time to be interviewed by the researcher.

The following assumptions were accepted:

1. The responses of the participants were offered honestly and without bias.
2. The sample population was an accurate representation of the population.
3. The questions asked during the interview were asked clearly by the interviewer and were understood by the research participants.
4. The participants had enough time to complete the interviews.

Summary

School administrators have often tried initiatives to increase achievement and are forced to wait for assessment data before making changes to how the district utilizes these programs (Castelhano, 2013). Programs that push for higher education standards, such as the Common Core State Standards Initiative, have changed how school districts approach education in individual states and across the country (Saine, 2013). If these new academic programs are proven to be effective in increasing student achievement, one day high schools may no longer graduate students who are not college- and career-ready (Kelly et al., 2014). As educators and parents become more accepting of programs aimed at increasing education standards, districts will develop more challenging curriculum and will better prepare students for success after graduation (Blackburn & Williamson, 2013).

Before the standards reform movement, districts were left to their own resources when trying to implement innovative teaching strategies (Guskey, Larson, Ma, Proffitt, & Starman, 2013). Without high-powered, well-organized initiatives calling for improvements and with little support from stakeholders, educators were forced to address district concerns without much guidance from the community (Guskey et al., 2013). By striving to increase education standards, districts have been provided new opportunities and have begun to push the developers of district curriculum in ways they have never been pushed before (Grossman et al., 2011).

Within Chapter One, evidence was offered regarding state education standards and whether or not increasing education standards will have a positive impact on student achievement. The individuals behind the standards were identified, and a justification of why higher standards are needed was offered. The theoretical framework, the philosophy

of the study, and the foundations behind it were noted. The limitations and assumptions of the study were acknowledged.

Within Chapter Two of this study, a review of literature includes the following: a history of and background information for the Common Core Standards Initiative; a history of and implementation plan for the Missouri Learning Standards; Common Core's effect on student achievement; and a definition for and the importance of college and career readiness. In Chapter Three, the research design and methodology are discussed. Data analysis is discussed in Chapter Four. In Chapter Five, a summary of the findings related to literature, conclusions, and recommendations for further research are conferred.

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

The National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers introduced the nation to the Common Core State Standard Initiative in 2009 (Bidwell, 2014c). The standards were adopted throughout the country, as politicians and educators believed the increased education standards would bring imagination and rigor back into America's classrooms (Long, 2013). Once opponents of the standards started fighting against implementation, state leaders turned on the initiative and many states chose not to utilize Common Core, while other states instead chose to revise the standards to meet the educational needs of their students (Bidwell, 2014b).

Looking to improve education, advocates for change pushed for new standards, feeling more rigorous standards would fix issues plaguing the public school system in Missouri and would better prepare students for college and career readiness (Kelly et al., 2014). With plans to have the new standards finalized by 2016, the Missouri Department of Education created the Missouri Learning Standards to serve as benchmarks until new standards were agreed upon (Berry, 2014). In 2014, stakeholders in Missouri began work on a set of education standards that would replace Common Core and belong exclusively to Missouri (Thompson, 2015).

For this qualitative study, a theoretical framework was used to identify what variables would guide the researcher. Theoretical variables identified for this study included the following: the role social structure plays in motivation of individuals to acquire skills; the necessity to place individuals into positions where they are capable of being successful; the notion certain professions are more pleasing and rewarding; and the fact education becomes more important as technological advances are made in society

(Collins, 1971). The literature review was used to answer questions concerning the main issues of the study. Within this review of literature, the following topics are discussed: a history of and background information for the Common Core Standards Initiative; a history of and implementation plan for the Missouri Learning Standards; the Common Core Standards' effect on student achievement; and the definition for and importance of college and career readiness.

Theoretical Framework

To develop a theoretical framework for this study, the Functional Theory of Stratification was used to better understand the perceptions held by high school principals regarding state education standards and to identify whether or not increasing education standards would have a positive impact on student achievement. According to this theory, a functioning society must be able to classify its members in social positions and motivate individuals to acquire skills necessary to perform duties required by the positions held (Davis & Moore, 1945). Sociologists Kingsley Davis and Wilbert Moore (1945) argued society is divided into different classes based on the abilities and skills individuals possess. When it is time for society to change and as new people are introduced into it, society must integrate these individuals into the positional system in an arranged and motivated manner (Davis & Moore, 1945).

Davis and Moore (1945) argued the main functional necessity of social stratification is for individuals in society to be placed into positions based on skills held and to be motivated by the existing social structure. Once placed correctly, individuals are encouraged to perform the duties required by the position (Davis & Moore, 1945). Davis and Moore (1945) theorized since professions require different skills and abilities,

are not equally pleasant to workers, and are not of equal importance to society, positions must be filled by individuals who have obtained certain abilities and merit.

As a result of social inequality and stratification, society fills positions on merit, which provides motivation for individuals to accept the responsibilities of positions essential for a functioning society (Davis & Moore, 1945). Subsequently, all jobs are not meant to be held of equal importance to the world, which causes society to motivate individuals by instilling a reward system for those who possess greater skills and who can perform the duties required for elevated positions (Davis & Moore, 1945). To motivate the most qualified and skilled individuals, rewards have been built into each position, creating jobs more pleasing to society (Davis & Moore, 1945).

Randal Collins (1971) believed the Technical-Function Theory could be used as a more general approach to the Functional Theory of Stratification. The Technical-Function Theory states skill requirements of jobs increase because of the technological changes made within society (Collins, 1971). To obtain the knowledge necessary to meet technological changes, additional education has become a necessity, requiring individuals to attend school to acquire more desirable skills (Collins, 1971).

Under this system, positions that require increased technical skills result in bigger rewards because of the necessity positions must be filled by highly motivated, capable individuals who are able to meet the demands of the jobs (Davis & Moore, 1945). If the required skills are considered uncommon or if training to acquire the skills is costly, the position must have a built-in reward to draw individuals to it (Davis & Moore, 1945). To appeal to the most qualified individuals, these positions have been placed high on the

social scale, command a high status within society, and must deliver high enough salary to justify the acquisition of the skills in the first place (David & Moore, 1945).

As more individuals are added to the positional system and as the global economy creates more competition in the job market, a necessity for jobseekers to show they possess higher-level thinking skills that separate them from other applicants has been created (Gardner & Powell, 2013). There is a need for research to focus on the effect of increased education standards on student achievement. By accepting this theoretical approach, the researcher sought to identify how students can obtain the skills needed to be successful in an ever-changing technological society and to ascertain how increased education standards impact student achievement.

The History of Common Core

The development and implementation of Common Core was a strenuous and well-thought out plan that included many different organizations and people (Bidwell, 2014a). The notion of Common Core can be traced back to earlier efforts at education reform, from the attempted creation of a national set of history standards in the 1990s to newer legislation like No Child Left Behind in the 2000s (Bidwell, 2014a). While the creation of common standards was a politically divisive process, policymakers believed through increased rigor and a common set of education standards, districts would see increases in the number of students who graduated high school college- and career-ready (Wallender, 2014).

At the National Education Summit in 1996, a bilateral group of state governors and business executives gathered to organize the not-for-profit group Achieve (Rust, 2012). In 2009, in an attempt to create a common set of national standards, Achieve

teamed up with the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSO) in an attempt to create a common set of standards (Rust, 2012). Arizona Governor Janet Napolitano, while serving as chair of the National Governors Association, was one of the first politicians to push for a common set of education standards, as she desired more rigorous standards to improve math and science education in the country (Bidwell, 2014a). Governor Napolitano did not believe it was possible for the nation to lead the world in innovation if the education system could not stand on its own and be competitive internationally (Bidwell, 2014a).

Proponents of the initiative believed a common set of standards would ensure all students have the knowledge to be successful in entry-level college courses, to be career-ready, and to be capable of competing for jobs in a global economy (Neuman & Roskos, 2013). While primarily fronted by the NGA, CCSO, and Achieve, there were other national groups who played a part in the creation of Common Core, such as the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, the International Reading Association, and both the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers (Bidwell, 2014a). Working alongside teachers and administrators, all groups collectively put aside their differences and developed the Common Core Standards, officially launching them on June 2, 2010 (Rust, 2012).

What is Common Core?

The Common Core Standards were designed to identify the knowledge and skills students must possess in both mathematics and literacy from kindergarten through the twelfth grade (Saavedra & Steele, 2012). Considered to be more demanding than most pre-existing standards, Common Core required students to develop higher-level thinking

and communication skills that could better prepare students for success in the 21st Century (Hwang, McMaken, Porter, & Yang, 2011). Desiring more rigorous lessons and improved instruction from teachers, the standards integrated best practices from top-performing countries worldwide, such as Finland, South Korea, Germany, and Brazil (Wallender, 2014).

Despite public misconceptions, the Common Core Initiative was not designed to take curriculum development away from school districts, but instead it was meant for districts to decide on their own how students would meet grade-level expectations (Neuman & Roskos, 2013). Promoters of Common Core claimed it was the districts who could decide how the standards were implemented, and with this power, districts would elect what impact the standards had on a student's academic performance (Neuman & Roskos, 2013). Regardless of some autonomy, districts were not expected to be in complete control of their curriculum, as all students from adopting states would be held to the same grade-level standards (Neuman & Roskos, 2013).

Requiring all adopting states to meet the same standards forced Common Core to be organized differently than many previous state standards in regard to content and structure, with a primary focus which linked the new standards with college and career readiness (McLaughlin & Overturf, 2012). Having Common Core aligned with career readiness standards made the newly created standards more comprehensive than most pre-existing state standards, better preparing students for state assessments and graduation (Neuman & Roskos, 2013). Connected to college and career readiness standards in the form of benchmarks in student progression, Common Core outlined what

students should know by the time they reached graduation (McLaughlin & Overturf, 2012).

The creation of Common Core and the attempts to align the standards to career readiness influenced the creation of two consortiums, the SBAC and PARCC, with both consortiums asked to produce assessments to determine student mastery of the standards (Fink, 2014). When utilized, these new assessments would require students to display writing skills, synthesize information, and utilize data to formulate conclusions (Fink, 2014). Educators were greatly involved in the creation of the new Common Core assessments, ensuring they aligned with district expectations and eliminating many problems associated with previous tests (Slover, 2013). The problems eliminated included the following: assessments occurring only once a year; assessments relying too heavily on memorization; and the inability of assessments to produce reliable data (Slover, 2013). With the intention the new assessments could properly evaluate student knowledge and provide school districts accurate information on how students perform in core subjects, developers of the assessments worked with Common Core to meet 21st-century educational needs (Schaffhauser, 2014).

While Common Core's plan encompassed many subjects, it clearly defined what knowledge was needed in mathematics and language arts for students to be considered career-ready (McLaughlin & Overturf, 2012). Mathematic standards created through the initiative were centered on the understanding of three fundamental principles: mathematical procedures, mathematical concepts, and mathematical problem solving (Zimba, 2014). Creators of the standards believed by achieving these three principles,

students will gain the knowledge necessary to be college- and career-ready (Zimba, 2014).

In regard to language arts, Common Core created standards focused on interpretation, argumentation, and the analysis of literature (McLaughlin & Overturf, 2012). Common Core standards for reading and language arts placed more of an emphasis on writing and the synthesis of information than previous standards, allowing for students to take part in more argumentative and persuasive discussions (Neuman & Roskos, 2013). Supporters of Common Core believed for a student to be considered highly literate, it is necessary for educators to integrate lessons into classrooms that allow students to experience a more integrated model of literacy (Neuman & Roskos, 2013).

States Make a Switch to Common Core

In 2001, Congress passed the federal No Child Left Behind Act, which established new academic standards in mathematics and literacy (Saavedra & Steele, 2012). The law allowed states to define what was proficient for their standards and what was considered adequate yearly progress (Saavedra & Steele, 2012). The variation in standards from state to state created irregularities in student assessments, resulting in inconsistent education across the country (Saavedra & Steele, 2012). These inconsistencies caused many district leaders to take advantage of Common Core in an effort to develop improved curriculum and instructional programs within their districts (March & Peters, 2014).

The switch to Common Core was justified by the need to meet four educational principles: the creation of a common set of standards, career readiness, the promotion of higher rigor in the classroom, and a quality education for all students (Wallender, 2014).

All four of these principles had been used as a justification for past educational reform, but Common Core was the first time an educational initiative tried to encompass all of them (Wallender, 2014). For these principles to be realized through Common Core, there was a necessity for change to occur within the educational system that would alter what Americans perceive as success in the classroom (Schoenfield, 2014).

School districts that have benefited from Common Core have made changes to meet these needs and have stopped making excuses to explain why Common Core will not work, but instead have begun to embrace the reform with hope of improved student achievement within their communities (March & Peters, 2014). By focusing on district strengths and weaknesses, school administrators identified how common standards can impact the district through an analysis of current curriculum and student performance (March & Peters, 2014). Unlike earlier attempts at standard-based education, Common Core was designed to incorporate various performance skills, critical thinking skills, and analytical approaches within the classroom (March & Peters, 2014).

Advocates for Common Core claim the standards were created to improve education by changing how educators view curriculum implementation, teacher instruction, and the assessment of student learning (Wallender, 2014). The new standards were created to promote success in the classroom by providing teachers high-quality instructional content, challenging students with meaningful and structured lessons, stressing equal opportunities for student success, and allowing students to show individual success in the classroom (Schoenfield, 2014). States that chose not to adopt the initiative were forced to develop comparable standards as rigorous as the Common Core State Standards in an attempt to make sure they did not fall behind states that had

already implemented standards reform and to ensure students are college- and career-ready (March & Peters, 2014).

Preparing for and Implementing Common Core

The essential philosophy of the Common Core initiative was built on three main themes: the creation of a common set of standards that allow all students to be competitive in a global society; the creation of a set of English language arts and mathematics standards that ensure all students are prepared for the workplace; and the desire for students to graduate high school college- and career-ready (McLaughlin & Overturf, 2012). When states began to implement Common Core, they realized achieving these three themes would be very complicated and the ability to use the standards correctly was a difficult task to achieve (McLaughlin & Overturf, 2012). Errors in the implementation of the standards were triggered by Common Core being structured differently than previous state standards, which caused the newer set of standards to rely too heavily on outside criteria and restricted the standards' ability to stand on their own (McLaughlin & Overturf, 2012). State leaders realized for their education systems to be fully prepared for changes, it was necessary for school districts to develop a more thorough understanding of what Common Core wanted to achieve (McLaughlin & Overturf, 2012).

The primary goal of Common Core was to increase student achievement and close the gap that existed with higher-performing countries by requiring students to use a more contextual understanding of mathematics and English language arts (Denisco, 2014). For student achievement levels to increase and for Common Core to be considered successful, teachers have to constantly look for ways to improve classroom instruction

and distinguish the differences between improved instruction and changes to instruction (Fox, 2014). With the United States consistently scoring in the middle of the pack on international assessments, it was time for policymakers and school leaders to identify what other nations were doing in their schools to better prepare students for success on international assessments (Denisco, 2014). For increased student achievement in this country, it was necessary for teachers to identify what parts of Common Core were effective, what was not effective, and what steps needed to be taken to realize the initiative's goal (Fox, 2014).

In an attempt to minimize problems during the implementation phase of Common Core, school districts and universities across the country identified three common methodologies that would align teacher preparation with the Common Core Standards: the alignment of teaching certification to Common Core, professional development opportunities that prepare teachers to use Common Core, and the integration of the new standards in relation to district accountability (Paliokas, 2014). By aligning teaching standards and certification assessments to the standards, states guaranteed new teachers are trained and ready to be held accountable for the instructional shift required from the new standards (Paliokas, 2014). School districts found it extremely difficult to adequately train veteran teachers to utilize Common Core and were forced to turn to professional development to better prepare inexperienced teachers for Common Core (Paliokas, 2014). Districts made use of the following methods: online training modules, in-person collaboration with district faculty, and modeling of best practices (Paliokas, 2014). By integrating Common Core into program accountability, states ensured teachers

graduated from teacher education programs prepared to step into the classroom and properly teach district curriculum aligned to the new standards (Paliokas, 2014).

Common Core Loses Support

Missouri adopted the Common Core Standards in 2010, with the intention of creating more rigorous classroom instruction and to better prepare students for success after high school (Crouch, 2015). In 2014, with support waning for the standards, Representative Kurt Bahr sponsored a bill that allowed Missouri to cut ties with the initiative and permitted state residents to begin working toward an independent set of standards to assess student learning (Crouch, 2015). Representative Bahr's bill, House Bill 1490, stopped the full implementation of Common Core in Missouri and moved the state toward their own set of standards (Thompson, 2015).

Representative Bahr's issue with Common Core was not completely directed toward the standards themselves, but more toward the disregard for the state's right to educational sovereignty (Crouch, 2015). Lawmakers blamed the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MODESE) for moving too quickly to adopt Common Core and for not allowing adequate time to hear concerns from parents and educators (Bock, 2014). With lawmakers believing the standards are flawed and that implementation would cost taxpayers too much money, Missouri's General Assembly defunded testing tied to the Common Core initiative in the spring of 2015, ending any chance for a total implementation of the standards (Crouch, 2015).

Turning against the initiative forced the MODESE to scramble to find benchmarks that could be used to replace Common Core, with lawmakers ultimately deciding on the creation of the Missouri Learning Standards (Singer, 2014). Although

public support in favor of Common Core had decreased, eliminating the standards from Missouri schools proved to be very difficult, with most of the Missouri Learning Standards incorporating portions of Common Core (Pratt, 2015). Despite attempts to please state residents' demands for change, the Missouri Learning Standards are still viewed as an overreaching attack on district sovereignty, resulting in the formation of educational committees that will revise Missouri's education standards to meet 21st-century needs of students (Pratt, 2015).

Missouri Votes to Reject Common Core

Many Missouri residents and lawmakers did not approve of the federal government's involvement in the adoption of Common Core across the country, seeing it as an attack on the educational sovereignty of the state (Crouch, 2013). Intended to bring more rigor to classrooms across the country, Common Core struggled to gain acceptance in Missouri as state lawmakers desired to create standards that represented the needs of Missouri students as opposed to the needs of the nation (Crouch, 2013). Missouri Governor Jay Nixon felt the state did their part to increase classroom accountability prior to Common Core and could continue their policies without being forced to rely on the initiative to push teacher instruction within the state (Lucas, 2014). With an overwhelming feeling the reform was not right for Missouri's students, animosity toward Common Core grew to the point House Bill 1490 easily passed both houses within Missouri's General Assembly, moving through the Senate with a 23-6 vote and through the House of Representatives with a 135-10 vote (Lucas, 2014).

The bad press behind the reform was not necessarily about the standards themselves, but about a flawed implementation process which caused district leaders to

develop bitterness towards the initiative, as they developed a feeling their opinions did not matter (Quinlan, 2014). The lack of cooperation between state governments and Missouri residents caused parents to opt their children out of state-mandated tests in defiance of the change (Quinlan, 2014). With the implementation issues in mind, Missouri approached standards reform cautiously in order to avoid disruptions in the current state curriculum and voted to include some fundamental parts of Common Core in the Missouri Learning Standards (Lucas, 2014). As more and more problems began to mount with the implementation of Common Core across the country, states began to rethink the implementation process, with some states dropping the standards completely and others rebranding them with a different name in an attempt to avoid public outcry (Quinlan, 2014).

In a 2014 meeting with the Council of Chief State School Officers, former Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee urged the council to drop the “Common Core” name from the national standards initiative in response to negative publicity (Layton, 2014). States that decided to rebrand the standards did it in a manner that, in a way, regionalized the standards and allowed states to move away from the notion Common Core was a national curriculum (Layton, 2014). State leaders felt rebranding the standards as something else would, in the end, provide educators more time to show everyone the standards could benefit education and increase career readiness (Quinlan, 2014). With Missouri making efforts to increase rigor, transparency, and accountability in the classroom, Governor Jay Nixon believed Common Core was not necessary and that the education reforms in Missouri better prepared students to compete in a global society (Lucas, 2014).

The Missouri Learning Standards

Having replaced the Common Core Standards in the state of Missouri in 2014, the Missouri Learning Standards have served as state benchmarks for all Missouri public schools and were used to ensure students graduated with an education that adequately prepared them for college and career readiness (MODESE, 2013b). Playing a substantial role in assisting Missouri to reach the self-imposed goal of being a top-10 state by 2020, the Missouri Learning Standards were used by school administrators and teachers to create a consistent guide for education from one grade to another in the absence of Common Core (MODESE, 2015d). With the state constitution requiring high academic standards for all public school districts, the Missouri Learning Standards were created with the intention to stabilize district curricula enough that student needs could be met while state committees worked to write the new learning standards (MODESE, 2015c).

Designed with help from educators, the Missouri Learning Standards were created to better serve the needs of Missouri students by producing clear and consistent education standards for classroom instruction (MODESE, 2015c). Designed to guarantee graduating students are college- and career-ready, the standards helped teachers clarify classroom expectations for students, placed academic focus on fewer topics per subject, and required teachers to create lessons that promote critical thinking within the classroom (MODESE, 2013b). By aligning to Missouri's college-ready standards, the Missouri Learning Standards established strong academic expectations for students and school districts, decreased remediation rates for college students, and aimed to increase the competency of college graduates (MODESE, 2015b).

Today, many employers in Missouri believe applicants fail to possess skills necessary to communicate effectively with co-workers, struggle to put their words into writing, and lack critical thinking skills that can be instilled through the Missouri Learning Standards (MODESE, 2014). Incorporating parts of Common Core, the 2014 version of the Missouri Learning Standards looked to improve previous state standards in math and English language arts by outlining student expectations in the following subjects: Career and Technical Education, English Language Arts, Fine Arts, Guidance and Counseling, Health and Physical Education, Math, Science, Social Studies, and World Languages (MODESE, 2015b). With the creation of the Missouri Learning Standards, Missouri accomplished what Common Core tried to do, by increasing student expectations in the classroom and establishing an academic foundation that better prepares students for college and career success (MODESE, 2014).

While the state required school districts to use the Missouri Learning Standards to guide curriculum, districts were provided the flexibility to implement curriculum to meet the specific needs of districts, as long as the district curriculum worked toward meeting state goals (Pratt, 2015). The Missouri Learning Standards were not designed to take local control of instruction away from school districts and were never meant to be the district's curriculum or to dictate how educators taught required content (MODESE, 2015b). What the Missouri Learning Standards were designed to do was create a baseline measurement for classroom instruction that would provide teachers and school districts a clear way to meet educational needs of students (MODESE, 2015b).

Preparing for and Implementing the Missouri Learning Standards

In 2010, with the hope of better preparing students for college and their careers, Missouri adopted Common Core to serve as state benchmarks to measure student achievement (Crouch, 2015). Missouri residents and some state politicians believed Common Core was an attack on local control of education and never fully accepted the reform due to too much involvement of the federal government (Crouch, 2015). Many thought Common Core strayed away from the educational needs of the region, which created opposition and led the state to never fully implement the standards (Crouch, 2015).

Beginning in 2014, school districts across the state started to implement the Missouri Learning Standards to meet educational needs in mathematics and English language arts (MODESE, 2013b). The Missouri Learning Standards allowed school leaders to streamline instructional programs and to better align curriculum to prepare students to compete in a global job market (March & Peters, 2014). By implementing more rigorous education standards and better preparing teachers to instruct in today's classroom, school districts paved the way for the development of higher-level thinking skills that better prepared students for success after graduation (Markell, 2014).

The rejection of Common Core and move toward the Missouri Learning Standards caused many concerns for Missouri educators, as the future of academics in the state became blurred and educators began to fear how state-mandated tests would be administered (MODESE, 2015c). For years standardized tests had been used by school districts to assess student performance and to determine district accreditation (Pratt, 2015). During the 2014-2015 school year, Missouri school districts used assessments

created by Smarter Balanced to measure the academic progress made while using the Missouri Learning Standards (Pratt, 2015). These tests were not well-received and because of those reviews, Missouri legislators decided to defund the Smarter Balanced assessments for the 2015-2016 school year (Pratt, 2015). By electing not to use Smarter Balanced for the 2015-2016 school year, the state of Missouri decided to develop their own tests to use with the new Missouri Learning Standards, adding additional work for the committees tasked with writing the new standards (Pratt, 2015).

Aware of the impact a complete re-write of the Missouri Learning Standards would have on the state curriculum and assessments, legislators devised a plan that would use Common Core as a guide during the writing process and incorporated pieces of the rejected initiative into the new Missouri Learning Standards (Lucas, 2014). With the passage of House Bill 1490, the MODESE signaled to the rest of the state it was time to abandon Common Core and to rewrite Missouri's standards in a way that would once again place the control of education back in the hands of the people (Thompson, 2015). Representative Bahr's bill was an indication from lawmakers it was time to repair what many considered to be a broken education system and led to the creation of eight work groups made up of educators and parents, who were tasked to decide what standards would best meet the academic needs of Missouri's students (Thompson, 2015).

Laying the foundation of the new Missouri Learning Standards, these work groups were asked not only to brainstorm new standards, but to attend open forums for people to discuss areas of concern and to provide updates to policymakers as the new standards were being reviewed (MODESE, 2015c). Prior to receiving final approval, the MODESE created a goal to have the new Missouri Learning Standards distributed to

school districts across the state by the end of the 2015-2016 school year, with implementation of the standards to occur the following school year (MODESE, 2015d). With assistance from work groups, the MODESE formulated a plan which included work groups deciding on the standards, the new standards being sent to the General Assembly's joint committee on education for discussion, and final approval required from the state school board (MODESE, 2015c). Once the new standards received approval from the state school board, the final step in the process was to develop the assessments to serve as statewide standardized tests, with the assessments to begin in the spring of 2018 (MODESE, 2015c).

During the writing process, educators in Missouri worked hard to create learning standards that were both engaging and beneficial to a student's success after high school (MODESE, 2015d). For students to graduate ready to successfully step into a job, it is essential school districts identify how to build strong academic foundations within their classrooms that can assist students to graduate not only from high school, but from either a college or an institute that emphasizes workplace training (MODESE, 2015a). By better preparing students for this success and ensuring steps are in place for student achievement to increase, school districts have managed to increase instructional rigor through challenging standards, provide additional resources for students who struggle, and invest a higher percentage of district funds into professional development programs (Denisco, 2014).

Professional Development and Student Achievement

At the time Missouri rejected the notion of using Common Core, the Missouri Learning Standards still utilized the Common Core Standards, but that all changed April

19, 2016, when the Missouri legislature passed a new version of the state standards to drive instruction (MODESE, 2016a). With so much focus placed on the implementation of higher education standards, many forgot to pay attention to recent research which highlighted the positive effects professional development can have on a teacher's ability to improve student achievement (Penuel, Allen, Coburn, & Farrell, 2015). With the creation of effective professional development, school districts are able to prepare teachers for change by increasing the efficiency of classroom instruction, eliminating ineffective classroom instruction, and requiring educators teach to the standards (Jenkins & Agamba, 2013). For standards reform to be successful, it is necessary for effective professional development programs to be more accessible to teachers (Jenkins & Agamba, 2013).

By creating effective professional development programs, teacher growth is promoted by taking teachers' practical knowledge and using it to create a more specific understanding of expected outcomes, eliminating any chance for prior knowledge to interfere with the desired change (Penuel et al., 2015). For standards reform to be successful, it is necessary for professional development to be designed for improved instructional knowledge of teachers and facilitated in a way that allows staff members to gain an understanding of the expected changes (Kober & Rentnor, 2014). Professional development has been proven most effective when used in a pre-emptive approach toward teacher growth (Kober & Rentnor, 2014). By taking this type of approach toward professional development, school districts have shown they can improve teacher understanding of district curriculum and instructional techniques across the district (Kober & Rentnor, 2014).

With more emphasis placed on college and career readiness today, educators must collaborate with one another to develop plans to make student growth more realistic and achievable (Jenkins & Agamba, 2013). By implementing standards-based student assessments, educators have been forced to look for new ways to handle curriculum development and instructional strategies that meet the individual needs of their districts and ensure students master required content (Kober & Rentnor, 2014). For content needs to be met and curriculum to be deemed successful, it is necessary school leaders continue to provide instructors proper training and district-specific information to meet desired goals (Jenkins & Agamba, 2013).

Common Core's Effects on Student Achievement

Supporters of Common Core believed the reform provided a momentous opportunity to increase student achievement and boost the quality of education in this country (Loveless, 2012). Unlike previous sets of standards, Common Core placed an emphasis on teaching meaningful skills that were necessary for students to be successful in college and in their careers (Gardner & Powell, 2013). Supporters of Common Core saw the standards not as a methodical takeover of the state's right to education, but as an initiative which created clear benchmarks that focused on improving literacy skills and were flexible to the curricular needs of districts (Gardner & Powell, 2013).

Opponents of Common Core argued significant education reform had to occur in the classroom and be dictated through classroom instruction, not directed from government officials (Brooks & Dietz, 2012). These people did not see Common Core as a game-changing educational reform, but instead as another national education initiative pushed by politicians promising better schools and improvements in student achievement

(Loveless, 2012). Opponents of Common Core argued the solution to fix the education system should not have included standardization and did not feel new standards ensured increases in student success (Brooks & Dietz, 2012).

While teacher support for Common Core remained high, criticism of the new education standards caused concern throughout the media and education community (Markell, 2014). Common Core was designed to improve student achievement by increasing a student's ability to think critically and by advancing the educational process toward a more in-depth level of comprehension which was aimed at better preparing students for life after graduation (Markell, 2014). As a result of Common Core, school districts across the country were forced to utilize new standards in an attempt to reshape curricular and instructional programs so classroom instruction could have a positive effect on student achievement (March & Peters, 2014). While Common Core was not overwhelmingly popular, it did create an opportunity to reshape what was viewed as regular classroom instruction and provided a new approach for students to gain the knowledge needed to make a lasting contribution in a global society (Markell, 2014).

Common Core's positive effects on student achievement. The approval of Common Core was a dramatic shift from past educational philosophies that required policymakers to spend a tremendous amount of time and money to develop and implement (Burroughs & Schmidt, 2012). Supporters of Common Core felt if the initiative's vision would have been realized, the quality of classroom instruction would have increased through a decline in curricular inequalities among school districts (Burroughs & Schmidt, 2012). At the center of Common Core's vision was the ability to improve teaching and increase student achievement with instructional rigor, the creation

of vertically aligned curriculum, and a renewed emphasis on teaching life skills to improve college and career readiness (Gardner & Powell, 2013). For a positive impact on student achievement to occur under Common Core, school districts had to be willing to increase expectations district-wide and demand a commitment from both teachers and students to district goals (Fox, 2014).

Common Core strove for increased student achievement through a clear set of benchmarks that created this consistency for both teachers and students (Gardner & Powell, 2013). Standards were designed to increase student achievement by aligning curriculum, creating a renewed focus on literacy, and utilizing flexible instructional content that not only increased classroom rigor but improved classroom instruction (Gardner & Powell, 2013). Once school districts decided to finalize a plan on how to properly implement Common Core, a path was paved for the new standards to increase student achievement by improving the quality of classroom instruction and eliminating inequalities in curriculum that had been plaguing public education (Burroughs & Schmidt, 2012).

Common Core was intended to better prepare students for success after high school by creating more consistency to allow students to receive a quality education regardless of their state of residency (Gardner & Powell, 2013). The possibility of sharing learning standards across state lines would enable educators to increase the complexity of classroom instruction and to create a more unified framework for teachers from one state to another (Gardner & Powell, 2013). By clarifying to students what was expected from classroom instruction received, Common Core aimed to positively affect student achievement by creating a shared language that not only clarified expected

outcomes, but also improved comprehension of what was being taught in class (Gardner & Powell, 2013).

Common Core targeted increases in student achievement by focusing on the literacy skills of students, not just the number of books a student had read during instruction (Gardner & Powell, 2013). By placing a focus on the development of literacy skills, the initiative allowed school districts and school boards to identify what content needed to be taught in their districts (Gardner & Powell, 2013). Common Core also allowed school districts to handle curricular content that emphasized skill development for students outside of the classroom (Forzani, 2014).

By implementing Common Core, states tried to positively affect student achievement with quality professional development opportunities and strove to improve teacher knowledge of classroom instruction (Loveless, 2012). With the proposal of effective professional development, school districts encouraged instructors to expand on their own knowledge of instruction and to promote continuous student improvement within districts (Fox, 2014). With the establishment of more rigorous education standards, educators were required to teach a more comprehensive range of skills, improve on instructional strategies within their classrooms, and question the effectiveness of their instruction (Fox, 2014).

Common Core's negative effects on student achievement. Common Core's goal from the beginning was to increase student achievement by focusing on improved critical thinking skills and promoting deeper levels of student comprehension (Markell, 2014). With adoption of the standards, supporters believed not only would student achievement increase, but so would the quality of classroom instruction (Loveless, 2012).

Those opposed to Common Core claimed the initiative placed too much emphasis on the standardization of district curriculum and limited both the creativity of classroom instructors and the imagination of students (Brooks & Dietz, 2012).

Among the public, there was a misconception the Common Core standards would replace district curriculum, not work alongside curriculum aligned with the reform (Schoenfield, 2014). Advocates for Common Core claimed the standards did not aim to create a new curriculum, but instead to offer school districts a framework of what students should be able to do, leaving curriculum decisions up to individual states and school districts (Gardner & Powell, 2013). Common Core was never meant to be the focal point of the curriculum, but instead to be used in a way to support teacher professionalism and place the achievement of students first (Brooks & Dietz, 2012).

When school districts first started teaching to the standards, administrators realized teachers were not properly prepared for Common Core (Burroughs & Schmidt, 2012). The lack of effective professional development and the failure of states to align teacher preparation programs with the new standards caused many concerns during implementation, which limited the ability for the standards to have a positive effect on student achievement (Burroughs & Schmidt, 2012). The failure to take classroom instruction seriously and to provide teachers effective professional development limited the ability of teachers to teach the standards in an effective manner (Schoenfield, 2014).

The main concepts behind Common Core were not new, as most educators possessed an understanding of why students needed to receive a well-rounded education (Schoenfield, 2014). The principles of Common Core had the ability to make a difference in the level of education one received, but for the standards to positively affect

achievement, the reform had to be implemented correctly with the necessary support from parents (Markell, 2014). To maximize the impact Common Core could have had on student achievement, it was essential for school districts to create effective professional development policies and make sure the district's curriculum was aligned with the new standards (Loveless, 2012).

College and Career Readiness

Common Core's favoring of profit-making companies and the potential for the reform to limit teacher control in the classroom created apprehension among the educational community, who favored a different approach (Brooks & Dietz, 2012). In the past, policymakers made many attempts at education reform with the intention of increasing the quality of education in the public school system, only to fail when they could not garner enough public support (Wallender, 2014). Early attempts at education reform were based on many of the same goals as more recent initiatives, such as looking for ways to generate common education goals for students, better preparing graduates for college success, and creating quality education programs which could benefit all students through an increase of educational rigor within the classroom (Wallender, 2014).

The perception American children had fallen behind the children of other countries was central to the Common Core Initiative and was used to justify the push for sweeping educational changes across the country (Wallender, 2014). As education reform began to move states toward increased education standards, the term "college and career ready" became more widely used among the education community (Westover, 2012). Ensuring students were prepared for college and their careers, Common Core looked to combine academics with career education through stronger education standards

which were relevant to the knowledge students need to be college- and career-ready (Deloza, 2013).

Once school districts began to look for ways to move away from mandates of No Child Left Behind, Common Core provided a potential way out for policymakers, while also allowing states to increase classroom rigor (Perkins-Gough, 2012). During the era of NCLB, school districts spent years working to improve instruction through more rigorous curriculum and professional development to improve instructional techniques of teachers (Perkins-Gough, 2012). As politicians realized the goal of all students gaining proficiency in math and reading was more difficult than first thought, as long as they agreed to adopt more rigorous education standards, states were issued waivers from the federal government which negated the failure to comply with proficiency goals of the law (Perkins-Gough, 2012).

In an earlier attempt at reform, President Eisenhower signed into law the National Defense Education Act of 1958 with the goal of increasing the number of college graduates in the country (Wallender, 2014). Eisenhower wanted to ensure United States educational policy was doing what was needed to keep pace with the Soviet Union (Wallender, 2014). The justification for President Eisenhower to better prepare American citizens for success in college was not much different than what has been used to justify increased education standards in today's classrooms (Wallender, 2014).

Through the National Defense Education Act of 1958, President Eisenhower looked to lessen the fear American schools were inferior to other countries and to ensure the nation's students could be successful in college (Wallender, 2014). With this in mind, advocates for education reform pushed for increased instructional equality to

ensure students developed higher-level thinking skills to allow for success after high school and to better prepare students to compete in a global society (Gardner & Powell, 2013). By increasing instructional equality from one school district to another, educators would better prepare students for college by exposing students to topics that otherwise might not have been introduced during classroom instruction (Burroughs & Schmidt, 2012).

The Importance of College Readiness

Promoters of increased education standards have an understanding of the importance of career readiness and have worked to create benchmarks to measure student progress (McLaughlin & Overturf, 2012). Common Core was linked to college and career readiness through benchmarks of student progress and outlined what students should know by the time they graduated high school (McLaughlin & Overturf, 2012). To better prepare students for graduation and life after high school, Common Core's standards were written to achieve this and were believed to be more comprehensive than most pre-existing state standards (Neuman & Roskos, 2013).

It is apparent for the country to be competitive globally, school districts must do a better job preparing students to be college- and career-ready (Denisco, 2014). The existing curricular inequalities in education created a system wherein U.S. student achievement had become stagnant, and where school districts were unable to graduate students who were prepared for success in the college classroom (Markell, 2014). Policymakers looked to change education policies within the state and to address issues that had been plaguing the education system (Denisco, 2014). By providing more resources to struggling districts, investing more money into the training of teachers, and

increasing education standards, school districts attempted to create opportunities that could close the gap that has separated U.S. classrooms from those in other countries (Denisco, 2014).

There is a necessity for this country's economic success to graduate college-ready students and to maintain the ability for American students to compete in the global market for jobs (Sheehy, 2012). By monitoring student achievement from an early age, educators can track student progress and make sure they have achieved the level of expertise required to be considered college- and career-ready (Sheehy, 2012). With today's education reforms focusing on ensuring all students are ready for college and careers, educators have tried to keep three things in mind: stop using test scores to label students college-ready, be mindful of unintended consequences brought on by assessments, and develop a desire to take risks (Corbett-Burris & Murphy, 2014).

The Importance of Career Readiness

For students to be considered career-ready at the time of graduation, school districts have developed goals to improve content-based learning and the amount of time teachers spend discussing career readiness in the classroom (Engelkemeyer, 2012). For more importance to be placed on career readiness, colleges must find ways to work with the public school system to not only create programs that provide knowledge of content to students, but to create curriculum that identifies skills for the 21st-century workforce (Engelkemeyer, 2012). According to a 2012 survey from the National Association of Colleges and Employers, the top five job qualities valued by employers include the ability to work with others, an understanding of leadership, good communication skills, the ability to solve problems, and a strong work ethic (National Association of College

and Employers [NACE], 2012). It is imperative prospective college graduates have the ability to identify their current skill levels and to map out a path that shows they have achieved the skills needed to be successful in their desired career fields (Engelkemeyer, 2012).

The increase in education standards has led students to develop a deeper understanding of college and career readiness through the teaching of life skills (Gardner & Powell, 2013). The push for increased education standards has resulted in a higher level of learning which better prepares students for more consistent success in college and helps students identify skills necessary for success in their careers (Barone, 2014). By increasing instructional rigor, raising staff expectations, and getting the community behind education reform, school districts create opportunities to implement effective education reform that promotes increased education standards and better prepares students to be successful (Blackburn & Williamson, 2013). While it is a difficult task to pinpoint what exactly was meant by “college and career ready,” graduates who have the ability to show they possess higher-order thinking skills, an understanding of academic behaviors and vocabulary, and the ability to successfully solve real-world problems are more successful after graduation than graduates are who do not possess these skills (Westover, 2012).

By identifying more ways to prepare high school graduates to step into the workforce, school districts have attempted to ensure students have the ability to demonstrate the skills companies are looking for applicants to possess (Sheehy, 2012). For years, colleges have run the risk of ignoring career readiness, choosing not to communicate to students the importance of being able to show employers what skills and

abilities they are able to bring to the table (Engelkemeyer, 2012). The ability of graduates to sell themselves as employees and to provide prospective employers all the answers looked for during the application process has become a big part of finding employment in an economic climate where job availability is scarce (Engelkemeyer, 2012).

Once school districts started stressing the need for all students to go to college, many students struggled to live up to those expectations, resulting in a large number of students graduating high school not prepared for either college or the workplace (Perkins-Gough, 2012). The belief all students should have an opportunity to attend college was a positive message, but an unrealistic one (Perkins-Gough, 2012). As states were faced with the opportunity for momentous education reform, educators realized career readiness was just as important for evolving society as was graduating students college-ready (Perkins-Gough, 2012). For many years, graduating high school was thought to be the finish line (DeLoza, 2013). Today, as more graduates have looked to distinguish themselves from others applying for the same positions, high school graduations have developed into more of a starting line (DeLoza, 2013).

Summary

In the review of literature, the Common Core State Standards Initiative, the Missouri Learning Standards, college and career readiness, and the effect of professional development on student achievement were discussed. It was believed that through increased rigor and a common set of education standards, politicians and school leaders could graduate all students college- and career-ready (Wallender, 2014). Advocates for the changes felt more rigorous and complex standards would better prepare graduates for

success and allow graduates to compete in a global economy (Kelly et al., 2014). By increasing education standards, attempts were made to improve classroom instruction, but it was thought by some that students would benefit more if teachers were provided effective professional development opportunities and if information needed to correctly implement changes within classrooms was provided to the teachers (Jenkins & Agamba, 2013).

Chapter Two included a review of literature related to the development and implementation of Common Core; Missouri's rejection of Common Core and establishment of the Missouri Learning Standards; the effects Common Core have on student achievement; and the importance of college and career readiness. In Chapter Three, the methodology and design of the study are discussed. Data analysis is discussed and presented in Chapter Four. Chapter Five includes a summary of the study, conclusions that were formulated, and recommendations for further research.

Chapter Three: Methodology

There is a common belief among supporters of the standards movements that increasing the rigor of education standards will result in students being better prepared for college and their careers (Kelly et al., 2014). By creating higher expectations in today's classrooms, school administrators have tried to address district deficiencies, and by making systematic changes, they believe students will graduate high school more ready to be productive members of society (Barone, 2014). Steady increases in remedial instruction for students entering colleges and universities have caused advocates to argue public education must do more to ensure graduates are adequately prepared for what comes after high school (Bidwell, 2014a).

When Missouri adopted Common Core in 2010, school districts across the state hoped a new, common set of standards would better prepare Missouri's students for college and make them career-ready (Crouch, 2015). The Common Core Standards Initiative aimed to change how public education operated and through increased rigor, better-written curriculums, and an emphasis on real-world problem-solving skills, believed achieving improvement was attainable (Gardner & Powell, 2013). By developing higher-order thinking skills, gaining a better understanding of academic behaviors, and honing the ability to solve real-life problems, it is possible increased education standards could make a difference in whether or not students graduate high school college- and career-ready (Westover, 2012).

In this chapter, the problems and purpose of this study are discussed, and the research questions are restated. Ethical considerations are outlined that ensured protection of the identities of school districts and individual participants of the study.

The population and sample size of the study are identified, and the procedures for data collection are documented. To conclude the chapter, the data analysis section of the paper includes the plan for organization and analysis of data after collection and how statistical methods will be applied to the study.

Problem and Purpose Overview

The purpose of this study was to identify the perceptions held by high school principals regarding state education standards and whether or not increasing education standards will have a positive impact on student achievement. With the Common Core State Standards Initiative and similar independently implemented state standards, school districts were directed to embrace standards that supported goals fashioned by the NGA, the CCSO, and state politicians (Bidwell, 2014c). These new, more rigorous standards were developed to increase student success and to propel student achievement in public schools to acceptable levels in order to properly prepare students for success after graduation (Markell, 2014). Qualitative data were obtained for this study to gain a better idea of how school districts and school leaders approach increased student education standards and how student achievement will be affected by these changes. District policies regarding professional development were reviewed to see if effective professional development impacts teacher effectiveness when implementing more rigorous education standards.

Research questions. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are high school principals' perceptions of the Missouri Learning Standards in comparison to the Common Core Standards?
2. What are the perceptions of high school principals in regard to professional

development and the Missouri Learning Standards?

3. What are high school principals' perceptions of the Missouri Learning Standards and student achievement?

4. What are high school principals' perceptions of the Missouri Learning Standards and college and career readiness?

Research Design

The objectives of qualitative research are much different than those of quantitative research and provide a more distinct type of information at the conclusion of a study (Taylor, Bogdan, & DeVault, 2015). Qualitative research often includes data that are unstructured, with a high proportion of the material coming from interviews and discussions with participants of the study (Taylor et al., 2015). Unlike quantitative research, qualitative studies are often about the detection of data, as the researcher is required to provide logic and organization of original accounts and observations (Taylor et al., 2015).

This qualitative study was designed to allow for analysis of how school principals view higher education standards and the overall effect these standards have on student achievement. The primary source data collected in this study came from interviews conducted with high school principals who were preparing for the implementation of increased education standards. Prior to interviewing each high school principal, the researcher provided the participants a Letter of Informed Consent (see Appendix A) to meet IRB guidelines.

Interviews were conducted with five high school principals from small school districts and five high school principals from large school districts. For this study, all

school districts with an enrollment below 1,500 students was defined as small, and all districts with more than 1,500 students were defined as large. All individuals interviewed were provided an opportunity to voice their opinions in regard to the effect increased education standards have on student achievement. For the convenience of study participants, interviews were conducted at a time and place which met the participants' needs. To provide legitimacy to the study, the researcher used interview questions specific to the high school principals who were interviewed (see Appendix B).

Ethical Considerations

Prior to conducting any research, the researcher received approval from the Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board (see Appendix C). All participating individuals were notified participation was voluntary, their identities would not be made public, and they had the option to opt out of the study at any time without negative consequences. No names were recorded, and the information from participants was not shared with anyone. Anonymity of the information collected was assured by assigning data codes to all individuals who chose to participate in the study.

Once data were collected from the interviews, paper copies of the data were placed in a locked cabinet, and all electronic files were saved on a personal computer located on a secure network which was password-protected. Transcripts of the interviews were sent to the participants, and all participants were provided an opportunity to ask questions or make comments before the transcripts were finalized. At the completion of the study, all documents and files will be saved for three years. At the end of three years, the electronic files will be deleted, and paper transcripts will be shredded.

Population and Sample

The population for this study consisted of high school principals in Missouri accredited districts. The sample included 10 high school principals randomly selected from southwest Missouri, with five of the principals from smaller school districts and five principals from larger school districts. The high school principals who participated in the study were chosen because of their school districts' student enrollment numbers and the inclination of the principals to participate. The researcher contacted the high school principals to request an opportunity to interview either by telephone or in person. The non-probability sampling technique of purposive sampling was used due to the specific content knowledge held by all participants (Levy & Lemeshow, 2013). The codes assigned to each administrator and the enrollment numbers of the school districts where the participants were employed are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Interview Participants

Participant	Classification	Code	Student Enrollment
Principal A	Small	S1	600
Principal B	Small	S2	400
Principal C	Small	S3	600
Principal D	Small	S4	500
Principal E	Small	S5	400
Principal F	Large	L1	1,900
Principal G	Large	L2	4,700
Principal H	Large	L3	4,500
Principal I	Large	L4	2,100
Principal J	Large	L5	1,600

Note. For this study, schools with a district enrollment below 1,500 students were classified as small districts. District enrollment was rounded down to the nearest hundred.

Instrumentation

The study consisted of interviews with 10 high school principals in an effort to better understand perceptions held by high school principals regarding state education standards and whether or not increasing education standards has a positive impact on student achievement. The principals' views of professional development and how to

properly ensure graduates are college- and career-ready were also addressed during the interviews. Interview questions were created based on a theoretical framework of the Functional Theory of Stratification. Interview participants were notified the interviews would be conducted either over the telephone or in person. Each participant was provided a letter of participation (see Appendix D), a letter of informed consent, and a copy of the interview questions to clarify the study.

Data Collection

Prior to contacting any potential participants, the researcher received approval from the Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board. To inform participants of the study, participants were notified by telephone or through electronic communication. Once potential participants showed interest in the research, each participant was presented, through electronic communication, a letter of participation, a letter of informed consent, and a copy of the interview questions. Once agreement to participate in the study was obtained, interviews were scheduled and confirmed.

All interviews were conducted in person at locations chosen by the participants. In order to ensure an accurate transcription, interviews were audio recorded with permission of participants and uploaded to a password-protected computer. The recorded interviews were then sent to a qualified transcriptionist to be transcribed. Electronic transcripts were returned to the researcher from the transcriptionist and stored on the researcher's password-protected computer. To ensure authenticity, transcripts were randomly compared to the original audio recordings.

Data Analysis

Interviews have been a common, reliable resource to collect data and are often used in qualitative studies (Peters & Halcomb, 2015). The use of semi-structured interviews is believed to produce insightful data, as they are structured around a predefined set of questions but allow for the researcher to request further responses from the participants (Peters & Halcomb, 2015). Through a qualitative data analysis, the interview process allows the researcher to take original interpretations and then convey data in an organized, logical manner (Taylor et al., 2015). At the conclusion of the interviews, the information obtained was reviewed, and the qualitative data were analyzed and organized.

For this study, qualitative data were collected to create an in-depth, personal understanding of the perceptions held by high school principals in regard to state education standards and whether or not increased education standards have a positive impact on student achievement. Through this process of data analysis, the researcher placed an emphasis on becoming familiar with data, and patterns were identified within the data which provided detailed descriptions and categories to assist in analyzing the data (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2011).

Summary

The methodology and design for this study were presented in Chapter Three. The problem and purpose of the research were identified, research questions were restated, and a justification of the population and sample were given. Ethical considerations and an explanation for the researcher choosing a qualitative study were declared.

Instrumentation methods and a description of the process for collecting and analyzing data followed.

In Chapter Four, data analysis of data collected from interviews with participants is presented. Data results are presented through opinions of high school principals obtained from interviews. Chapter Five includes a summary of the study, conclusions that were formulated, and recommendations for further research.

Chapter Four: Analysis of Data

The purpose of this study was to elicit perceptions of high school principals regarding state education standards and whether or not increasing education standards has a positive impact on student achievement. It has been proposed that by increasing the rigor of education standards, student achievement will increase and students will graduate more equipped for the college classroom (Kelly et al., 2014). Furthermore, by striving for increased student achievement through improved education standards, it has been alleged students will receive a more consistent education, better preparing graduates to contribute to society (Barone, 2014).

In order to complete this study and to identify the impact more rigorous standards could have, it was necessary to collect qualitative data to gauge the opinions of high school principals regarding education standards in Missouri. Once collected, data were analyzed to identify any similarities or differences held in beliefs of participants.

Data collected were used to formulate answers to the following research questions:

1. What are high school principals' perceptions of the Missouri Learning Standards in comparison to the Common Core Standards?
2. What are the perceptions of high school principals in regard to professional development and the Missouri Learning Standards?
3. What are high school principals' perceptions of the Missouri Learning Standards and student achievement?
4. What are high school principals' perceptions of the Missouri Learning Standards and college and career readiness?

Organization of Data Analysis

In this chapter, qualitative data collected from interviews with 10 high school principals in southwest Missouri are presented. To acquire the essential data for this study, interviews were conducted with principals in southwest Missouri who were preparing for the implementation of the new Missouri Learning Standards. The data were obtained to gain a better idea of the standards' effect on student achievement and how high school principals perceive the new Missouri Learning Standards. The interviews of the study participants consisted of 10 questions designed to measure the opinions of these principals regarding the Common Core State Standards, professional development, college and career readiness, and the Missouri Learning Standards.

Analysis of Qualitative Data

Qualitative data were collected from high school principals who were preparing to implement the new Missouri Learning Standards within their districts. Study participants were divided into two groups, principals from larger school districts and principals from smaller school districts. To keep participant identities and responses confidential, all participants were given an identification code, and the school district names of the participants were not mentioned. The participants from larger schools were labeled Large 1 (L1), Large 2 (L2), Large 3 (L3), Large 4 (L4), Large 5 (L5), and the participants from the smaller schools were labeled Small 1 (S1), Small 2 (S2), Small 3 (S3), Small 4 (S4), and Small 5 (S5).

Prior to the interviews, principals who agreed to participate were provided a letter of participation, a copy of the interview questions, and an informed consent form. Participants were informed one hour would be needed for the interviews, and additional

time would be allowed at the request of the participants. All interviews were conducted in locations requested by the participants and were scheduled at a time of their choosing. To ensure research accuracy and after receiving permission from participants, interviews were audiotaped and the recordings were transcribed.

Principals interviewed were chosen at random, which resulted in varying levels of experience among the 10 participants. For this study, the years of experience are presented to show competency of participants. A breakdown of the different experience levels can be found in Table 2.

Table 2

Participants' Years of Administrative Experience

Participant	Code	High School	Total Years
Small 1	S1	4	6
Small 2	S2	4	4
Small 3	S3	5	5
Small 4	S4	7	22
Small 5	S5	2	2
Large 1	L1	3	18
Large 2	L2	8	10
Large 3	L3	0	15
Large 4	L4	2	2
Large 5	L5	6	10

Note. Principals were chosen at random.

Out of the 10 participating administrators, the least experienced participant had two total years of administrative experience, compared to 22 years for the participant with the most experience. When looking at number of years at the high school level, only one participant had 10 or more years of experience at that level. The participants from school districts identified as small had less experience as building administrators when compared to participants from larger school districts. The experience levels among

participants created a natural contrast as data collected from interview questions were analyzed to identify similarities or differences in opinions.

Interview question one. Why do you believe Missouri failed to accept Common Core?

Principal S1 responded to the question by mentioning Missouri was one of the earliest supporters of Common Core and how surprised S1 was that the state ultimately decided to drop support for the initiative. In agreement with one another, L5 and S1 claimed schools could have seen positive results from Common Core, but due to the divisiveness of the legislation, Missouri was better off to abandon plans to implement the standards. Both S1 and L5 found it difficult to believe Missouri had completely moved away from Common Core, asserting Missouri instead chose to rebrand Common Core as the Missouri Learning Standards in an attempt to decrease negativity that had become attached to the initiative.

When asked the same question, S2 felt people were convinced the federal government was behind the standards in an apparent takeover of state-led education. Principal S2 mentioned once the federal government became an advocate for Common Core, school boards across the state began to reject the standards in order not to relinquish control of their school districts to the government. Agreeing with S1's opinion, S2 held the state's switch to the Missouri Learning Standards was political, and the Common Core name was changed to shield state standards from the people of Missouri. Arguing against the amount of time it took to re-write the standards, S2 pointed out, "If the state truly believed in improving education, they would have removed

all standards tied to Common Core and would have looked into writing standards that could have benefited Missouri students much earlier.”

Principal L2 was in agreement Common Core failed in Missouri because the standards were pushed on the states by the federal government, and the standards would reduce local control of school districts. While L2 did not like the idea of losing local control, L2 could see both positive and negative aspects of the initiative. Liking how Common Core created a common curriculum for students, L2 believed the standards would benefit students who moved from one state to another; however, L2 did not like how the government would have a bigger influence on what was taught in the classroom. Principal L2 believed had Missouri not changed course, “Common Core would have dictated what politicians thought was best, and politics would end up deciding what was taught within our classrooms.”

While agreeing the government would have more control of education under Common Core, S4 did not like that Missouri had thrown its support behind the initiative as quickly as it did. Principal S4 wished the state would have taken more time to identify issues that could have plagued Common Core’s implementation. By not taking time to identify potential problems, S4 believed the state opened themselves up to criticism from Missouri residents. Assuming the negativity would result in the state moving in a different direction, S4 admitted, “Once the complaints started, a quick action was required by the state before total control of the situation was lost.”

Mentioning “the lack of local control,” L3 was in agreement with the other administrators why Common Core failed, but also cited misinformation presented by the press as a deciding factor. Principal L3 did not believe Missouri constituents really knew

what Common Core had to offer teachers and education. Principal L3 also suspected the push from political groups to remove Common Core might not have been as strong if accurate information would have been presented by members of the press.

There were many reasons why Missouri failed to accept Common Core, with both L1 and S5 believing the standards were not accepted because they were unfair to students. Principal L1 alleged earlier standards had served students better, and once Common Core was adopted, dramatic changes to the educational system would have to be made for students to benefit. Blaming districts for failing to do enough to promote the standards, S5 did not feel Common Core had any chance at being successful. Citing a “lack of effective professional development” leading up to the implementation of Common Core, S5 was not surprised the standards were rejected by the education community.

Differing from the opinions of other participants, S3 claimed Missouri’s original plan to adopt Common Core was closely associated with the home school community and was led by politicians who were not focused on improving education, but who were set on pushing an anti-public school message. While S3 was not too sure if this was the main reason Common Core was adopted, S3 agreed with others the standards failed because of the fear of losing local control. Principal S3 articulated, “Once people started hearing that schools would be controlled by politicians in Washington, support of Common Core quickly evaporated.” Echoing this sentiment, L4 shared, “Common Core would have been given a chance had the federal government kept their hands off of it.”

Interview question two. How are the Missouri Learning Standards an improvement on Common Core?

While not feeling the Missouri Learning Standards were an improvement over Common Core, S1 stopped short of labeling the standards as ineffective. Sharing opinions similar to other participants, S1 contended the Missouri Learning Standards were a rebranding of Common Core aimed at satisfying disgruntled Missouri residents. In addition to this, S1 disagreed with claims the crosswalks contained in the Missouri Learning Standards were any different than the ones found in Common Core, further sharing:

If you look at the crosswalks, you find the same standards with a new number next to it. There are some changes so it is not totally Common Core but it comes down to Missouri choosing not to throw out millions of dollars by completely abandoning Common Core. If you want my opinion, the Missouri Learning Standards are a new car with a different paint job.

Expressing a positive outlook about the new Missouri Learning Standards, S1 shared the opinion, “By giving Missouri residents a role in the creation of these standards, the state would not receive the same backlash as with Common Core.”

Principal S2 implied a more positive opinion toward the old Missouri Learning Standards than S1 held. Believing the first version of the Missouri Learning Standards improved on Common Core by utilizing a higher level of rigor than Common Core intended to use, S2 supported the switch to the Missouri Learning Standards and characterized the shift in curriculum with the following opinion:

The state has used many of the standards from Common Core and have allowed me as an administrator to go to my community and sell the Missouri Learning Standards as no longer being associated with Common Core. Our new standards

are designed for Missouri, not something created by the national government. By adopting the Missouri Learning Standards, Missouri has taken the high rigor of Common Core and replaced it with a curriculum that Missouri residents can get behind. The district I represent is a small community, and our residents are proud that they have local control of education.

Principal S2 shared that since the community never fully wanted to accept Common Core, the new standards were accepted without many residents even looking at what type of changes would be taking place.

Together S3 and L4 did not know if the old Missouri Learning Standards would have improved on Common Core had they not been replaced by new standards. Principal S3 recognized it was important to have standards but was not sure of the overall impact of learning standards on student achievement. Explaining it was beneficial for all administrators to know what was being taught in classrooms, S3 could not decide if higher education standards did enough to increase student achievement. To clarify this response, S3 shared:

I never completely made my mind made up about Common Core, but feel it is hard to judge the amount of learning that has taken place from one year to another without schools sharing common standards across the board. I think that it is good for schools to know what needs to be taught, but I feel that no matter what program is being pushed by the state, there are going to be more standards required to be learned than time to teach. I look at the Missouri Learning Standards and see the same problem. There was a study conducted that said it would take a student 22 years to learn everything Common Core wanted taught. I

think the standards will help principals, but schools will still need to sit down to decide what must be taught and what would be nice for our students to be taught. Agreeing with S3, L4 was confident the state was trying to make things better but felt student achievement would show more growth if student needs were placed a head of district needs. Principal L4 asked, “Why has the state decided that the best thing for our students is to change standards three times in a span of five years?”

Encouraged with the changes, L2 felt the state had made the correct decision to move toward standards reform. Principal L2 indicated the Missouri Learning Standards were an improvement on Common Core that improved public perception of public education in the state. By rejecting Common Core, L2 claimed groups against the initiative backed off and allowed a positive public perception to “surround the Missouri Learning Standards.” With Missouri’s new standards driven by Missouri constituents, L2 suggested the new standards would be an improvement on Common Core “as long as the federal government stayed out of state-controlled education.”

Principals S5 and L3 shared many of the opinions L2 held on Common Core and viewed the decision to move to the Missouri Learning Standards as a success. Both S5 and L3 believed by switching to a name that regionalized state curriculum, Missouri was able to move away from the negativity associated with Common Core. Not seeing much difference between the two set of standards, S5 emphasized the increased rigor of the new standards would increase student achievement in Missouri. Failing to comprehend how Common Core would ever be successful in the state of Missouri, S5 expressed, “There are too many people in the state of Missouri that feel government involvement in local education should be held to a minimum.”

Agreeing with other participants, L5 thought the new Missouri Learning Standards were an improvement primarily due to the name of the standards. Having sole ownership of the standards was seen as a positive among study participants, with L5 sharing, “Common Core was not popular among my community because they had no part in creating the standards.” Principal L5 further expressed another positive to the Missouri Learning Standards was that the new standards did not stick with Common Core’s grade-level expectations. The committees who wrote the new standards rearranged curriculum to better represent what Missouri residents believed to be important.

At the time of the interview, L1 had not gone over the old Missouri Learning Standards in their entirety and had not reviewed the newly approved Missouri Learning Standards. Because of this, L1 could not clearly answer whether or not the Missouri Learning Standards were going to be an improvement on Common Core. One thing concerning to L1 was that individuals at the state level did not have a clear answer to how student achievement would be judged on state assessments. Principal L1 shared the following interaction between L1’s district and the MODESE:

Our district was trying to prepare for the new EOC tests, and we were going over the standards. We needed to know if the new tests would follow the Common Core standards or follow the Missouri Learning Standards. The first person we spoke with said that the EOC test for the 2015-2016 school year would follow the standards set by Common Core. Some of our teachers then went to an EOC meeting where they were told the tests would go along with the Missouri

Learning Standards. I called back to DESE and a third person gave a completely different answer than the other two answers our district received.

After having this exchange with the department of education, L1's district decided to do what it felt would best meet student needs. Principal L1 did give the impression some confidence had been lost when it came to the department of education making the right decisions.

Interview question three. What would you like the new education standards of Missouri to accomplish?

Responding to question three, L1 placed a focus on the importance of creating state assessments that match the standards set by the state. This particular administrator did not feel there had been any major issues with state standards over the years, but did indicate the state could do more to set students up for academic success. Principal S1 insisted one way to ensure academic success of students was to decide what type of state assessments were going to be used and "to stick with it." Additionally, S1 alleged the inability of the state to decide on one particular state assessment was a detriment to Missouri students. Principal S1 shared, "If you keep changing the assessments, there are no ways to go back and compare to past tests."

Principal S5 held many of the same beliefs as S1 and liked the idea the new standards would focus on less information. Similar to S1, S5 was concerned about how the state conducted end-of-year assessments and hoped the new standards could lead to improving how assessments were administered. To clarify these concerns, S5 shared, "I would like for our new standards to focus on career readiness, not necessarily college readiness." Claiming two decades of failure by public education, S5 felt students had

been pushed blindly into attending college and that school districts had failed to adequately address technical training for students.

Principals S2 and S3 held comparable views of what they wanted from new standards, with both administrators concluding the new standards would provide school districts a relevant starting point from the state. Both administrators maintained the new standards would give teachers a better idea of where to start and would allow teachers to identify key concepts much easier. By moving toward new standards, both principals believed rigor in the classrooms would increase and allow districts more autonomy than Common Core. Addressing career readiness, S3 emphasized, “I would like state standards to become more relevant for the students who are being taught.”

Believing the new standards needed to focus on increased rigor in the classroom, S4 was pleased to see Common Core never fully implemented because of failures by the initiative to address certain needs of students. Apprehensions toward Common Core were expressed by S4:

I liked the idea of starting at kindergarten and slowly incorporating Common Core as students advance from one grade to another. I liked the overall idea of Common Core, but the standards taught needed to answer real life questions that students would face throughout their life. Common Core needed to approach education in that way and in my opinion, failed to do so.

Appreciating the inclusion of higher-level thinking skills into the new Missouri Learning Standards, S4 was leery the new standards would suffer the same fate as Common Core due to the state’s quick implementation of the standards.

Viewing the changes in a favorable manner, L1 expected the new standards would allow school districts to build from one concept to another more easily than previous sets of standards. Principal L1 placed a high level of importance for students being college- and career-ready at the time of graduation and anticipated the new Missouri Learning Standards would address this need. In addition, L1 believed for the new Missouri Learning Standards to have a positive impact on student achievement, vertical alignment needed to improve in state curriculum. Principal L1 also shared:

I hope that we have vertical alignment in the state. I doubt very seriously that the state is doing that. I hope that there is enough problem solving and critical thinking going on in the classroom that will allow graduates to move effortlessly into the work force. Growing up I learned problem solving through everyday jobs, I learned how to solve real life problems because those opportunities existed for me. Today, if a kid is looking for employment they find it in jobs that do all the thinking for them and do not provide an opportunity for problem solving.

Holding the opinion the new standards should incorporate real-life problems into the curriculum, L1 desired reform that would allow for classroom instruction of everyday skills students use outside of a classroom setting.

Eager for improvement, L2 expressed many of the same feelings conveyed by L1, wishing the new standards would ensure students were college- and career-ready by the time of graduation. Principal L2 did not want students graduating from high school without the skills to be successful outside of the classroom. Additionally, L2 thought the new Missouri Learning Standards would be most effective by “focusing on technical

skills and not so much on college readiness.” Similar to L1, L2 did not want students to graduate high school and not understand how to react in real-life situations.

Principal L3 approached question three as both an educator and as a parent. When viewing this question as an educator, L3 wanted what many of the other administrators desired – for students to receive a well-rounded education. By looking at this question as a parent, L3 responded, “I hope that my kids graduate with as many opportunities available as possible.” Further maintaining increased standards did not guarantee opportunities would exist, L3 noted, “Higher education needed to get on the same page as public education to ensure graduates were ready for college.”

Interview question four. What is your definition of effective professional development, and do you feel it is linked to increased student achievement?

When asked this question, S2 and L3 concurred effective professional development has to be an ongoing effort and must incorporate a consistent district message. Principal S2 maintained in order to label professional development as effective, instruction has to connect with district needs and cannot be something provided to teachers just so the district can confirm professional development is offered. Not agreeing all professional development was effective, Principal S2 shared:

One reason schools fail with professional development is due to the fact that professional development is one way and not differentiated. Teachers learn differently just like students do and must be provided professional development that targets different learning styles. Effective classroom instruction requires effective classroom instructors, and it is possible to achieve this through professional development.

Principal S2 suspected effective professional development corresponds with increased student achievement and because of that correlation, school districts “should continue to strive for effective professional development within their district.” In agreement, L3 declared, “If it is handled correctly, I definitely believe that professional development can have a positive effect on student achievement.”

Principal S3’s response to this question was also positive in tone. Concurring that “effective professional development did have a positive effect on student achievement,” S3 echoed the belief professional development can have a positive effect on student achievement if taken seriously by the individual teacher and if consistent with district goals. Principal S3 expressed when “professional development was used in collaboration with district data,” teachers gained more beneficial knowledge than when it was not tied to similar statistics. In conclusion, S3 alleged professional development should be focused on achieving goals created by the district.

In response to the question, S4 replied, “Professional development effectiveness relies on the teacher buying into what the district is telling them.” Principal S4 asserted the information provided has to be relevant to what the teachers are teaching and must meet the expectations of those teachers. Once professional development meets teacher expectations, S4 emphasized districts should continue the process and provide the teacher the tools needed to implement professional development effectively. Showing support for professional development, S4 emphasized, “I think that as long as the information is presented well and is relevant to what teachers want to accomplish in the classroom, professional development will increase student achievement.”

In agreement with other administrators, S5 asserted for professional development to be labeled effective, it has to be specific to district needs. Principal S5 held the opinion:

If it is classroom management that the district wants to focus on, it is the district's responsibility to identify three ways to improve classroom management within the district and then locate the professional development opportunities available to meet these needs.

Recognizing a need for administrators to possess the ability to identify when an instructor is struggling in the classroom, S5 thought school administrators should promote professional development within their buildings that could move instructors past those barriers. Principal S5 expressed if a district failed to employ administrators who could recognize the difference between effective and ineffective professional development, the district would be "better off spending professional development funds on classroom resources."

Principal L1 replied to question four by stating many administrators have failed their districts by sending teachers off to workshops to excite them about new methodologies, but not providing adequate follow-up or support. Principal L1 agreed with S5's opinion many school districts struggle to identify what areas should be addressed with professional development and revealed:

I feel we fail with professional development because instead of having an absolute focus, we come up with 50 different things instead of focusing on just one strategy or area of deficiency. We fail to perfect those foundational building blocks and instead move on from one strategy to another. If you take a look at

DESE, they have modeled ineffectiveness to us greatly through standardized testing. They cannot decide what the tests are going to look like from one year to another. Before we have mastered one technique, the state moves everyone in different directions and on to something else.

Agreeing with other administrators, L1 also believed for effective professional development to exist, the information has to be specific to district needs.

Principal L4 expressed the state failed to promote professional development effectively and because of this failure, professional development is viewed negatively by many educators. Noticing a surplus of professional development opportunities available to educators, L4 identified some of these opportunities as being of good quality and others as being inferior. Moreover, L4 held the opinion professional development needs to be specific and used to meet the needs of the teachers attending the workshops. Principal L4 desired for professional development workshops to be relevant to each teacher, “allowing the teacher to leave the meeting with something they can put to immediate use in their classroom.”

For professional development to be effective, L5 asserted school administrators have to take responsibility for success or failure of the district professional development program. Additionally, L5 does not like when too many administrators plan professional development opportunities and then fail to adequately assess the success or failure of the sessions. Principal L5 shared, “Professional development can only help improve student achievement so much. Teachers, administrators and students all have their role to play in improving achievement levels.”

Interview question five. What effect does professional development have on teachers' understanding of what is expected from them in the classroom and how they teach to state standards?

In response to question five, S1 replied professional development has to include opportunities for follow-up sessions for teachers to fully understand the methodology and to label the professional development as effective. Principal S1 thought professional development sessions often incorporate too much information into a couple of hours of instruction. In addition, S1 shared the opinion, "If teachers have never used the strategies being taught, there is no effective way to teach everything in one day and expect teachers to implement the strategies consistently."

In agreement, principals S2, S3, and S4 all wanted professional development to be specific to teacher needs and expressed that by making the professional development teacher-specific, teachers would better understand how to utilize information presented to them. Principal S2 answered professional development would be most beneficial to teachers if it was geared to the state standards and differentiated instruction methods. Principal S2 thought, "If you do a one-size-fits-all instruction and fail to differentiate to specific subjects, the professional development would be too broad and ideas would be lost to some teachers."

Principal S3 added to what S2 shared by stating professional development should be focused on the district goal for the year. Emphasizing administrators have to ensure teachers meet district goals, S3 placed a high level of importance on teachers understanding what is expected from them in the classroom. Furthermore, S3 shared the following opinion on professional development:

I think that PD should be written into each teacher's professional development plan and that as a district you are following through with the professional development plans. I feel that there is a pyramid of needs that must be met during the school year. First you have to make sure that there is effective communication among staff, second that there is effective teaching going on in the classroom, and then third that the curriculum meets the needs of the district. It is necessary that a curriculum allows students to move from one district to another and that when this happens the student can transition without any major problems. Supporting claims made by S2 and S3, principal S4 maintained professional development is only effective when teachers utilize the information covered, and it is the building administrator's responsibility to hold teachers accountable to using information presented during the professional development session.

Both S5 and L5 longed for professional development to be simplified in a way so teachers can retain more information. Certain teachers will struggle to remember everything mentioned in a meeting, S5 felt it is more effective to shorten professional development sessions. Similar to the other four administrators from small school districts, S5 wanted professional development to be building-specific. Principal S5 communicated, "Districts have different needs depending on the size of the district or geographic location. Teacher needs are different from one building to another." Echoing those beliefs, L5 specified, "Professional development cannot be an overload of information and must be specific to needs of the teachers."

Principal L1 stressed the idea ongoing professional development is most beneficial to teachers' performance within the classroom. In addition, L1 discussed the

importance of districts picking an area of concern and spending adequate time focusing on alleviating that concern, which will result in an increase in teacher and student performance. Principal L1 shared:

Over the last two years, my district has focused on remediation at the high school level, and I feel that many high school principals are focusing on the remediation because of the importance of state testing. Our math scores were atrocious and because of remediation, we have increased our scores by eight percent over the last two years. Under the old model of No Child Left Behind, we focused on growth and did not necessarily focus on increasing student achievement. I think that we now will truly have to understand what those state standards say so that as a district we can sit down and modify our curriculum so we teach to those standards.

In the end, L1 strongly supported professional development and articulated, “Professional development increased student achievement.”

Together, L2 and L4 contended districts need to make sure plans are in place to improve district deficiencies. Principal L2 suggested if a district can identify what areas are concerning, district resources can then be used to solve problems plaguing the district. In addition, L2 said, “If we just say that we are going to participate in professional development without any expectations, then we are going to be sitting around wondering what in the world is happening.” Principal L4 pointed out professional development must help teachers in the classroom, or it is a waste of time and money.

Sharing some of the same opinions as L2 and L4, L3 believed professional development has to be tied to the mission and vision of the school district. Principal L3

revealed, “Professional development has to be a product of what you are and what you have created.” Furthermore, L3 felt professional development should reinforce to teachers what they can use tangibly within the classroom. In conclusion, L3 felt that by aligning professional development to district goals, the professional development will have a positive impact on achievement. Specifying their beliefs, L3 stated, “Hopefully our new standards are aligned to what we do in the classroom on daily basis to help meet district needs.”

Interview question six. Do you feel the old version of the Missouri Learning Standards did enough to increase student achievement? Please explain why you feel this way.

Principal S1 felt under the old standards, math was the area of biggest struggle for most districts. Sharing these beliefs, S1 stated, “The state began to provide many resources to help improve state scores, but then stopped providing these resources once state officials started seeing a backlash against the standards.” Additionally, S1 did not know if the old Missouri Learning Standards were used long enough to identify a significant increase in student achievement. In keeping the same state tests used with the old Missouri Learning Standards, S1 conveyed, “It would be difficult to accurately judge the amount of student achievement that could be credited to the new standards.”

In agreement with S4, principal S5 thought it would be difficult for state officials to determine what standards should receive credit if student achievement increased. Principal S5 asked, “Did achievement increase because students learned more from the new standards or because the students figured out how to effectively take the old state assessments?” Moreover, S5 supposed one positive of Common Core was that states

shared a common curriculum, making it easier for governments to compare achievement levels from one state to another. Concerned with the new Missouri Learning Standards, S5 believed when Missouri moved to the new standards, it became much more difficult to compare state achievement levels from one state to another.

Neither S2 nor L3 could definitively answer question six with a yes or a no. Principal S2 said, “There are no standards out there that are going to guarantee student achievement increases, no matter how good the standards are.” Despite holding that view, S2 did think the older standards were successful in some ways, because the increased rigor required teachers to be held accountable at higher levels. Feeling the intentions behind the old standards were good, L3 believed minor adjusting of the standards was needed to benefit students the most. Principal L3 shared, “I think that the intentions of the old standards were good and that we were moving in the right direction, but the practicality of the standards might not have been where it needed to be.”

Principals S3 and L4 were in agreement switching to the Missouri Learning Standards could be beneficial but did feel education would have been better off if the state would have remained committed to Common Core. Principal S3 shared:

I feel this way about Common Core because you cannot guarantee a viable curriculum for students who move across state lines or allow for comparisons between districts. However, I also believe in local control and feel that Missouri has certain needs for the students of this state and those needs need to be met. I am okay with whatever standards are used as long as they are what is best for our students.

Not feeling the state had done enough to help these students, L4 questioned whether or not the new standards would meet the need of a viable curriculum for students moving across state lines. Principal L4 concluded students who did move to another state would be at a disadvantage when compared to students who moved from one Common Core state to another.

Principal S4 was glad the state decided to go a different direction with education standards. Principal S4 acknowledged that while state politicians were trying to decide which standards to implement, districts were dealing with curriculum issues caused by some teachers trying to teach to Common Core and others trying to teach to the Missouri Learning Standards. In addition, S4 did not feel student achievement would increase because of education standards and suggested Missouri had a history of struggling with its educational identity. Furthering this belief, S4 stated, “Missouri is a bandwagon state; they like to jump on what other states are doing, but fail to completely think things through.”

By implying school districts had been struggling to show how their students were progressing from one year to the next, L1 could not say if the Missouri Learning Standards would do enough to show this progress. Principal L1 shared a favorable opinion of NCLB and liked the intent behind the act. With the current system, L1 noted it is much harder to show student growth and believed NCLB forced educators not to leave any child behind. Principal L1 explained that while the new standards might not be perfect, by increasing expectations, student achievement will more likely increase than if things are left alone.

It was further elaborated by L2 that as the world evolved into a more technical society, education standards changed from being practical for one generation to less practical for the following generation. Principal L2 believed because of these changes, students started entering college with different expectations than previous generations, sharing:

When I started teaching, the only technology in my classroom was the overhead projector. Emailing parents was a step in the direction but no comparison to what we have today and who knows what we will have in 20 years. I think we always need to update standards to make them relevant.

It was noted by L2 that as expectations changed, schools had to change as well, stating, “It is necessary that educators do what is possible to stay in front of the changes coming to education.”

Principal L5 did not feel the old standards did enough to progress student achievement. Agreeing with other participants, L5 believed the standards had not been in use long enough to accurately judge their impact and did not believe the old Missouri Learning Standards existed for the best interests of the students. From these beliefs, L5 decided the original version of the Missouri Learning Standards arose largely because of complaints about Common Core.

Interview question seven. How do you feel the new standards will improve on the old Missouri Learning Standards?

Principal S1 asserted the new standards will improve on the old Missouri Learning Standards by increasing critical thinking in the classrooms, but more time will be needed to fully judge the standards’ effectiveness. By feeling Common Core had

failed because people lacked a full understanding of the standards, S1 expressed a fear the same could happen to the new Missouri standards if parents were not educated on the goals of the standards. Using the failure of Common Core as an example, S1 felt it was very important to educate parents on the new standards and maintained, “Since parents were not taught the material the exact same way, they will assume what is being taught is wrong.”

Neither S2 nor L5 could decide whether or not the new standards would be beneficial to student achievement. Principal S2 said, “No matter how good the new standards were, no standards exist that can guarantee increases in student achievement.” Aiming to increase student achievement in the classroom, S2 proclaimed the importance of increasing instructional rigor. Principal L5 agreed with S2 that standards by themselves will not guarantee an increase in student achievement, but felt when teamed with other variables, the new standards can net positive results. Principal L5 maintained, “The first version of the Missouri Learning Standards did little to improve student achievement. The new version was created through a well-planned process and student achievement should benefit from the time people put in to that process.”

Both S3 and S4 proposed that as times change, educators needed to ensure standards change as well in order for students’ needs to be met. Principal S3 felt when compared to other states across the country, Missouri’s standards were starting to show a lack of rigor, and new standards were adopted to increase educational rigor in the classroom. Summing up the importance of new standards, S3 shared, “The new standards would improve student performance by requiring teachers to teach more relevant topics.” Principal S4 further expressed, “As Missouri transitioned to the new

standards, districts would see increases in lessons that focused on the application of real-life skills and higher-level thinking.”

Agreeing with one another, L2 and L3 assumed the new standards will have more success than Common Core, because the new standards belong to Missouri and are not an overreach of the federal government. Principal L2 indicated the new standards will receive more support than Common Core, because “people want to support something they had a hand in creating.” Principal L2 mentioned, “There is a reason that our forefathers put control of education into the hands of the state government.” Likewise, L3 was keen on how the new standards placed curriculum back in the hands of the local government and shared, “I feel that the new standards take things a little further in preparing students for college and career, and that is a good thing.”

Principal L4 did not feel his or her knowledge of the new standards was comprehensive enough to provide a sufficient answer to question seven. Excited about how the state developed the new standards, L4 felt the efforts made by parents, politicians, and state education leaders would lead to improved education in Missouri. Principal S5 concurred with L4 that enough time had not passed since the standards were approved for an accurate opinion of the standards to be formed. In agreement, S5 and L4 felt changes needed to be made to Missouri’s standards and believed that by increasing expectations, some level of student progress would result.

Interview question eight. Why is it important students graduate college- and career-ready?

Principal S1 answered, “Too often students graduate high school, sign up for college, and drop out when they realize that college is not for them.” Suggesting students

do not drop out because they do not want to attend college, S1 felt many actually dropped out because they are not ready for college. It was asserted by S1 that school districts are limited in what they can do to prepare students for life after high school, and parental guidance plays a larger role than some believe. Owning these feelings, S1 was convinced:

The best way to get a kid ready for college is through the parents. It is necessary parents know their child must graduate high school ready to be productive citizens and that the only way they will do this is from hard work and dedication.

While S1 expressed support for the new standards, S1 did not know if the standards would succeed in preparing students for college and career readiness.

Principal S2 conveyed it is very important to reinforce the idea high school is not the final step in a student's education, sharing, "Graduating high school is a monumental feat, but it is not the end." By highlighting the importance of college and career readiness, S2 felt school districts should not only convince students to continue their education, but help students prepare to join the global community. Adamantly, S2 noted how schools are responsible to prepare students for success after graduation, and success will be judged on "the skills and the abilities graduates will be able to contribute to society."

Identifying remedial college classes as a major reason students need to graduate ready for college, S3 did not place all the blame on public education, holding colleges responsible for some of the failures. Principal S3 furthered this opinion by stating, "We say that we are going to educate everyone, and colleges do not take that approach." Principal S3 believed some students fail to succeed in college because these students are

not prepared to do everything for themselves. Feeling school districts need to begin placing a high level of importance on preparing students for their careers, S3 believed, “Too often students graduate high school without the responsibility required to successfully hold a job.”

For students to be productive citizens upon graduation, S4 felt it is important for district curriculum to focus on college and career readiness. Principal S4 said, “We must give the students the tools to be successful, and hopefully they dedicate themselves enough to follow through with these tools during their lifetime.” After some thought, S4 struggled to understand how “some valedictorians graduate high school, go to college, and drop out, while other students work their butts off to graduate college.” Believing school districts should do more in developing a work ethic among students, S4 wanted districts to identify ways to “keep students from failing in life.”

Principal S5 expressed school districts are not doing enough to ensure all students are ready for success after graduation. Questioning why school districts place so much emphasis on college readiness, S5 noted it is unrealistic to graduate all students college-ready. Principal S5 shared, “Too many students graduate school without skills that would allow them to move into the workforce immediately.” It is because of the lack of these skills at the time of graduation that more emphasis needs to be placed on career readiness.

It was suggested by L1 that students not seeing immediate success in college are not anything to worry about, mentioning, “When I graduated high school I was prepared for college but struggled.” Principal L1 showed concern about the number of students who went to college and lacked the ability to adjust to the expectations of a college

classroom. By creating opportunities for students be placed in real-life situation and to develop life skills in the classroom, L1 advocated, “Students who do not intend to attend college can still graduate with the skills that allow them to have a successful career.”

Both L2 and L3 were in agreement that if Missouri continues using the same standards, students will continue to graduate without the skills or responsibility to be successful. Looking for students to compete on an international level and to ensure they are ready for success at the time of graduation, L2 mentioned, “There is no such thing as being able to compete, without competition.” Principal L3 favored school districts dropping the idea of college readiness to direct their focus to career readiness. Principal L3 said, “You go to college to focus on a career, you join the military to focus on a career. College readiness is career readiness.” In closing, L3 shared, “If people do not have the ability to work with other people or understand the importance to show up on time, they won’t be able to hold a job.”

Interview question nine. How do higher education standards, such as Common Core and the Missouri Learning Standards, impact college and career readiness?

In response to question nine, L4 shared public school districts should not have to take the majority of the blame for students who are not successful in college. Arguing this point, L4 stated, “College has not changed so much over the years that schools should completely change how they present information because colleges have requested they make the change.” Principal L4 conveyed:

When these students get to college, college professors are still presenting information the way it was presented decades ago. There are not as many jobs available today that do not require some college, so everyone is going to college

today. Kids who were behind in high school are now going to college and are expected to be successful. Many of these kids would not have attended college 20 years ago.

Claiming increased education standards are impacting college and career readiness within districts, L4 alleged students who do not apply themselves in high school are creating the impression today's graduates are not ready for college.

In agreement with L4, both S2 and S3 held the new standards are making a difference. Principal S2 expressed the opinion the new standards "placed an emphasis on critical thinking and problem solving." Similarly, S3 shared, "The standards were making a difference because they provided the knowledge students needed to possess."

Principal S2 suggested the old standards were not seeing the desired results because they required too much recall, while the new standards place more of an emphasis on reasoning. Asserting this opinion, S2 said, "The new standards will help these students become more ready for college and for their careers." Despite all the negative publicity school districts were receiving, S3 felt students were prepared for college. Principal S3 shared, "Our students who stop by after college do not say that they lack knowledge to be successful, but that they lack the tools to transition to the college classroom."

Together, S4 and S5 favored the new standards' promotion of critical thinking in the classroom. Principal S4 said, "We have not been doing enough as educators to promote critical thinking." Principal S5 shared similar concerns, stating, "I think students need to be able to think more critically, because when they get to college not

every professor is going to teach in the same manner, and improved critical thinking skills would help with the transition to college.”

Indicating the standards need to address how classrooms lack opportunities for real-world education, principal L1 stated, “We need to create programs that deliver content that places students into situations that push them, that allow no room for error, similar to what NCLB accomplished.” To meet this need, L1 hoped the new standards will allow administrators to push teachers to apply classroom knowledge to real-life situations and to hold teachers more accountable if real-life situations are not incorporated in daily lessons. Principal L1 believed if the new standards do incorporate these real-life situations into the curriculum, college and career readiness will improve; however, L1 concluded, “I hope the standards allow for real-life situations to be taught, but I am not sure they will do that.”

Principal L2 agreed colleges are seeing increases in students who are not prepared for success and viewed the new standards favorably, recognizing that under the new standards, students will be better prepared for college and career readiness. Acknowledging a lack of adequate career readiness, L2 stated, “Without the technical skills required, businesses are turning away high school graduates because they cannot complete the tasks asked of them.” Principal L2 believed without proper preparation, job opportunities will be extremely limited for students, and due to the lack of career readiness, potential earnings will be greatly diminished over a lifetime. In showing the belief career readiness is necessary for success, L2 argued, “Graduates must be ready when they cross the stage to receive their diploma or be ready to fail.”

In agreement with S1's answer, principal L3 noticed a huge disconnect between college readiness and higher education standards. Principal L3 stated:

You hear that there is a huge amount of remediation going on in college and that students are just not ready. I ask who is writing these college tests. The answer to that is that colleges write the tests, not the people who write state examinations. When a college decides they need to make more money, they can raise or lower standards to justify the need for more remedial classes. I think kids are a little more ready than colleges are saying, and I feel that this disconnect hurts our kids in the long run. Colleges do not have to deal with the masses; public schools do. Not thinking anything would improve until the public school system and higher education came to an agreement on what to prioritize, L3 conveyed the new standards will help prepare students for college.

Mutually, L4 and L5 noted increasing academic standards will have a positive effect on college and career readiness, if paired with other variables. Principal L4 asserted the standards will be most impactful if the district is well-organized and if administrators within the district have a clear understanding of the standards. Principal L5 did not believe the standards would improve achievement if teachers and students failed to take them seriously. Clarifying this belief, L5 shared, "Students will not always take their role in the learning process seriously. It is the responsibility of the teacher to make sure learning is taking place in the classroom and that students are receiving an education."

Interview question 10. What is the best way to ensure students graduate high school college- and career-ready?

Principal S1 proposed school will not be important to students if it is not important to their parents. It was further reasoned school districts will see more success with college and career readiness if teachers find ways to incorporate life skills into daily lessons. Sharing this belief, S1 stated, “If teachers fail to show students why the information is important for success after high school, students are not going to buy into it.”

Principal S2 believed schools place too much emphasis on college readiness. Principal S2 held the opinion schools will be more successful if teachers place more focus on differentiated instruction. Feeling schools should do more to support student career choices, S2 shared:

No matter if the students want to go to a university or work for their parents’ business, we need to make sure all students have the opportunity to be successful. Too much focus is placed on career readiness. We need to do a better job at making sure students who want to work on their parent’s farm or for their parents’ family-owned business are prepared as well.

It was further reiterated by S2 that schools will best serve student needs if they take an approach that prepares students for either college or a career.

In agreement with S2, L3 believed educators have to identify skills students can apply to their chosen career paths and must provide students with opportunities for “authentic education.” Principal L3 declared more students will be prepared for post-high school life if more job shadowing or mentor programs are available in high school. Conveying this message, L3 anticipated if districts fail to provide students opportunities for career training, the standards will fail to increase college or career readiness.

Principal S3 believed principals must take time to identify what the most important student needs are and the necessary instruction to meet those needs. In sharing this opinion, S3 echoed, “Standards can help prepare students for college but they are not the end-all to prepare students for college.” Noting observations made during his or her career, S3 identified there are many different variables that contribute to a student being prepared for life after graduation, and it is the principal’s responsibility to identify those needs. Principal S3 felt schools should focus more on “soft standards” in addressing curricular needs, and defined soft standards as “standards that the state did not feel were as important for academic success, but could have an impact on a student’s academic success.”

Principal S4 thought the best path for his or her district is to continue utilizing current district academic policies. While S4 supported more rigorous standards, S4 admitted, “Some students were going to be successful in life and others were going to fail no matter how hard the district tried to make all students successful.” It was believed a need existed for school districts to promote college readiness; however, S4 hoped for more vocational training, as student interest in technical skills had been increasing within S4’s district.

By increasing education standards, S5 believed college and career readiness will improve. Principal S5 voiced if teachers believe their performance will be judged by student performance, “Teachers would try harder.” Principal S5 noted higher standards will not achieve greater achievement alone, but by placing more accountability on teacher performance, college and career readiness will result.

It was guaranteed by L1 the best way to ensure college and career readiness is to “interview your returning product.” Endorsing this belief, L1 thought by speaking with recent graduates, administration can identify deficiencies within the district. Principal L1 stressed the importance of doing a better job covering areas that are concerning to recent graduates. Summing up the importance of taking time to visit with recent graduates, L1 shared:

We try to answer what are we missing with our students and what are we doing well. I think that if we fail to ask tough questions, we open ourselves up to criticism. There are times that we have to ask ourselves if we are doing a good job or not. I don't know if I am right with how I handle things but by asking our community, I can get an idea of what we are missing and I can then share that with our teachers for self-reflection.

By approaching district concerns in this manner, L1 asserted issues with curriculum can be identified more efficiently, increasing the district's ability to correct problems that could be affecting student learning.

In agreement with S1's belief, L2 and L4 were certain educators have to “get the family involved.” Principal L2 noted the student will not care if education is not seen as a priority by family members and maintained, “School districts can make a huge difference, but to greatly improve student readiness, a student's home life must accept the importance of an education.” Principal L4 echoed this belief, stating, “Parents have to do their part and stress the importance of graduating high school ready to step into college or into a job with a work ethic that will allow them to be successful.”

Summary

Chapter Four included a summary of the perceptions of 10 high school principals regarding state education standards and the standards' impact on student achievement. Each participant was employed by a southwest Missouri school district preparing to implement the new Missouri Learning Standards. In this chapter, participants' transcribed interviews were examined to discover similarities and differences that existed in their opinions.

By analyzing interview responses, this qualitative study was designed to disclose how differing perceptions exist in regard to improving state education standards and the perceived impact these standards will have on student achievement. Interview responses of participants were examined to provide data on how new standards influence professional development, career readiness, and student performance in the classroom. All participants of the study expressed by incorporating more rigorous education standards into state curriculum, student achievement will be positively affected. However, the level of perceived impact varied among participants, with some believing the new standards will result in large levels of improvement, while others believe results will be insignificant.

Findings from the analysis of data and a summary of these findings are presented in Chapter Five. Each research question is reexamined, and conclusions to each question are discussed. Implications for practice are addressed, and recommendations for future research regarding the effect increased education standards have on student achievement are presented.

Chapter Five: Summary and Conclusions

Improving the education standards of Missouri has proven to be a difficult task, as it has been tough to determine what will benefit Missouri's students the most (Crouch, 2013). It is believed by many that by increasing instructional rigor, school districts in Missouri have initiated an education reform that will promote individual readiness and better prepare students for success after graduation (Blackburn & Williamson, 2013). With evidence lacking that increased education standards have a positive effect on student achievement, many educators have looked for answers (Firmender et al., 2014).

Researcher Randall Collins (1971) argued that as skill requirements for jobs constantly increase, the number of jobs available that do not require specific skills or additional education have decreased. With research showing graduates who possess higher-order thinking skills and an ability to successfully solve real-world problems are more successful than graduates who do not possess these skills, it is necessary for educators to identify ways for students to develop abilities within the classroom (Westover, 2012). While college and career readiness may not be a realistic goal for all students to achieve, failure to identify and to practice the necessary skills for success during high school should not be an excuse for impeding the learning process (Corbett-Burris & Murphy, 2014).

The purpose of this qualitative study was to elicit perceptions held by high school principals regarding state education standards and whether or not increasing education standards will have a positive impact on student achievement. It has been proposed that through increased educational rigor, state standards will increase student achievement and students will graduate more equipped for success in the college classroom (Kelly et

al., 2014). As education standards changed in Missouri, it was necessary to conduct this study to identify how the Missouri Learning Standards, or similar standards, impact student achievement.

Within Chapter Five of this study, the guiding research questions are answered. Findings are offered with corresponding qualitative data to support answers for the research questions. In addition, conclusions, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research on the impact education standards could have on increasing student achievement are provided.

Findings

This study involved an analysis of the perceptions of high school principals in regard to the impact increased education standards have on student achievement. To provide the needed data, interviews were conducted with 10 high school principals and transcribed for accuracy. Data were then analyzed to increase an understanding of how high school principals perceive the new education standards. The following findings were identified from the qualitative data collected during the interviews.

Two common themes among participating administrators were identified for why Missouri chose to abandon Common Core. While providing their own interpretations on why Common Core was not accepted, the administrators shared a belief the federal government was too involved in the creation and adoption of Common Core across the country. It was because of the added government influence participants felt Common Core would threaten district sovereignty if ever fully implemented in Missouri. To lessen the likelihood of this occurrence, Missouri chose to move in another direction regarding standards reform.

Participants were in agreement the original version of the Missouri Learning Standards was not around long enough to provide an accurate measurement of student growth. In addition to this belief, it was mentioned the old Missouri Learning Standards were a rebranding of Common Core, and it was wrong to view them as a new set of independent standards. Due to this perception, research participants from both small and large school districts struggled to clearly label the original Missouri Learning Standards as a success or failure. While support for the new Missouri Learning Standards was detectible, participating administrators were not in a complete agreement the new standards would achieve substantial student growth without the presence of other variables.

Overall, opinions of participants were mixed on how influential professional development is on teacher expectations in the classroom. Participants suspected teachers have a better understanding of expectations if professional development is specific to district needs and if adequate follow-up sessions are made available to staff members. It was believed by organizing professional development opportunities around state standards, aligning professional development to district goals, and simplifying the message, professional development programs can have a positive effect on teacher performance.

Responses indicated support, from both small and large school districts, for professional development programs that are an embodiment of a common district message. Participants expressed the belief effective professional development can increase student achievement, but is most effective when supported by teachers within the district and when ongoing throughout the school year. Collectively, the participants

did not feel professional development is as effective in increasing student achievement if building leaders fail to take responsibility for failures which result from the professional development program. Data collected indicated the most effective professional development conveys a consistent message, is relevant to district needs, and is taught by teachers who are held accountable to implementation of the professional development's message.

It was believed a lack of effective professional development and Missouri's indecisiveness on standards used to assess student achievement made it difficult to identify which standards were responsible for any improvements in student performance. Many participants questioned if the old version of the Missouri Learning Standards had been around long enough to have any substantial impact on increasing student achievement. Responses further showed there is a need for districts to increase the number of lessons focused on skills that can be used outside of a classroom and to identify ways to get more parental involvement in their buildings. By incorporating a plan to meet district goals, improving instruction, and increasing family support for education, it was thought students will have a better chance to graduate college- and career-ready.

Positive opinions were revealed regarding standards reform within Missouri, but participants reiterated the standards would not guarantee increases in student achievement alone. Some reactions indicated career readiness needs were not being met, and too many students were viewing high school as a completion of the educational process. It was because of this concern, participants placed differing levels of importance on college

and career readiness of graduates, with some favoring career readiness and others deciding to focus on college readiness.

All though participants failed to identify a specific solution for how to increase student achievement, both small and large districts were in agreement Missouri had to reassess the effectiveness of state curriculum. Participants were united in believing increasing critical thinking in the classroom is essential for student achievement growth, and the State's pre-Common Core standards did not do enough to prepare students for a changing society. While no administrator could say how successful the standards will be, there was a mutual feeling the new standards are an improvement from earlier attempts at standards reform.

Conclusions

Within the limitations of this study, the perceptions of high school principals concerning the impact of increased education standards on student achievement were viewed utilizing Kingsley Davis and Wilbert Moore's (1945) Functional Theory of Stratification to formulate a conclusion to this study. Findings were summarized and then applied to the four research questions of the study. To provide further support for the conclusion of this study, supporting literature from Chapter Two is included.

Research question one. What are high school principals' perceptions of the Missouri Learning Standards in comparison to the Common Core Standards?

Sociologists Kingsley Davis and Wilbert Moore (1945) argued society is divided into different classes because of the abilities and skills individuals possess. Data retrieved from the interviews with high school principals revealed the belief that unless students are able to obtain these skills, it will be difficult for them to find employment in

a career that is both rewarding and ranked highly on the social hierarchy. The administrators involved in this study believed school districts are graduating students who lack the skills necessary to be successful in an ever-changing, technological society.

It was concluded from this study that in order for students to graduate with the skills that allow for success in the college classroom or in the workplace, participants insisted it is necessary for school districts to identify specific goals for faculty to work toward. Participants agreed students will benefit the most if new district goals align with new standards; by doing so, teachers will gain a better understanding of classroom expectations. In addition, by aligning district goals with the new state standards, it is assumed needs of teachers will be more easily met and there will be a possible increase in effective professional development throughout the district.

Research question two. What are the perceptions of high school principals in regard to professional development and the Missouri Learning Standards?

If all positions of employment required equal talent and abilities, it would make no difference to society who was awarded the position (Davis & Moore, 1945). Data retrieved from the interviews with high school principals indicated a belief that for students to graduate from high school able to step into a rewarding position, at some point students must receive the additional training needed to meet the demands of the job. Participating administrators believed for students to acquire this additional training after high school, classroom teachers have to be provided the educational tools to meet the students' current needs.

It has been said professional development is most effective when used as a preventative approach to encourage teacher growth (Kober & Rentnor, 2014). For

teachers to grow as educators and to meet the requirements of new education standards, participants noted school districts have to develop effective professional development programs. While it was difficult for the participating administrators to specify what is meant by effective professional development, they expressed professional development is most beneficial when it is specific to the needs of the teacher and the needs of the school.

Data collected from the interviews showed the creation and implementation of the Missouri Learning Standards made it necessary for school districts to re-evaluate how they approach professional development. School districts that fail to identify ways to meet the educational needs of teachers are going to fail in preparing students to be college- and career-ready. From these opinions, the researcher concluded for the Missouri Learning Standards to benefit student achievement and adequately prepare students to one day obtain a rewarding position in society, it is imperative for teachers to have the ability to effectively teach to the state education standards.

Research question three. What are high school principals' perceptions of the Missouri Learning Standards and student achievement?

Participants asserted the original Missouri Learning Standards did little to separate from Common Core. By politicizing the academic interests of Missouri students, the participating administrators alleged the state failed to make sound curriculum decisions to benefit students. Participants were persistent the new version of the Missouri Learning Standards should have been the standards that replaced Common Core. With too many similarities existing between Common Core and the original version of the Missouri Learning Standards, participants held there was no need to transition to the Missouri Learning Standards at the time the state made the change.

In regard to the new Missouri Learning Standards, participants concluded if the new standards are used properly, they should increase rigor within the classroom and place focus on the processes of learning, not the recitation of facts. By pushing students to think differently, the new standards will require students to rationalize their thoughts more effectively and assist in the development of academic skills specific to increasing student achievement. With more rigor than previous state standards and with more focus on critical thinking, it was a consensus the new standards will more likely have a positive effect on student achievement when paired with an effective professional development program.

Research question four. What are high school principals' perceptions of the Missouri Learning Standards and college and career readiness?

In the Functional Theory of Stratifications, it is proposed that in a functioning society, positions are filled based on individual merit; the more merit one holds, the more rewarding his or her position in society will be (Davis & Moore, 1945). Through this theory, Davis and Moore (1945) argued when society provides positions that are more rewarding than others, individuals are more motivated to acquire the additional skills needed to obtain a rewarding positions. They further believed for society to function adequately, it is essential for individuals to be placed in positions for which they are qualified and where their skills will be utilized (Davis & Moore, 1945).

Data retrieved from the interviews with high school principals showed an agreement among participants that high school should not be considered the end of formal education, and if graduates are going to be productive citizens after high school, some additional training will be required. Participants were very receptive of the new

Missouri Learning Standards and believed the increased rigor and high expectations of the standards will push student performance in the classroom. While the previous standards did produce students who were successful in college and the workplace, participants predicted the new standards will do a better job to prepare students for college and career readiness because of increased rigor and a focus on real-life skills.

Interviews exposed an additional belief among administrators that too much emphasis has been placed on the college readiness of students. From this belief, it was concluded school districts need to incorporate more technical training within their curriculum. While it was accepted the new Missouri Learning Standards will increase expectations in the classroom, participants found it hard to guarantee all students will benefit from the changes or take advantage of any new opportunities created from the standards. Participants maintained students will experience difficulty outside of the classroom if they have not achieved college readiness or career readiness by the time of graduation.

Implications for Practice

According to the results from the interviews conducted, the following school practices would prove to have a positive effect on the implementation of increased education standards within Missouri school districts:

1. Work to develop and keep effective professional development programs within Missouri school districts. Have a system developed to assist certified staff in training, questioning, and implementation of best practices.

2. Ensure professional development presented to teachers is specific to district goals and meets the needs of teachers. School districts must do a better job informing teachers of district goals for a given school year.

3. Increase student opportunities to participate in technical training during the school day. Training opportunities that facilitate the teaching of these skills for students who do not intend to go to college after graduation have been decreased in some smaller school districts in southwest Missouri.

4. Monitor student achievement to track how the new standards are impacting student growth toward college and career readiness. Attendance, college assessments, state assessments, and grades should all be monitored.

5. Create an advisory committee made up of faculty, business leaders, alumni, and parents to advise the district on what college and career needs are not being met with current district curriculum. Use suggestions from this committee to improve the effectiveness of district curriculum

6. Increase programs within the district that promote parent involvement in education. By increasing parent awareness of the importance of education, students are more likely to realize the value of an education.

7. Increase communication among school districts and places of higher education to alleviate concerns of disconnect among each another. Needs of the school district and needs of the college or university must be communicated for any improvements to occur.

8. Ensure district administrators are properly trained in the evaluation of certified staff and that goals of the new standards are realized in the classroom. Teachers must be

held accountable within their classrooms, and the new standards must be utilized during instruction.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the results of this study, the following recommendations for further research are offered:

1. Additional research should be conducted focusing on higher education's role in promoting career readiness among college graduates.
2. This study should be furthered to include middle school and elementary school administrators' perceptions of increased academic standards and the standards' impact on college and career readiness.
3. This study could be enhanced by interviewing more district stakeholders to gain additional views of how changes to standards can impact student achievement and college or career readiness.
4. Continued research on the Missouri Learning Standards implemented at the beginning of the 2016 school year is necessary to gain a better understanding of how the standards have impacted student achievement.
5. Research the best instructional practices for how teachers can incorporate differentiated instruction into their daily lessons.
6. Further research could show the correlation between professional development and increases in student achievement.
7. Research the best support interventions for students who are not showing college or career readiness as they advance through high school.

8. Further research could be conducted to investigate the attitudes of school leadership toward education reform and the impact reform has on student achievement.

Summary

This qualitative study was designed to identify the perceptions held by high school principals regarding state education standards and whether or not increasing education standards has a positive impact on student achievement. The beliefs and opinions of 10 high school principals in southwest Missouri were shared regarding standards reform in Missouri schools, the impact of professional development, and the mounting importance of college and career readiness. The data collected from the participating high school principals were viewed utilizing Kingsley Davis and Wilbert Moore's Functional Theory of Stratification and centered on the rising importance of education in society.

When analyzed, the qualitative data were found to support the related research found in Chapter Two. Participants agreed the lack of critical thinking in classroom assignments, the need for more rigor in district curriculum, and poorly executed professional development programs are reasons students are not college- and career-ready at the time of graduation. These district administrators sensed education standards have been targeted by state officials as the primary reason for perceived achievement deficiencies, leading to the adoption of the Common Core State Standards across the country. To counter an eventual backlash against Common Core, Missouri chose to reorganize state education standards and began implementation of the Missouri Learning Standards at the start of the 2016-2017 school year.

A few concerns among educators in relation to the push for college and career readiness were identified from the collected data. Participants felt college and career readiness is an important goal to work toward, but believed too much focus is being placed on college readiness. Participating administrators did not believe college readiness is easily defined, and by improving cooperation between secondary education and places of higher learning, it would be easier to determine what graduates need to know prior to entering a college classroom. It was also thought to be unrealistic to expect all students to be college-ready at the time of graduation, and because of this, there is a need to include more life skills and technical training into district curriculum.

Data gathered through this study indicated Missouri's move from Common Core to the Missouri Learning Standards is seen to be a step in the right direction. However, despite the positive reaction to the new standards, there is not an overwhelming belief the new standards will result in substantial improvements in student achievement.

Participants indicated the new standards do in fact increase the academic expectations of students, but will only affect student achievement in a positive way if students buy into the suggested changes, if districts provide effective professional development for teachers, and if district administrators do a better job at holding teachers accountable for their classroom performance.

For state education standards to have the most effect in increasing student achievement levels, teachers have to possess a full understanding of the standards' expectations. When expectations of the new standards are fully understood and the district shows a commitment to them, standards should positively affect classroom instruction. Once classroom instruction improves, increasing education standards could

be beneficial to college and career readiness. To best meet the educational needs of high school students and to graduate students who are ready for life outside of high school, it is crucial school districts work to improve current district policies concerning teacher readiness and instructional practices.

Appendix A

Lindenwood University

School of Education
209 S. Kingshighway
St. Charles, Missouri 63301

Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activities

“The Perceptions of Missouri High School Principals in Regards to the
Missouri Learning Standards”

Principal Investigator: Chris Kell

Telephone: [REDACTED] E-mail: [REDACTED]

Participant _____ Contact info _____

1. You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Chris Kell under the guidance of Dr. Shelly Fransen. The purpose of this research is to discover what impact education standards have on student achievement. Special emphasis will be placed on gathering these perceptions from high school principals.
2. a) Your participation will involve
 - Voluntary participation in a 30-40 minute interview after reading and signing this form. You will be asked a total of 10 interview questions. All interview questions will center around how you perceive higher education standards will impact student achievement.
 - Interviews will take place at the school sites involved in the study. Interviews will be digitally recorded to allow the researcher to transcribe all verbal communication.

b) The amount of time involved in your participation for an interview will be approximately 30-40 minutes.

Approximately ten participants will be involved in this research. Interviews will take place at the school building of the participant selected for this research study to provide convenience for study participants. High school principals will be interviewed to gain different perspectives on how they feel higher education standards will impact student achievement.
3. There are no anticipated risks associated with this research.

4. There are no direct benefits for you participating in this study. However, your participation will contribute to the knowledge about education standards in southwest Missouri and may help society.
5. Your participation is voluntary and you may choose not to participate in this research study or to withdraw your consent at any time. You may choose not to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. You will NOT be penalized in any way should you choose not to participate or to withdraw.
6. We will do everything we can to protect your privacy. As part of this effort, your identity will not be revealed in any publication or presentation that may result from this study and the information collected will remain in the possession of the investigator in a safe location.
7. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, or if any problems arise, you may call the Investigator, Chris Kell [REDACTED] or the Supervising Faculty, Dr. Shelly Fransen [REDACTED]. You may also ask questions of or state concerns regarding your participation to the Lindenwood Institutional Review Board (IRB) through contacting Dr. Marilyn Abbott, Provost, at abbottm@lindenwood.edu.

I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I will also be given a copy of this consent form for my records. I consent to my participation in the research described above.

 Participant's Signature

 Date

 Participant's Printed Name

 Signature of Principal Investigator

 Date

 Investigator Printed Name

Appendix B

Interview Questions

1. Why do you believe Missouri failed to accept Common Core?
2. How are the Missouri Learning Standards an improvement on Common Core?
3. What would you like the new education standards of Missouri to accomplish?
4. What is your definition of effective professional development, and do you feel it is linked to increased student achievement?
5. What effect does professional development have on teachers understanding what is expected from them in the classroom and how they teach to state standards?
6. Do you feel the old version of the Missouri Learning Standards did enough to increase student achievement? Please explain why you feel this way.
7. How do you feel the new standards will improve on the old Missouri Learning Standards?
8. Why is it important students graduate college- and career-ready?
9. How do higher education standards, such as Common Core and the Missouri Learning Standards, impact college and career readiness?
10. What is the best way to ensure students graduate high school college- and career-ready?

Appendix C

IRB Approval Disposition Letter



DATE: April 22, 2016

TO: Christopher Kell
FROM: Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board

STUDY TITLE: [881743-1] The Perceptions of Missouri High School Principals in Regards to the Missouri Learning Standards

IRB REFERENCE #:
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: APPROVED

APPROVAL DATE:
EXPIRATION DATE: April 22, 2017
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this research project. Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a study design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on the applicable federal regulation.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the study and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the study via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require each participant receive a copy of the signed consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this office prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported to this office. Please use the appropriate adverse event forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to the IRB.

This project has been determined to be a minimal risk project. Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the completion/amendment form for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of April 22, 2017.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years.

Appendix D

Letter of Participation

Date
Title
Position
School District or Organization
Address

Dear (Participant Name),

Thank you for participating in my research study, *The Perceptions of Missouri High School Principals in Regards to the Missouri Learning Standards*. I look forward to talking with you at <time> on <date> to gather your perceptions on how higher education standards can impact student achievement in southwest Missouri high schools. I have allotted approximately one hour to conduct our interview.

Enclosed are the interview questions to allow ample time for reflection before our interview. I have also enclosed the Informed Consent Form for your review and signature. If you agree to participate in the study, please sign and date the provided consent form.

Your participation in this research study is purely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. Confidentiality is assured. If you have any questions, please call ([REDACTED]) or e-mail ([REDACTED]). Once the study has been completed, the results will be available to you upon request.

Sincerely,

Chris Kell
Doctoral Candidate
Lindenwood University

Appendix E

Phone Script for Contacting Interview Participants

Hello, my name is Chris Kell. I am contacting you regarding the research I am conducting as part of the doctoral requirement for Lindenwood University. My study will examine the perceptions of high school principals on the topic of how higher education standards can impact student achievement. As the primary investigator, I am requesting your participation in the form of a personal interview. The interview will allow me to collect thoughts, beliefs, and practices regarding higher education standards in high schools in southwest Missouri. Thank you for your time and support.

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Vita

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