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Principals' Self-efficacy in Low Scoring Middle Schools in Mississippi

James Foreman Derryberry

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Principals' self-efficacy in low scoring middle schools in Mississippi

By

James Foreman Derryberry

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of
Mississippi State University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Elementary, Middle, and Secondary Education Administration
in the Department of Educational Leadership

Mississippi State, Mississippi

May 2017

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This study investigated the self-efficacy (also often referred to as self-confidence) of principals as determined by school administrator certification credentials and teaching endorsements at low performing middle schools in Mississippi. In educational literature, the term “self-confidence” is often referred to under the nomenclature of self-efficacy.

In the context of an educational environment, self-efficacy pertains to a principal's capability to organize and execute courses of action required in leading and managing a school. Successful school management requires a leader who is task oriented, consistently stays focused, employs effective strategies, and utilizes managerial skills.

The investigation focused on the self-efficacy, as determined by credentials and endorsements, of the principals charged with leading and managing the 24 Mississippi middle schools that received Mississippi Department of Education accountability ratings of “D” or “F” in relation to student academic performance.

The overall research question that guided the investigation asked: Did the self-efficacy of the principals charged with leading and managing the 24 Mississippi middle schools that received low accountability scores suggest any connection to the ratings?

Based on the findings of the investigation, it may be concluded that the self-efficacy of the principals charged with leading and managing the middle schools that received low accountability scores didn't appear to have any connection to the ratings. Also, neither the principals' certification credential levels nor teaching endorsements appeared to be factors.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my wife Gail, daughters Carrie and Beth, Dr. Jack Blendinger, and late father Major L.D. Derryberry. Gail without your prodding and constant belief in me, I would have never completed this endeavor. I love you. Carrie and Beth your very existence have given meaning to my life. You have taught me more about how to handle young people than all my years of experience as an educator. Dr. Jack Blendinger your assurance, understanding and expertise took on a lost Doctoral student, pointed him in the direction to go and guided him through the pitfalls and dark times to the destination. And dad, you always wanted one of your children to complete a Ph.D. I never thought it would be me. I just wish I'd accomplished it before your passing.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This study investigated the self-efficacy (also often referred to as self-confidence) of principals as determined by school administrator certification credentials and teaching endorsements at low performing middle schools in Mississippi. In educational literature, the term “self-confidence” is often referred to under the nomenclature of self-efficacy.

According to Bandura (1986), self-efficacy pertains to a principal’s capability to organize and execute courses of action required in leading and managing a school. In support of Bandura’s position, McCormick (2001) contended that successful school management requires a leader who is task oriented: that is, a principal who consistently stays focused and uses effective strategies, while artfully applying conceptual, technical, and interpersonal skills.

Self-efficacy in leadership portrayed by the principal plays an important role in the success of the school. Simply put, self-efficacy is thought to affect a principal’s leadership by influencing goals he or she sets for the school, along with levels of adaptability and persistence. In the leadership role, self-efficacy is related to setting direction, acquiring commitment, and overcoming resistance to change by followers (Paglis & Green, 2002).

According to Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2004), a principal’s behavior in a given situation can be accurately predicted by his or her sense of efficacy. A principal’s

confidence in relation to self-efficacy directly affects what is done in carrying out responsibilities and tasks.

Statement of the Problem, Purpose, and Research Question

For the 2012-2013 school year, the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) assigned grades of either a “D” or “F” to 29 (35%) of the 85 middle schools in the state. A rating of “D” means a school’s performance classification is near failing and on academic watch. A rating of “F” represents one of three possible performance classifications: low performing, at risk of failing, or failing.

It should be noted that only 24 of the 29 middle schools were used in the study because three of the schools were reconfigured and no longer met the requirements for the investigation. Two other middle schools were not included in the study because they went through the 2012-2013 school year without either an interim or permanent principal.

MDE classification ratings for schools are determined by combining what the department refers to as the *Achievement Model* with what is referred to as the *Growth Model*. The achievement model takes into account the percentage of students scoring minimum, basic, proficient, or advanced on the Mississippi Criterion Test 2 (MCT2). The growth model measures student improvement in academic performance (MDE, 2015).

Because of MDE’s interest in overseeing the certification credentials and teaching endorsements of school administrators, it appears reasonable to assume that appropriate credentials and endorsements should lead to higher self-efficacy: in turn, higher self-efficacy (i.e., belief in one’s capability to lead and manage) should assist a school administrator in developing positive learning environments, motivating teachers and staff, and facilitating student achievement. The problem, however, is that MDE officials,

school district authorities, and educational researchers do not appear know whether the credentials and endorsements of the principals assigned to the 24 low performing middle schools made any difference in regard to their capability to lead and manage, especially in relation to the concept of self-efficacy.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the self-efficacy, as determined by credentials and endorsements, of the principals charged with leading and managing 24 Mississippi middle schools that received MDE accountability ratings of “D” or “F” in relation to student academic performance.

The overall research question that guided the investigation asked: Did the self-efficacy of the principals charged with leading and managing the 24 Mississippi middle schools that received a “D” or “F” from MDE suggest any connection to the ratings?

Prior to the investigation, it was assumed that higher the principal’s certification credential level (e.g., Ph.D. degree for Level AAAA certification) and the more suitable the principal’s teaching endorsement (e.g., middle school teaching endorsement), the better the school’s accountability rating. Simply put, it was assumed that the administrative credentials and teaching endorsements of the principals leading the “D” and “F” level middle schools would be either low or unsuitable, or both low and unsuitable in many instances.

Significance of the Study

The study was significant in that it examined the relationship among principals in low performing middle schools and accountability ratings in terms of self-efficacy as expressed through credentials and endorsements.

Almost all the principals leading and managing Mississippi's middle schools hold AA to AAAA school administration certification credentials and appropriate teaching endorsements. But do credential levels and endorsement specifics impact accountability ratings? The results of the investigation suggest otherwise.

It is a compelling idea that a principal's level of certification and area of endorsement can play an important role in his or her level of self-efficacy. But did certification and endorsement specifics for principals in low performing middle schools come into play? Chapters IV and V present the findings and conclusions drawn in regard to these questions.

Method

The research method used in this investigation was a qualitative research design known as an archival case study. The study consisted of publicly available archival information being obtained and analyzed from MDE in regard to 24 principals who led and managed middle schools receiving a "D" or "F" accountability rating during the 2012-2013 school year.

The school administration certification credential level and teaching endorsement for each principal in the investigation was acquired from the MDE publically available website. The information collected was recorded and analyzed using charts, commonly referred to as visual graphs. The charts provided a visual understanding of the relationship between the credentials and endorsements of principals in relation to the accountability ratings of the middle schools they led and managed.

Limitations and Delimitations

This study was limited to middle schools in Mississippi. The adolescent years of middle school students are full of transitions and change that makes for a unique time between elementary and the high school.

The investigation was also limited to middle schools containing only sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. Schools calling themselves middle schools but containing a different grade structure were not used. Grade restrictions were done to provide consistency in the investigation.

Only principals of Mississippi middle schools receiving “D” or “F” accountability ratings from MDE for the 2012-2013 school year were included in the study.

Another limiting factor of the study was that only publicly available archival information was used. Information such as certification credentials and teaching endorsements were available through MDE records made accessible to the public. Other pertinent information, such as years of experience in teaching, was not accessible. To include this information would involve contacting each district and that would violate confidentiality restrictions.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

As stated in Chapter I, this study investigated the self-efficacy, as determined by certification credentials and teaching endorsements, of the 24 principals leading and managing Mississippi middle schools that received MDE accountability ratings of “D” or “F” for the 2012-2013 school year. Accountability ratings are based on student academic performance.

Chapter content addresses the concept of self-efficacy in relation to the following four areas: (a) theoretical perspective, (b) beyond theory, (c) principal leadership, and (d) foundational material. Content presented in the chapter was selected on the assumption that self-efficacy influences the decisions the principal makes in carrying out administrative responsibilities and tasks.

Self-Efficacy: Historical Perspective

For the purpose of this investigation, self-efficacy theoretically refers to the extent of a middle school principal’s belief (i.e., confidence) in his or her own ability to execute responsibilities, complete tasks, and accomplish goals. Due to the dynamics of self-efficacy, no single theory appears dominant.

In two similar but independent works addressing the concept of self-confidence, Heider (1958) and White (1959) laid the groundwork for what theoretically became widely referred to as self-efficacy. In 1958, Heider published his seminal work in a book

titled *The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations*. One year later, in 1959, White expanded on Heider's thinking in an article titled, *Motivation Reconsidered: The Concept of Competence*. More than 50 years later, the works by Heider and White continue to influence social psychologists.

Heider (1958) and White (1959) contended that leaders and followers in an organization develop understanding, both explicitly and implicitly, about the way they and others react in given situations by attributing feelings, motives, ideas, and intent to behavioral actions.

Heider (1958) suggested that leaders bring harmony and balance, two forms associated with his concept of self-efficacy, to their understanding of an organization. Because they are confident of their capabilities, leaders possessing high self-efficacy possess the capacity to make causal inferences instantly in conjunction with their view of the environment.

White (1959) contended that motivation, a key component of self-efficacy as he understood it, is built upon a leader's basic instincts: that is, one's inherent drive to invent, innovate, and search out areas that go beyond the status quo in problem solving.

White (1959) further suggested that leaders develop enhanced self-competence whenever they successfully meet challenges. In turn, much like the proverbial perpetual-motion machine, successfully meeting challenges and solving problems leads to ever increasing levels of self-efficacy.

Influenced by the works of Heider (1958) and White (1959), Rotter (1966) theorized that leaders derived reinforcement either internally or externally. Building on the theorizing of Heider and White, Rotter developed his own closely related theory that

he called the Locus of Control Theory. Rotter's (1966) theory focused on how a leader perceives and interprets outcomes based on the reinforcement received. Essentially, Rotter's theory postulated that reinforcement of an act strengthens one's expectancy that he or she will continue to receive positive reinforcement each time the particular act is completed. Rotter, however, recognized that reinforcement was not entirely contingent on one's actions. Outside perceptions or influences (e.g., luck, fate, behaviors of others.) also played a part.

In the 1970s, Bandura (1977) further increased awareness about self-efficacy theory in relation to human functioning. He argued against the behaviorist theories that human action was only controlled by outside influences (i.e., external stimuli). Bandura contended that internal influences (e.g., self-confidence) also played a major role.

In the 1980s, Bandura (1986) postulated that through introspection one is able to make sense of self-originated psychological processes, and as a result, influence his or her future thoughts and actions. Self-efficacy, Bandura suggested, gets at the very essence of a leader's judgment regarding the capacity to carry out the effort required to meet responsibilities and succeed at given tasks.

Although the Locus of Control Theory developed by Rotter (1966) focused on outcome expectancies, claiming that probable consequences predict behavior, Bandura (1986) questioned the importance of consequences predicting leadership behavior. Bandura contended that behavior is better predicted by perceived self-efficacy: an individual's judgment of his or her capability to accomplish a given level of performance.

In the 1990s, Bandura (1997a, 1997b) further developed his perspectives on self-efficacy. He contended that self-efficacy (believing in one's personal capabilities)

provides the foundation for human motivation, happiness, and individual accomplishment. Bandura suggested that self-efficacy played a role in all parts of a leader's professional and personal life: thoughts, actions, disposition, and willingness to continue toward goals when confronted with adverse situations.

Self-Efficacy: Beyond Theory

Potentially, self-efficacy theory can serve as an important construct in understanding the complex nature of human behavior in leadership-oriented social situations, such as managing a school.

According to Fuller, Wood, Rapoport, and Dornbusch (1982), self-efficacy may be described in the context of social situations as an individual's perceived expectancy of obtaining valued outcomes through personal effort. In regard to leadership (e.g., a principal leading and managing a school), Fuller et al. suggested that self-efficacy has a significant impact on goal setting, level of aspiration, effort adaptability, and persistence.

In relation to the impact of self-efficacy on actions and outcomes in educational environments, Raudenbush, Rowan, and Cheong (1992) studied self-efficacy concept among high school teachers. Their findings indicated intra-teacher variations of self-efficacy based on variables that included the subjects and grade levels taught, degree of preparation, and level of student engagement. Teachers tended to have higher feelings of self-efficacy when teaching advanced and/or higher-level students. Why? These students tended to learn more.

Raudenbush et al. (1992) found that higher teacher self-efficacy appeared to be especially true among mathematics and science teachers. The grade level taught (e.g., teaching eleventh grade students versus ninth grade students) and the extent of a teacher's

level of preparation also tended to indicate different degrees of self-efficacy among study's subjects. In addition, teacher self-efficacy was shown to be elevated when teachers perceived that they had substantial control over their working conditions and when working in highly collaborative environments.

However, Raudenbush et al. (1992) concluded that principals cannot assume that highly desirable environmental working conditions for teachers in and of themselves will produce desired outcomes. They must consistently recognize, call forth, and consistently apply exemplary managerial skills whenever needed in unpredictable circumstances.

Self-Efficacy: Principal Leadership

Klinker (2006) contended that leadership, in its most basic form, is motivating a group of people to work together to attain a common goal. In an educational environment, the main concern of the principal, as the school's leader and manager, should be to provide an atmosphere, free of chaos, where teachers can teach to the best of their abilities and students can learn to the best of their capabilities. Klinker (2006) concluded that principals who put the concept of self-efficacy into practice through managing by walking about are more effective because they are visible within their school buildings and grounds. Such principals are also more accessible to teachers and staff. Klinker (2006) believed that managing through providing a visible presence was a key characteristic: one necessary for effective leadership. (It should be noted that "management by walking about" is commonly referred to by the acronym MBWA).

To create and preserve a school culture where teacher and student performance thrives, McCormick (2001) contended that a principal possessing high self-efficacy needed to put personal competence into action; that is, employ effective task strategies

coupled with possessing and using conceptual, technical, and interpersonal skills for the purpose of motivating students, teachers, and support staff. McCormick (2001) believed the effective leader needed to make sure that all are on board in order to accomplish the mission of the school. To McCormick, principals who possess and establish a clear sense of direction make an impact on shaping a positive school culture and encouraging high student achievement.

Building on McCormick's (2001) position, Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2004) contended that the principal has a moral imperative to create and preserve a school culture where teacher and student performance thrives. In order for performance to thrive, Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2004) believe that a successful leader must be task oriented and persistent in accomplishing the school's goals.

Tschannen-Moran and Barr (2004) suggested that self-efficacy determines the actions that the principal chooses. Also, they contended that positive thinking influences perseverance and resilience. Positive thoughts help leaders overcome obstacles or failures so that intended outcomes can be accomplished.

According to Smith, et al. (2003), principal self-efficacy in relation to positive thinking has consistently been shown to have a beneficial effect on the teaching and learning that takes place in the school.

Three teams of researchers—Hallinger and Heck (1996); Leithwood, Jantzi, and Steinbach (1999); and Witzers, Bosker, and Kruger (2003)—conducted similar research and found the principal, though not more important than the teachers in relation to student achievement, to be one of the major factors in promoting the overall success of a school. The principal can influence teacher performance and, indirectly, make an impact

on student academic achievement. The principal through instructional leadership is in a crucial position to provide the type of guidance that improves classroom instruction and enhances student learning.

Research conducted by Grissom and Harrington (2010) that investigated formal principal-to-principal mentoring and coaching through the lens of principal self-efficacy suggested a strong positive correlation between principal effectiveness and investment in mentoring and coaching. Conversely, principals who were minimally involved in mentoring and coaching, but spent the majority of their professional development effort in university course work pursuing advanced degrees appeared less effective. Furthermore, students in schools led by principals significantly involved in university-oriented professional development scored lower on state and school district standards than those students in schools in which the principals committed maximum time and effort to formal mentoring and coaching.

Osterman and Sullivan (1996) remarked that although principals with high levels of self-efficacy were usually steadfast in working toward the accomplishment of their goals, they do not continue pursuing strategies that are not successful. Not being able to solve a particular problem is not interpreted as failure. High self-efficacy principals simply spend more time and expand greater amounts energy and perseverance when faced with obstacles.

Self-Efficacy: Foundational Material

In addition to the source material cited within the body of work constituting this chapter, several other publications were identified, retrieved, and read. These works

provided foundational material for the investigation although they were not specifically cited in the text.

Although published works by Brewer (1993); Elberts and Stone (1988); Gale and Bishop (2014); Leithwood, Begley, and Cousins (1994); Ross and Gray (2006); Soehner and Ryan (2011); Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2010); Soini, Pyhalto, and Pietarian (2010); Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001); and Wood and Bandura (1989) were not cited per se within the body of the study, they contributed to the framework by providing an overview perspective of the self-efficacy construct.

Summary

From a historical perspective, the works of Heider (1958), White (1959), Rotter (1966), and Bandura (1986, 1997a, 1997b) provided the groundwork for the development of a multi-faceted theory of self-efficacy. They suggested that leaders and followers develop understanding, both explicitly and implicitly, about the way they and others react in given situations by attributing feelings, motives, ideas, intent, and so forth to behavioral actions. Moreover, self-efficacy theorists suggest that both leaders and followers in an organization (e.g., school) perceive and interpret outcomes based on the reinforcement received, and that self-efficacy (believing in one's personal capabilities) provides the foundation for human motivation, happiness, and individual accomplishment.

Theoretically, self-efficacy serves as an important construct in understanding the complex nature of human behavior in leadership-oriented social situations such as leading and managing schools. Self-efficacy pertains to a middle school principal's

perceived expectancy of obtaining valued outcomes through personal effort and influences goal setting, level of aspiration, effort adaptability, and persistence.

Simply put, leadership is motivating a group of people to work together to attain a common goal. The major concern of the principal, as the school's leader, should be to establish, shape, and maintain a middle school culture where student and teacher performance thrives.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Chapter III focuses on the methods used in this study that investigated self-efficacy in terms of the credentials and endorsements of the principals leading low performing middle schools in Mississippi in relation to accountability ratings. The chapter is subdivided into three sections. The sections address the following: (1) research design, (2) data collection, and (3) data analysis.

Prior to this investigation, it was not known whether low performing schools were led by principals, based on their credentials and endorsements, who were confident (i.e., possessed high self-efficacy) that they could make a difference in the quality of education provided at their particular schools or if low performing schools were led by principals who lacked confidence (i.e., did not possessed high self-efficacy) in their capability.

For the purpose of this investigation, a middle school was defined, as a school comprised of the following three grades: 6, 7, and 8. Schools calling themselves “middle schools” but not fitting this definition were not included in the study.

As stated in the literature review chapter, self-efficacy pertains to principals’ judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to accomplish student achievement performance goals. Successful school management requires leaders who are task oriented, consistently stay focused, and use effective strategies, while artfully applying conceptual, technical, and interpersonal skills. Self-

confident principals take the lead, set direction, acquire commitment from the faculty, and overcome resistance to change (Bandura, 1986; McCormick, 2001; Paglis & Green, 2002; Sergiovanni, 1991).

It should be noted, as previously stated in the literature review chapter that the term “self-confidence” is referred to under the nomenclature of self-efficacy. Similarly, throughout the study, the term “Self-efficacy” is used as a synonym for self-confidence.

Research Design

A qualitative research design, referred to as archival case study research, was used in this investigation focusing on data collection and analysis of publically accessible archival information. Archival research involves seeking out and extracting information from public and/or private documents and records (Blendinger & Adams, 2015).

Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2009) state that documents may be considered written communications prepared for either publication, personal, or official purposes. Records, on the other hand, are usually written communications primarily intended for an official purpose.

In addition to books and articles, Blendinger and Adams (2015) state that other examples of documents and records used in archival research include business and personal letters, diary entries, legal contracts, commission reports, meeting minutes, and newspaper articles.

Practically speaking, documents and records may be held personally, or in institutional archive repositories, or in the custody of the organization (e.g., government body, business, family, or other agency) that originally generated or accumulated them. Official documents and records (e.g., school board meeting minutes) ordinarily constitute

excellent sources of information because of the care which official bodies must exercise to make certain that such materials are accurate, complete, and carefully preserved.

Newspaper accounts, although not always accurate in detail because factual material may be interpreted and presented in more than one way, also provide excellent sources of information. News articles often present essential facts and serve as a more or less permanent record of day-to-day happenings in a particular community.

Archival research is often complex and time-consuming. Also, archival research can present challenges in identifying, locating and interpreting documents. Archival documents and records are often unique, necessitating travel to access them. Although some archival documents and records are electronically available, many are not. The researcher may have to hunt through large quantities of documents in search of material relevant to his or her particular study. In addition, some records may be closed to public access for reasons of confidentiality.

The case investigated in this study consisted of the principals leading the 24 middle schools in Mississippi receiving a “D” or “F” rating from the Mississippi Department of Education for student academic performance during the 2012–2013 school year (MDE, 2015).

Data Collection Procedures

Data for the study provided by MDE, were collected from documents and records assessable to the public (MDE, 2015).

Middle schools in Mississippi containing only Grades 6, 7 and 8 were identified from information provided by MDE. School accountability ratings, were noted in

particular. The names of middle schools receiving a rating of “D” or “F” (signifying failure) for the 2012-2013 School Year were recorded.

A contact list of Mississippi middle schools containing their names and addresses, along with the names of the principals, was acquired from MDE. The names of the principals from the contact list were cross-referenced with the names of the “D” and “F” rated middle schools (MDE, 2015; MDE, 2015a and MDE, 2015b).

The following list, numbered in alphabetic order, provides the names of the 24 schools, student enrollments, MDE accountability ratings, and the names and locations of the school districts of which the schools were a part:

1. Armstrong Middle School; student enrollment: 917; MDE rating: D; Starkville School District, 401 Greensboro Street, Starkville, MS 39759
2. Bettie E. Woolfolk Middle School; student enrollment: 578; MDE rating: F; Yazoo City Municipal School District, 1133 Calhoun Avenue, Yazoo City, MS 39194
3. Blackburn Middle School; student enrollment: 404; MDE rating: F; Jackson Public Schools, 662 South President Street, Jackson, MS 39225
4. Brinkley Middle School; student enrollment: 425; MDE rating: F; Jackson Public Schools, 662 South President Street, Jackson, MS 39225,
5. Chastain Middle School; student enrollment: 846; MDE rating: F; Jackson Public Schools, 662 South President Street, Jackson, MS 39225
6. Coleman Middle School, student enrollment: 736; MDE rating: F; Greenville Public School District, 412 South Main Street, Greenville, MS 38701

7. D.M. Smith Middle School, student enrollment: 293; MDE rating: F Cleveland School District, 305 Merritt Drive, Cleveland, MS 38732
8. George Middle School, student enrollment: 229; MDE rating: D; Carroll County School District, 603 Lexington Street, Carrollton, MS 38917
9. George Washington Carver Middle School, student enrollment: 371; MDE rating: F; Meridian Public Schools, 1019 25th Avenue, Meridian, MS 39301
10. Hardy Middle School, student enrollment: 474; MDE rating: F; Jackson Public Schools, 662 South President Street, Jackson, MS 39225
11. Kirksey Middle School, student enrollment: 382; MDE rating: D; Jackson Public Schools, 662 South President Street, Jackson, MS 39225
12. Leake Central Junior High, student enrollment: 431; MDE rating: F; Leake County Schools, 123 Main Street, Carthage, MS 39051
13. Magnolia Middle School, student enrollment: 408; MDE rating: D; Meridian Public Schools, 1019 25th Ave., Meridian, MS 39301
14. Margaret Green Junior High, student enrollment: 497; MDE rating: D; Cleveland School District, 305 Merritt Drive, Cleveland, MS 38732
15. Nettleton Junior High, student enrollment: 313; MDE rating: D; Nettleton School District, 179 Mullen Avenue, Nettleton, MS 38858
16. Northwest Junior High School, student enrollment: 534; MDE rating: D; Meridian Public Schools, 1019 25th Avenue, Meridian, MS 39301
17. Peeples Middle School, student enrollment: 626; MDE rating: F; Jackson Public Schools, 662 South President Street, Jackson, MS 39225

18. Port Gibson Middle School, student enrollment: 400; MDE rating: F; Claiborne County Schools, 404 Market Street, Port Gibson, MS 39150
19. Powell Middle School, student enrollment: 636; MDE rating: D; Jackson Public Schools, 662 South President Street, Jackson, MS 39225
20. Rowan Middle School, student enrollment: 218; MDE rating: F; Jackson Public Schools, 662 South President Street, Jackson, MS 39225
21. Shivers Middle School, student enrollment: 278; MDE rating: D; Aberdeen Public Schools, 205 Highway 145 North, Aberdeen, MS 39730
22. Solomon Middle School, student enrollment: 635; MDE rating: F; Greenville Public Schools, 412 South Main Street, Greenville, MS 38701
23. Tunica Middle School, student enrollment: 496; MDE rating: D; Tunica County Schools, 744 School Street, Tunica, MS 38676
24. Whitten Middle School, student enrollment: 713; MDE rating: F; Jackson Public Schools, 662 South President Street, Jackson, MS 39225

A list of the principals leading and managing the 24 schools and their credentials, available for public inspection, was also obtained from MDE. The list was crosschecked with state department officials to determine accuracy. Credential information teaching endorsements and administrative certification levels (A, AA, AAA, AAAA) was recorded.

Middle school principal certification levels range from “A” to “AAAA” in the state of Mississippi. According to state department officials, the majority of middle school principals have “AA” certification or higher (MDE, 2015b)

An “A” class credential signifies that the principal has earned a bachelor’s degree in teacher education from a regional or national accredited institution of higher education. The class “A” license requires the holder to score 21 or better on the ACT examination or the nationally recommended passing score on the Praxis Core Academic Skills for Educators examination. The holder must also meet 2.75 GPA minimum score on content coursework in the requested area of certification.

The class “AA” credential signifies that the principal met the requirements for a Five Year Class A License and obtained a master’s degree in the endorsement area in which license is requested or Master of Education Degree.

The class “AAA” credential signifies that the principal met the requirements for a Five Year Class A License and obtained a Specialist degree in the endorsement area in which the license is requested or Specialist of Education Degree.

The class “AAAA” credential signifies that the candidate meet the requirement for a Five Year Class A License and obtained a Doctoral degree in the endorsement area in which the license is requested or a Doctor of Education Degree (MDE, 2015a).

Because it is a much mentioned belief among professional educators that the more formal education a person receives, the greater his or her capabilities, it appears reasonable to believe that the higher the principal’s credential level and the more suitable the principal’s teaching endorsements, the higher quality of the leadership provided. In turn, the better the leadership, the higher the school’s accountability rating. The assumption that certification / endorsement correlates with self-efficacy is founded through teacher studies. Naturally, those teachers who instruct higher-level classes have higher levels of training. Another valid assumption is that myriad principals were

teachers before assuming leadership roles. Simply put, it was assumed that the administrative credentials and teaching endorsements of the principals leading the “D” and “F” level middle schools would be either low or unsuitable, or both low and unsuitable in many instances.

Data Analysis Procedures

Charts, graphs, and tables were used to analyze data collected because they focused attention on the most important aspects of the study. In particular, charts, graphs and tables were employed to analyze the principal’s credentials and endorsements in relation to the accountability rating of the schools they were leading and managing.

Charts, graphs and tables provide excellent tools for investigations such as this study because they communicate information visually. Complicated information is often difficult to understand and needs to be illustrated. Visual communication increases understanding by clearly and concisely expressing important points.

A chart, graph, or table represents a diagrammatical illustration of a set of data. When one of these items is placed within a narrative, the point being made becomes easier to see and understand.

Chapter IV visually displays data collected. Making comparisons, showing relationships, and highlighting trends through visual displays-charts, graphs, and tables-significantly enhances the reader’s comprehension of the study’s findings.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Chapter IV presents the findings for the investigation that focused on the self-efficacy, as expressed by school administration certification credentials and teaching endorsements, of the principals charged with leading and managing the 24 Mississippi middle schools that received MDE accountability ratings of “D” or “F” in relation to student academic performance. Findings are presented in response to the overall research question guiding the investigation that asked: Did the self-efficacy of the principals charged with leading and managing the 24 Mississippi middle schools that received a “D” or “F” from MDE suggest any connection to the ratings assigned to the schools? As stated previously, the term “self-efficacy” refers to the self-confidence possessed by a principal as expressed by the level of certification credentials and teaching endorsements.

Prior to conducting the investigation, it was assumed that the more suitable the principal’s school administration certification credentials (e.g., Ph.D. degree for Level AAAA certification) and the more suitable the teaching endorsement (e.g., middle school or secondary education certification), the higher the school’s accountability rating. Also, prior to conducting the investigation, it was assumed that the certification credentials and teaching endorsements of the principals leading these “D” and “F” level middle schools would be either unsuitable or low, or both unsuitable and low, in many instances.

The findings are presented in three sections: (1) accountability ratings and certification credential levels, (2) accountability ratings and teaching endorsements, and (3) summary of the findings. Visual graphics in the formats of pie charts and narrative charts are used for the purpose of analysis.

Accountability Ratings and Certification Credential Levels

The “accountability ratings and certification credential levels” section provides an analysis of data collected in regard to MDE’s accountability ratings of the middle schools constituting the case and three levels of school administration certification credentials held by the principals leading and managing the 24 schools.

The 24 middle schools in Mississippi that received “D” or “F” accountability ratings from MDE for the 2012-2013 school year are divided into two groups. Of the 24 schools, 10 received a “D” rating and 14 were “F” rated.

Chart 1 visually illustrates the breakdown of the 24 middle schools in regard to “D” and “F” ratings:

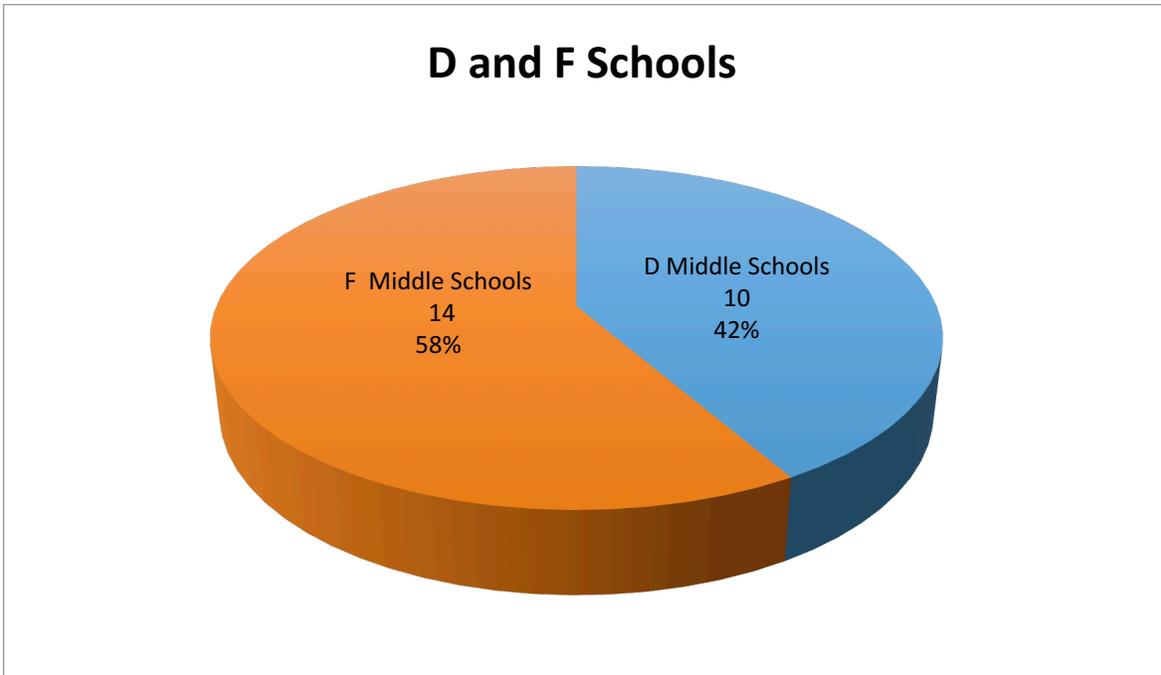


Figure 1. Middle Schools rated “D” or “F” by the Mississippi Department of Education.

As shown in the pie chart, the findings indicate that the majority (58%) of the middle schools were given a “F” rating, while less than half (42%) received a “D” rating.

Chart 2 visually presents the breakdown of the 24 principals of the middle schools receiving “D” and “F” accountability ratings in relation to the principals’ school administration credential certification levels:

Principals with AA, AAA, and AAAA Certification

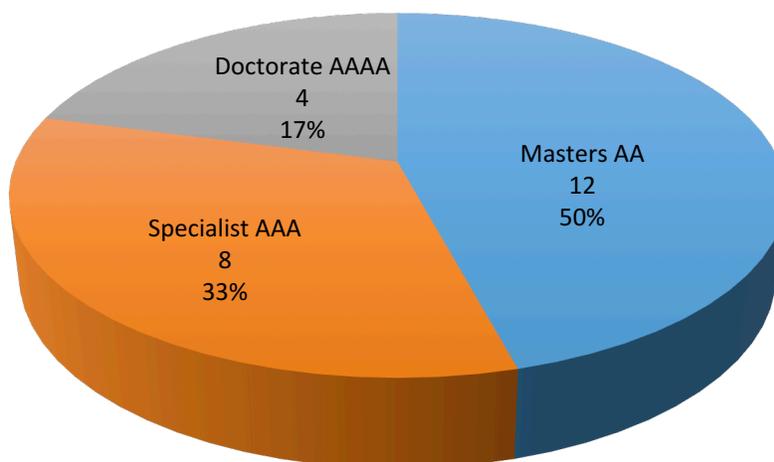


Figure 2. Principal credential levels in “D” and “F” schools in Mississippi.

As shown in the pie chart, the findings indicate that the majority (50%) of the middle school principals held AA certification in school administration, one-third (33%) held AAA certification, and approximately one-fifth (17%) possessed AAAA credentials.

Table 1 presents the “D” and “F” accountability rated middle schools led by principals holding master degrees with AA credential certification. Twelve of the 24 middle schools constituting the case were managed by principals with AA certification. The chart lists the school’s name, accountability rating, and AA certification level of the principal.

Table 1

Principals Holding Masters Degrees serving “D” or “F” Rated Schools

School Name/List Number	Accountability Rating	Certification Level
1. Armstrong Middle School	D	AA
8. George Middle School	D	AA
13. Magnolia Middle School	D	AA
19. Powell Middle School	D	AA
21. Shivers Middle School	D	AA
23. Tunica Middle School	D	AA
4. Brinkley Middle School	F	AA
9. G. Washington Carver	F	AA
12. Leake Central Jr. High	F	AA
17. Peeples Middle School	F	AA
18. Port Gibson Middle School	F	AA
24. Whitten Middle School	F	AA

The findings in Table 1 indicate that half (50%) of the middle schools receiving a “D” accountability rating were led by principals with AA certification levels, while the other half (50%) of the middle schools that received a “F” accountability rating were also led by principals with an AA certification levels. Self-efficacy, as expressed by AA certification credentials did not make a difference.

Table 2 presents the “D” and “F” middle schools led by principals holding educational specialist degrees with AAA credential certification. Eight of the 24 middle

schools constituting the case were managed by principals with AAA certification. The chart lists the school’s name, accountability rating, and AAA certification level of the principal.

Table 2

Principals Holding Specialist Degrees Serving “D” or “F” Schools

School Name/List Number	Accountability Rating	Certification Level
14. Margaret Green Jr. High	D	AAA
15. Nettleton Junior High	D	AAA
16. Northwest Junior High	D	AAA
5. Chastain Middle School	F	AAA
6. Coleman Middle School	F	AAA
7. D.M. Smith Middle School	F	AAA
10. Hardy Middle School	F	AAA
22. Solomon Middle School	F	AAA

The findings presented in Table 2 indicate that approximately one-third (37%) of the middle schools receiving a “D” accountability rating were led by principals with an AAA certification levels, while almost two-thirds (63%) of the middle schools that received a “F” accountability rating were also led by a principal with an AAA certification levels. The result was the opposite of what was expected. Self-efficacy as expressed by AAA certification credentials did not make a difference.

Table 3 presents the “D” and “F” middle schools led by principals holding doctoral degrees with AAAA credential certification. Four of the 24 middle schools constituting the case were managed by principals with AAAA certification. The chart lists the school’s name, accountability rating, and AAAA certification level of the principal.

Table 3

Principals Holding Doctorate Degrees Serving “D” or “F” Rated Schools

School Name/List Number	Accountability Rating	Certification Level
11. Kirksey Middle School	D	AAAA
2. Bettie E. Woolfolk Middle School	F	AAAA
3. Blackburn Middle School	F	AAAA
20. Rowan Middle School	F	AAAA

The findings presented in Table 3 indicate that only one-quarter (25%) of the middle schools receiving a “D” accountability rating were led by a principal with an AAAA certification level, while almost three-fourths (75%) of the middle schools that received a “F” accountability rating were led by a principal with an AAAA certification level. The result differed from the expectation that higher credentialed principals, especially those possessing Doctorate level credentials would not be leading “D” and “F” schools. Self-efficacy as expressed by AAAA certification credentials did not make a difference.

Middle School Principals: Teaching Endorsements

The “teaching endorsements” section provides an analysis of data collected in regard to the principals leading and managing the 24 middle schools constituting the case. The principals were divided into two groups: (1) principals holding secondary education (7-12) teaching endorsements ranging from chemistry to physical education and (2) principals holding elementary education (K-6) teaching endorsements or both elementary and secondary endorsements.

Table 4 presents principals holding secondary education (7-12) teaching endorsements ranging from chemistry to physical education assigned to lead and manage the 18 middle schools. Six of the principals served in middle schools receiving a “D” accountability rating and 12 principals managed schools awarded an “F” rating.

Table 4

Principals Holding Secondary (7-12) Teaching Endorsements

<u>School Name/List Number</u>	<u>Accountability Rating</u>	<u>Endorsement</u>
1. Armstrong Middle School	D	Chemistry (7-12) Physics (7-12)
8. George Middle School	D	Agriculture (7-12) Vocational Family & Consumer Science (7-12)
15. Nettleton Middle School	D	Physical Education (K-12) Social Studies (7-12) ICT I (7-12)

Table 4 (Continued)

School Name/List Number	Accountability Rating	Endorsement
19. Powell Middle School	D	Biology (7-12) Chemistry (7-12) General Science (7-12)
21. Shivers Middle School	D	Physical Education (K-12)
23. Tunica Middle School	D	Physical Education (K-12)
2. Bettie E. Woolfolk	F	Biology (7-12) General Science (7-12) Mathematics (7-12)
3. Blackburn Middle School	F	Biology (7-12) Chemistry (7-12) General Science (7-12)
4. Brinkley Middle School	F	Biology (7-12)
5. Chastain Middle School	F	Social Studies (7-12)
6. Coleman Middle School	F	Business Education (7-12) Educ. Handicapped (7-12)
7. D.M. Smith	F	Mathematics (7-12) Physics (7-12)
9. G. Washington Carver Middle School	F	Social Studies (7-12)
10. Hardy Middle School	F	Physical Education (K-12) Social Studies (7-12)

Table 4 (Continued)

School Name/List Number	Accountability Rating	Endorsement
17. Peeples Middle School	F	Mathematics (7-12)
18. Port Gibson Middle School	F	Physical Education (K-12) Biology (7-12)
20. Rowan Middle School	F	Biology (7-12) General Science (7-12) Mild/Mod Disabilities (K-12)
22. Solomon Middle School	F	English (7-12) Mathematics (7-12)

The findings presented in Table 4 show no discernable pattern among the teaching endorsements. The principal’s teaching endorsement does not appear to influence the accountability rating. One-third (33%) of the middle schools earned a “D” accountability rating, while two-thirds (66%) were judged failures. Principal self-efficacy as expressed by teaching endorsements do not appear to relate to school accountability ratings.

Table 5 presents principals holding elementary education (K-6) teaching endorsements or both elementary and secondary endorsements. Three of the principals served in middle schools receiving a “D” accountability rating and two principals manage schools assigned an “F” rating.

Table 5

Principals Holding Elem./Secondary (K-6/7-12) Teaching Endorsements

School Name/List Number	Accountability Rating	Endorsement
11. Kirksey Middle School	D	Elementary Ed. (4-6) Biology (7-12) Chemistry (7-12) General Science (7-12)
13. Magnolia Middle School	D	Elementary Ed. (4-6) Kindergarten-4 (K-4) Reading (K-12)
14. Margaret Green Jr. High	D	Elementary Ed. (4-6) General Science (7-12) Social Studies (7-12)
12. Leake Central Jr. High	F	Elementary Ed (K-3) Elementary Ed. (4-6)
24. Whitten Middle School	F	Elementary (K-3) Elementary (4-6)

Similar to the findings presented in Table 4, the findings presented in Table 6 show almost no discernable pattern among the teaching endorsements. The principal's teaching endorsement, whether the endorsement was for elementary education (K-6) or for both elementary and secondary, does not appear to make a difference. Endorsement does not influence the accountability rating. Three-fifths (60%) of the principals led and

managed middle schools that earned “D” accountability rating, while two-fifths (40%) of the principals served schools that were judged failures.

It should be noted that that only 23 middle schools (not 24) were addressed in the teaching endorsement section. This anomaly occurred because MDE does not have a teaching license recorded for the principal at Northwest Middle School (number 16 in the study) in the Meridian Public School District. It appears that occasionally (but rarely) MDE officials issue school administrator certification credentials to wannabe administrators who haven’t been teachers. In Mississippi, it is possible to be awarded the “entry level administrator certificate” as a stand-alone certificate.

Summary of the Findings

As stated earlier in the study, the concept of “self-efficacy” in relation to leading and managing middle schools may be seen as pertaining to principals’ judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain student achievement performance goals. It is generally thought that successful school management calls for principals who are task oriented, who consistently stay focused and use effective strategies, while artfully applying conceptual, technical, and interpersonal skills. That is, self-confident principals take the lead, set direction, acquire commitment from the faculty, and overcome resistance to change.

For the purpose of reporting the findings of the investigation, the 24 middle schools in Mississippi that received “D” or “F” accountability ratings from MDE for 2012 - 2013 school year were divided into two groups. Of the 24 schools, 10 received a “D” rating and 14 were “F” rated.

Results indicated that the majority (58%) of the middle schools were given a “F” rating, while less than half (42%) received a “D” rating.

In regard to the principals’ school administration credential certification levels, results indicated that the majority (50%) of the middle school principals held AA certification in school administration, one-third (33%) held AAA certification, and approximately one-fifth (17%) possessed AAAA credentials.

Investigation findings showed that half (50%) of the middle schools receiving a “D” accountability rating were led by a principal with an AA certification level, while the other half (50%) of the middle schools that received a “F” accountability rating were also led by a principal with an AA certification level. Self-efficacy as expressed by AA certification credentials did not make a difference. Approximately one-third (37%) of the middle schools that received a “D” accountability rating were led by a principal with an AAA certification level, while almost two-thirds (63%) of the middle schools that received a “F” accountability rating were also led by a principal with an AAA certification level. The result was the opposite of the expectation that low scoring schools led by principals with specialist certification would be “D” rated compared to “F” rated, or if AAA credentialed principals would be leading low scoring schools at all. Self-efficacy as expressed by AAA certification credentials did not make a difference. Four of the 24 middle schools constituting the case were managed by principals with AAAA certification. The findings indicated that only one-quarter (25%) of the middle schools receiving a “D” accountability rating were led by a principal with an AAAA certification level, while three-fourths (75%) of the middle schools that received a “F” accountability rating were also led by a principal with an AAAA certification level. The result was

different from what was expected. Self-efficacy as expressed by AAAA certification credentials did not make a difference.

In regard to teaching endorsements, principals holding secondary education (7-12) teaching endorsements ranging from chemistry to physical education were assigned to lead and manage 18 middle schools. Six of the principals served in middle schools receiving a “D” accountability rating and 12 principals managed schools awarded an “F” rating. The findings show no discernable pattern among the teaching endorsements. The principal’s secondary education (7-12) teaching endorsement, in relation to the concept of self-efficacy, does not appear to influence the accountability rating. Five principals held teaching endorsements for elementary education (K-6) or for both elementary and secondary. The principal’s teaching endorsement, whether the endorsement was for elementary education (K-6) or for both elementary and secondary, did not appear to make a difference. Simply put, teaching endorsements do not seem to influence accountability ratings.

In closing, it should be noted that due to the relatively low number of middle schools and principals involved in the investigation along with the specific area of study being limited to only “D” or “F” accountability rated middle schools consisting of grades 6,7, and 8, utilization of quantitative statistical analysis techniques did not seem appropriate and were not used. Qualitative visual analysis, in the form of tables and charts was used instead.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter V presents the summary, conclusions, and recommendations for this investigation focused on the self-efficacy, as expressed by school administration certification credentials and teaching endorsements, of the principals charged with leading and managing the 24 Mississippi middle schools that received Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) accountability ratings of “D” or “F” in relation to student academic performance. The overall research question that guided the investigation asked: Did the self-efficacy of the principals charged with leading and managing the 24 Mississippi middle schools that received MDE accountability ratings of “D” or “F” in relation to student academic performance suggest any connection to the ratings assigned to schools?

The investigation utilized archival data, readily accessible to the public, in the form of documents and records provided by MDE. Chapter IV presented an analysis of the archival data collected to determine an answer to the research question that guided the investigation.

Summary of the Investigation

The investigation titled *Principals’ Self-efficacy at Low Performing Middle Schools in Mississippi* was presented in five chapters: (1) introduction; (2) literature review; (3) method; (4) findings and discussion; and (5) summary, conclusions, and

recommendations. The study also included a reference list providing information about specific resource materials relative to the investigation.

Chapter I presented content in four sections. After a brief lead in, the introductory chapter addressed (1) problem statement, purpose, and research question; (2) significance of the study; (3) method; and (4) limitations and delimitations.

Chapter II reviewed pertinent literature. The chapter provided literature-based content addressing self-efficacy in relation to the following: (1) historical perspective, (2) varied actions and outcomes, and (3) principal leadership.

Chapter III covered the methods used in the investigation. Chapter content focused on the research design, data collection, and data analysis. Utilization of archival data, readily available to the public, was featured.

Chapter IV presented the findings and discussion. Findings were presented and discussed in relation to the overall research question that guided the investigation. The findings were presented in the form of written narrative and graphic visualization focusing on charts.

The present chapter, Chapter V, summarizes the investigation, presents conclusions based on the findings, and provides recommendations for future research.

Conclusions

This study's conclusions are based on publicly available information gathered from the official website of the MDE supplemented with additional clarification provided by state department officials. Information included school ratings, a listing of middle schools and their principals, and school administrators' licenses, which show levels of certification credentials and teaching endorsements. The conclusions are limited in scope

and attributed to only this specific case (i.e., principals leading and managing the 24 Mississippi middle schools that received MDE accountability ratings of “D” or “F” in relation to student academic performance for the 2012-2013 school year).

In K-12 education, it is generally thought that a principal’s level of self-efficacy affects the quality of his or her leadership and management. Similarly, it is generally thought that teachers who teach higher-level students and classes exhibit higher levels of self-efficacy. Teachers who instruct advanced students and classes are expected to have higher than baccalaureates (e.g., master degrees) and specific teaching endorsements in given areas (e.g., biology or chemistry).

In general, the majority of middle school principals are former teachers. In this investigation, the principals leading and managing the 24 Mississippi middle schools that received MDE accountability ratings of “D” or “F” in relation to student academic performance for the 2012-2013 school year were all former teachers.

The principal’s certification level is not a factor in the schools low rating. Chapter IV summarizes the findings, showing no connection between principals with AA certifications and the D or F rating of their schools. The same was true of those possessing AAA and AAAA certifications. In fact, in case of principals possessing AAAA certification, the opposite occurred. More of these principals led F rated schools than those rated D.

Low scoring middle schools (i.e., middle schools assigned “D” or “F” MDE accountability ratings) were led and managed by principals having a relatively lower sense of self-efficacy. Simply put, the principals leading and managing the middle schools that received “D” or “F” accountability rating would hold minimum AA

certification credentials rather than AAA or AAAA certification credentials. A pattern among teaching endorsements (e.g., elementary education versus secondary education) might be discernible. For example, middle school principals possessing elementary (K-6) education teaching endorsements would have less sense of self-efficacy than middle school principals who had secondary teaching (e.g., biology or chemistry) endorsements.

Based on the findings indicated in this investigation, three conclusions appear warranted.

In regard to self-efficacy, it appears reasonable to conclude that the principal's certification credential level (AA, AAA, or AAAA) was not a factor in the middle school's low accountability rating. The findings presented in Chapter 4 show no connection between principals with AA certification credentials and the "D" or "F" rating of their schools. The same was true for those possessing AAA and AAAA certification credentials. In fact, in case of principals possessing AAAA certification the opposite occurred. More of these principals led "F" accountability rated schools than "D" rated schools.

Secondly, it appears reasonable to conclude that the principal's teaching endorsement was not a factor in his or her middle school receiving a "D" or "F" rating. Findings indicate otherwise. Endorsements ranged widely from primary grade teaching to science to physical education. As a matter of fact, the findings indicated that a majority of the middle school principals held secondary teaching endorsements (18 principals) compared to elementary or both elementary and secondary endorsements (5 principals; 1 principal had neither secondary or elementary endorsements; see pg. 29) Findings

indicated that 66% of the principals with secondary teaching endorsements led and managed “F” rated middle schools.

In regard to the overall research question guiding the investigation that asked whether the self-efficacy of the principals charged with leading and managing the 24 Mississippi middle schools that received MDE accountability ratings of “D” or “F” in relation to student academic performance suggested any connection to the ratings assigned to schools, it maybe concluded that self-efficacy did not appear to demonstrate a connection to the ratings.

Recommendations

Educators and people in general often think of the middle grades as just a “passing through” stage between elementary school and high school; however, they are now recognizing the importance the middle grades play in the future success of students both in high school and beyond. It is imperative that schools of education develop curriculum that meets the needs of future teachers and administrators who will work with adolescent age students. Secondary and elementary endorsements, which include middle grade content do not appear to be meeting the unique learning and life changes of middle school students.

It cannot be assumed that having secondary subject area or elementary grades endorsements, or said another way, having taught high school, elementary school, or even middle school, prepares one to be a middle school principal.

The main conclusion of this study is that a middle school’s principal’s certification level and areas of endorsement are not tied to the low score of his or her school, and are not indicative of his or her levels of self-efficacy.

The following three recommendations are based on the findings and conclusions drawn from this study.

First, future research needs to broaden the parameters of the present study. The certification credential levels and teaching endorsements of many more middle school principals in Mississippi need to be investigated in terms of MDE accountability ratings. With a larger data pool, the likelihood of seeing suggestive patterns between school ratings and principal certification credential levels and teaching endorsement areas would potentially become more accurate. Statistical analysis and comparisons (low scoring schools vs. high scoring schools) would become viable, allowing for a more precise picture of the connection between school ratings and principal certification credentials and teaching endorsements.

Secondly, it is recommended that more precise specific instruments be used to measure the self-efficacy of middle school principals. Certification credentials levels and teaching endorsements do not appear sufficient. For example, utilize the “Principal Sense of Efficacy Scale” (PSES), developed by Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2004), to determine self-efficacy levels of administrators.

Self-efficacy involves the principal’s drive to succeed and meet given goals. A principal possessing high self-efficacy might be more able to overcome obstacles that get in the way of meeting goals. Such a principal may be more likely to be a team builder, willing to use the strengths of others involved to meet the goals of the organization.

Thirdly, require higher AAAA certification credentials for middle school principals. Often when hiring or replacing principals, choose the candidate with the highest credentials.

Although this particular investigation did not demonstrate the fact, it still appears reasonable to assume that the candidate with a doctoral degree (AAAA) will be more capable than an applicant possessing just a masters degree (AA) to provide the leadership and management skills necessary to produce the desired student academic performance success.

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