Comparison of Nebraska Accreditation Options and Effect on Student Achievement: A Mixed Methods Study

by

Tami Eshleman, Ed.D.

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Comparison of Nebraska Accreditation Options and Effect on Student Achievement: A Mixed Methods Study

Tami Eshleman

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Advisor: Barbara LaCost

The purpose of this study is to determine if and how each of the two accreditation options in Nebraska may influence student achievement outcomes. A mixed-methods study was developed. Phase I quantitative analysis determined whether a significant difference existed in the ACT composite scores and the NeSA reading and math assessments in schools accredited by either the Nebraska Frameworks or AdvancED. The analysis revealed that NeSA math was influenced by accreditation choice. Based on the quantitative results, school superintendents were identified for Phase II qualitative methods to survey and interview to share (a) attributes that contributed to their academic success, (b) how accreditation influences best teaching practices, and (c) what challenges affect student achievement.

Respondents did not attribute their success to accreditation process. The districts' successes were based on processes that were developed by the district leaders. Personnel contributed to the success according to the respondents. Policymakers should focus on reducing the requirements for accountability and accreditation that would allow districts to focus on improving student achievement.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The Problem

Schools are failing. This is the message that can be inferred from daily news reports. A Google news search of failing schools resulted in over 60,000 links. The media and external community focuses on failing states, districts, schools, and students. The internal educational community reacts to legislative regulations to meet the ever-changing mandates. "Terms like fault and failure obscure a clear view of the problem and, in fact, are part of the problem" (Wagner & Kegan, 2006, p. 8). School improvement is the driving force to any successful school district. Companies market their solutions to school districts aggressively. National and state legislation has allocated funding specifically targeting low-performing schools. Media reflect the emphasis on the issue of poor performance in schools. Examples of this media attention include major cover pages in education magazines: "What Works in Raising Student Achievement?" (Corwin), "Unleash the Power" (Read 180), "Solutions that can take students to the head of the class --And perhaps even further" (Verizon), and "Our School Improvement Partnership is about GETTING IT RIGHT" (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt).

Nebraska Department of Education Commissioner Matt Blomstedt addressed the improvement in his September 30, 2014, Annual Yearly Progress Letter:

> We are committed to continuous improvement. Gains in student achievement are due to the collaborative efforts of teacher, staff, parents, and community members through high-quality instruction, effective leadership, and partnerships. We know that tests are an important part of teaching and learning, but we also understand that basing a student's achievement on a single assessment does not capture everything that is important for our children's learning journey.

Jenkins (2008) asked, “Do the superintendent and board accept the belief that 94 to 97 percent of the school district’s issues are system problems” (p. 4). School leaders must first acknowledge the need to recognize the systems problem. As directed in Title 92, Nebraska Administrative Code, Chapter 10, Section 009.01A: “The school system develops and implements a continuous school improvement process to promote quality learning for all students. This process includes procedures and strategies to address quality learning, equity, and accountability”. (92 NAC 10, 2015, p. 29).

School improvement efforts can be further divided into programs or processes. For purposes of this study, programs and processes are defined. Programs target specific achievement gaps. Programs may be adopted to support instructional, curricular, or operational functions. School improvement programs are only one cog in the wheel of school improvement. Processes focus on systems and are not limited to one academic deficiency. The school improvement process is the comprehensive management of several programs to improve student learning.

Whitaker (2010) advised, “Only when we knew the goal could we come up with a solution” (p. 8). Whitaker explained three levels of change; procedural, structural, and cultural. DuFour et al. (2010) recognized the struggles of school improvement.

> Many teachers and administrators prefer the familiarity of their current path, even when it becomes apparent that it will not take them to their desired destination. We recognize it is difficult to pursue an uncharted path, particularly when it is certain to include inevitable bumps and potholes along the way. (p. 7)

Context of the Problem

Quick and easy school improvement solutions do not garner long term improvement. School improvement in Nebraska is directed by Nebraska Department of

Education and is defined in Rule 10 (NDE, 2015) that requires a district commitment to a five-year cycle for either of two accreditation options, Nebraska Frameworks or AdvancED. School districts have the autonomy to select one of the two choices.

Nebraska Frameworks

School districts that choose Nebraska Frameworks accreditation provide the improvement plans for all schools within the district. The accreditation team then validates the goals and makes recommendations during site visitations.

The *Nebraska Framework: A Handbook for Continuous Improvement in Nebraska Schools* (2015) defines the alignment process for school districts as:

> The Nebraska model for continuous improvement is intended to assist Nebraska schools in aligning and coordinating the various school improvement initiatives that may be in progress in each district. These may include for example, Improving Learning for Children with Disabilities (ILCD), Title I Improvement Plans, technology plans, curriculum development activities, and plans for other local, state, or federal programs. Schools are encouraged to merge or align their various plans and goals so that local improvement activities will be mutually supportive and consistently aimed toward achieving school improvement goals. Therefore, it is crucial that representatives of special projects and programs be frequent participants in continuous improvement planning.
>
> In addition, local standards, curriculum, assessment, and professional development should be developed and implemented through the involvement of all staff members to provide quality learning experiences for all students and to provide a solid foundation for developing and implementing school improvement plans. Ongoing committees for curriculum, assessment, and professional development should, therefore, communicate frequently with the school improvement steering committee to assure that these important activities are indeed mutually supportive.
>
> Research has identified the following four areas critical to high performance schools:
>
> - Curriculum alignment
> - Appropriate instructional strategies
> - Family and community engagement
> - Assuring equity and addressing diversity (p. 2).

The responsibility of individual school districts is to facilitate school improvement through a systematic process.

AdvanceED

Districts that elect AdvancED accreditation may accredit entire district, single buildings and multi-buildings with the district. Multi-building districts may choose AdvancED accreditation for all buildings or may option for individual building accreditation, usually districts choose to accredit only high schools if district-wide accreditation is not chosen. While the district's other buildings – such as elementary or middle schools – may accredit through the Nebraska Frameworks standards. AdvancED accreditation includes five standards with multiple indicators for the accreditation team to evaluate compliance. The accreditation team is required to submit at least two required actions. There are annual fees for districts and buildings for AdvancED accreditation.

School improvement is a social obligation of the state of Nebraska as implicitly noted in Amendment Ten of the nation's Bill of Rights (U.S. Const. amend. X) that states, "The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the states, are reserved to the states respectively, or to the people." This social obligation is based on the assumption that school districts are responsible for the learning of all students. Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) has drafted documents to meet state legislation, specifically LB 438, The Quality Education and Accountability Act, in establishing an accountability system. Accountability for a Quality Education System Today and Tomorrow (AQuESTT) is a state-wide systematic endeavor to address quality,

accountability, and school improvement. Commissioner Blomstedt further explained the new accountability system in his September 2014 AYP letter:

> As a state, our biggest challenge is finding better ways to engage and support the learning of every student, every day. Nebraska is developing a system for Accountability for a Quality Education System, Today and Tomorrow (AQuESTT). The State Board of Education believes that Nebraska citizens-through the Constitution, the Nebraska Legislature, the State Board of Education, the Commissioner of Education, and other policy makers-are responsible for the total design of this education system. While acknowledging that this education system will be influenced by others, (federal government, other state leaders, and local policy makers) this system will be dependent on and driven by local boards of education, administrators, teachers, parents, communities and students. This belief requires that we listen well, communicate better, and engage leaders and stakeholders across the state. The goal is to build a quality accountability system that is meaningful to Nebraska.

What is school improvement in Nebraska and how can Nebraska Department of Education best support the process? Commissioner Blomstedt's statement acknowledged the responsibility of the Nebraska Department of Education to design an educational system that addresses school improvement as required by Rule 10 (NDE, 2015).

Restatement of Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine if and how each of the two accreditation options in Nebraska may influence student achievement outcomes.

Research Questions

Phase I analysis in the quantitative section concentrated on four questions.

1. Is there significant statistical difference between ACT composite scores for Frameworks school districts and AdvancED school districts?
2. Is there significant statistical difference between NeSA reading assessments for Frameworks school districts and AdvancED school districts?

3. Is there significant statistical difference between NeSA mathematics assessments for Frameworks school districts and AdvancED school districts?
4. To what degree is the accreditation system associated with enrollment?

The study's qualitative emphasis focused on three questions.

1. How do superintendents of high achieving districts explain sustained academic success?
2. How do superintendents of high achieving districts link accreditation procedures to best practices in teaching students?
3. What challenges do superintendents of high achieving districts face in Nebraska as they work to sustain their progress in academics?

Method

A quantitative analysis of public data available from the Nebraska Department of Education was completed prior to beginning the qualitative section of the study. I first determined whether a significant difference existed in the ACT scores and the NeSA reading and math assessments in high performing schools accredited by either the Nebraska Frameworks or AdvancED. I also determined the degree of association between accreditation process -- Nebraska Frameworks or AdvancED – and student enrollment.

These results provided a basis for selection of participants for the qualitative approach, which provided opportunity for Nebraska superintendents of high achieving school districts to share (a) how accreditation might be linked to student achievement in their districts and (b) what best practices were in place for sustaining annual growth.

Definition of Terms

ACT – For the purpose of this study, ACT is the college readiness assessment.

AdvancED Accreditation– For the purpose of this study, AdvancED Accreditation is an international accrediting agency. Districts and schools pay an annual fee. Schools and district are accredited based on five standards that are evaluated every five years by an external team. Membership is available to all schools who meet the five standards.

Accreditation – Rule 10, Regulations and Procedures for the Accreditation of Schools - For the purpose of this study, accredited schools must comply with 92 NAC 10, the rules and regulations that govern standards and procedures for the accreditation of all public schools and any nonpublic schools that request state accreditation. Districts/schools may also choose to be accredited by the AdvancED/North Central Association accrediting body. (Accreditation and School Improvement, n.d.).

AYP – For the purpose of this study, AYP means Adequate Yearly Progress.

Common Core Standards – For the purpose of this study, the Common Core is a set of high-quality academic standards in mathematics and English language arts/literacy (ELA). These learning goals outline what a student should know and be able to do at the end of each grade. The standards were created to ensure that all students graduate from high school with the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in college, career, and life, regardless of where they live. (About the Standards, n.d.).

District– For the purpose of this study, district is defined as entire educational entity, usually serving residents from birth to 21.

District Accreditation- For the purpose of this study, District Accreditation uses AdvancED criteria to define district standards that must be met.

NCLB – For the purpose of this study, NCLB refers to *No Child Left Behind* federal legislation. (No Child Left Behind Executive Summary, http://www2.ed.gov/nclb/overview/intro/execsumm.html)

Nebraska Administrative Code **–** For the purpose of this study, all Nebraska state agency regulations are compiled in the *Nebraska Administrative Code* (NAC). Each agency is assigned certain titles of the Code for its rules and regulations. The Nebraska Department of Education uses Titles 92 and 93. The Nebraska Department of Education administration regulations are contained in Title 92 of the NAC, and each of the Department of Education's "rules" are actually "chapters" of Title 92 of the NAC. Thus, the formal legal citation to the Department's "Rule 1" is "Title 92, Nebraska Administrative Code, Chapter 1", or "92 NAC 1" when abbreviated. In addition, Title 93 is used for the Department's Personnel regulations for its state employees. (NDE Rules and Regulations, n.d.)

Nebraska Frameworks – For the purpose of this study, Nebraska Frameworks is the internal accreditation process that schools within Nebraska may elect to use to meet Rule 10 accreditation requirements. (Nebraska Framework: A Handbook for Continuous Improvement in Nebraska Schools, 2015)

NeSA- For the purpose of this study, NeSA is the Nebraska State Accountability assessments that measure state standards and determine student proficiency on those standards. Scores include all students tested.

Race to the Top – For the purpose of this study, Race to the Top refers to competitive grants awarded to states that met criteria set by the United States Department of Education.

Rule 10 – For the purpose of this study, Nebraska Administrative Rule for Accreditation of Schools.

School - For the purpose of this study, school can be defined as elementary, middle or high school only.

School Improvement – For the purpose of this study, accredited schools must have a systematic on-going process that guides planning, implementation, and evaluation and renewal of continuous school improvement activities to meet local and statewide goals and priorities. The process includes a periodic review by visiting educators who provide consultation to the local school/community in continued accomplishment of plans and goals. (Accreditation and School Improvement, n.d.)

School or *Unit Accreditation*- For the purpose of this study, School Accreditation through AdvancED which meets school standards.

Statutory Authority – For the purpose of this study, the Administrative Procedures Act (Sections 84-901 to 84-920 of the Revised Statutes of Nebraska) contains the main statutory provisions detailing how state agency rules and regulations are

adopted. Under state law, the terms "rules" and "regulations" may be used interchangeably. The State Board of Education has the authority to adopt state rules and regulations for carrying out the State Board's constitutional responsibilities and those responsibilities assigned to the State Department of Education by the Legislature. State regulations that are properly adopted and filed with the Secretary of State have the effect of statutory law (See Nucor Steel v. Leuenberger, 233 Neb. 863 (1989). (NDE Rules and Regulations, n.d.)

Student Achievement - For the purpose of this study, student achievement is success as measured by state achievement tests and reported as proficient.

School Improvement Program - For the purpose of this study, program is a specific, targeted intervention or strategy for school improvement.

School Improvement Process - For the purpose of this study, process is a specific, targeted multi-year procedural course of action for evaluating, defining, monitoring, and adapting.

Assumptions

One underlying assumption of this study was that schools have autonomy in choosing their own method of accreditation -- Frameworks or AdvancED. A second assumption is that, in this study, I relied on data integrity as shared by the Nebraska Department of Education State of the Schools report. A third assumption is that the interviewees were truthful in their responses.

Limitations

The results of the study may have limitations. First, the investigation was limited by the student achievement data collected by the Nebraska Department of Education. The investigation was limited to two methods of accreditation in Nebraska. The survey developed may have limited the responses received from participants. Interpretation of interview data may have limited the conclusions. Moreover, districts may have been hindered by financial resources in their opportunity to select AdvancED accreditation.

Delimitations

I included only data from Nebraska public schools in this study. Furthermore, I examined only student achievement data and enrollment for one year, the 2013-2014 school year, and then compared that data to limited data from the 2012-2013 and 2014-2015 school years. Finally, I did not take into account demographics of the students in the school districts examined.

Significance of the Study

The results of the study may contribute to the field of education by shedding light on the relationship between methods of school improvement and student achievement outcomes. Superintendents and the state department might benefit in multiple ways. First, the process provided a procedure to assess outcomes of two accreditation options by partitioning achievement data by the two accreditation options, allowing differences between the two accreditation methods to emerge. Second, quantitative data analysis demonstrated possible differences between Frameworks and AdvanceED districts regarding ACT scores and NeSA Reading and Mathematics state assessment scores.

Third, the analysis addressed enrollment data as a factor in distinguishing between the two accreditation methods. The school superintendents revealed relevant practices that resulted in sustaining high student achievement. Results provided possible predictors that school leaders and policy makers may use to establish school improvement methods for Nebraska schools.

Chapter 2

Review of Related Literature

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to determine if and how each of the two accreditation options in Nebraska may influence student achievement outcomes.

Overview

In this chapter, I provide a review of the research literature that provides context for this study of Nebraska accreditation and student achievement. Sources included statutory rules and regulations, and materials from selected professional journals, educational resource books, and dissertations. Four main topics are addressed in this review: (a) accreditation, (b) state and federal accountability, (c) student achievement, and (d) perception and roles of key stakeholders.

Accreditation

Limited independent research has been done on the impact of AdvanceED accreditation in comparison to other accreditation models. Limoges (2001) studied the history of Nebraska Public School Accreditation and identified three major periods of accreditation in Nebraska: Organizational Period (1855-1929), Regulatory Period (1930-1951) and Leadership and Service (1953-1990). During the Organizational Period, the state supervised Nebraska districts directly. County superintendents were charged with conducting annual visits to schools. In the 1900s, there was increased oversight from the state level into the governance of schools. Courses of study and methods of teaching were evaluated according to certain standards based on performance and requirements. Three levels of standards included: approval, accreditation, and AA accreditation. Each

level of standards embodied increased requirements. Schools were required to have a comprehensive visit every seven years. In 1951, the Approval and Accreditation of Nebraska Schools identified the purpose of the accreditation plan as "to maintain adequate school programs and to provide better instructional opportunities for Nebraska youth". (Limoges, 2001, p. 167) Historically, there have been two Nebraska options for accreditation for school districts. The first Nebraska option was the self-study model in which local school district committees evaluated their own school district. This was replaced by Rule 10's continuous school improvement model that required an external team visitation. School districts now have the option of Nebraska Frameworks or AdvancED. Nebraska Department of Education monitors the accreditation process and has allowed accreditation options to school districts to fit their local initiatives and directives.

Boles (2012) examined the perceived strengths and limitations of the AdvanceED/ NCA accreditation option within the state of Indiana. The study surveyed superintendents, principals, and teachers on four accreditation variables: (a) vision/leadership, (b) collaboration, (c) engagement, and (d) implementation integrity. Boles had a 38% (78 of 207 responses) return rate for the survey. Analysis of the data determined no significant difference on the perceptions of vision/ leadership, collaboration, and implementation integrity among the superintendents, principals, and teachers. However, significance difference among the three groups of participants was established with respect to engagement.

Nebraska Department of Education and legislative statutes have historically guided district functions. Worrell (2015), in researching the reorganization of Nebraska schools in a mixed methods study, examined the impact of reorganization on student opportunities, enrollment, staffing effects, and community. In the quantitative research portion, Worrell surveyed 199 Nebraska superintendents and conducted qualitative interviews with eight experts in public school education. Worrell found no negative impact on the schools due to reorganization, whether it was mandated by legislative action or initiated by districts.

State and Federal Accountability

States were granted autonomy to accredit their public primary and secondary schools through the United States Constitution as defined by the Tenth Amendment (U.S. Const. amend. X). The United States Department of Education (DOE) has increased their jurisdiction in accountability through federal mandates, including No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top measures. Although states were initially granted autonomy in delivery and monitoring of education, the federal government has become more involved in evaluating success in schools since the release of "A Nation at Risk" in 1983. Federal funding requires accountability for funds allocated to schools for specific purposes, historically these funds were limited to Special Education and Title I funding.

> Now, 30 years later, the Equity and Excellence Commission calls on the federal government to take a more active role in public education, and advocates universal preschool – which President Barack Obama championed in his January [2013] State of the Union address – desegregating schools, equalizing funding, and improving teacher training. (DeNisco, 2013, p. 34)

A new report released by the United States Department of Education in 2011, "For Each and Every Child" provides an action plan with strategies to address the achievement gaps throughout the nation. The Common Core State Standards were published in 2010 and adopted by 42 states to meet the requirements of federal mandates. "Looking to the future, the Common Core State Standards is expected to help close the achievement gap by holding states accountable for preparing students for college and the workforce." (DeNisco, 2013, p. 34)

In 1973, Martin examined accountability through accreditation for the United States Department of Education. He identified two definitions of accountability in the different states. Some states used approval while other states used the term accredited. Accreditation meant that there was some form of judgment usually. Approval meant that schools met a certain requisite such as teacher qualifications, course of study, textbooks, or adequacy of facilities. Martin defined approval and accreditation:

> Approval is defined as the official act of the State Department of Education certifying that a school or a school system complies with laws, rules and regulations for administrative approval (p. 3).
>
> The State Department of Education that, in the judgment of the department, a school or school system has met the standards of quality established by the state defines accreditation as an official decision. (p. 4)

Martin made clear that the United States Department of Education (DOE) should define its role in accountability for not only business and financial management, but also for student learning. His research examined practices from the 1960s, and he recognized the increased public pressure for schools to identify the responsibilities by the DOE for involvement and leadership in the accountability of student learning for all school

districts. The present role of the DOE is no longer focused solely on compliance, but now includes leading school districts to improve student learning. (Martin, 1973)

President George W. Bush served as the Texas governor prior to being elected President of the United States. While he served as Governor, the Texas education system was overhauled with a new accountability system. President Bush initiated No Child Left Behind Act at the federal level based upon the Texas system. The Act allowed States to develop accountability systems based upon State standards in reading and math with annual testing that ensures proficiency for all students. The assessment results must be disaggregated by various subgroups. States must meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) or be faced with sanctions for not making progress. (No Child Left Behind Executive Summary, http://www2.ed.gov/nclb/overview/intro/execsumm.html)

President Barack Obama initiated competitive grants to states to improve their educational systems. States were encouraged to apply for lucrative grants to fund their initiatives. Race to the Top initiatives focused on preparing students for college and career readiness, providing funds for educators, focusing on lowest-performing schools, and mining data for decision-making. States were rewarded for innovative platforms which addressed the Race to the Top agenda. (Setting the Pace, March 2014, p. 1)

There have been three phases of grants since the inception of Race to the Top. The initial program was funded through American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009. ARRA focused on four reform areas: college and career readiness, building data systems, effective teachers and principals, and turn round schools. States were to be rewarded for:

> creating the conditions for education innovation and reform; achieving significant improvement in student outcomes, including making substantial gains in student achievement, closing achievement gaps, improving high school graduation rates, and ensuring student preparation for success in college and careers; and implementing ambitious plans in four core education reform areas." (Race to the Top Executive Summary, November 2009, p. 2)

Nebraska Frameworks is based on Rule 10 requirements. Rule 10 further outlines the legal requirements for staff, programs, school improvement process, curriculum and assessments for accredited schools. Rule 10 identifies the technical requirements of an accredited school system in Nebraska. Rule 10 states:

> 001.02 Accreditation Classification. Accredited school systems shall comply with all the numbered provisions of this Chapter except that the items identified as Quality Indicators are not requirements. No violations will be cited under Section 014 for any Quality Indicator. School systems will be classified as accredited if they meet all of the applicable requirements of this Chapter. All of the statements herein, with the exception of the Quality Indicators, are requirements of accredited school systems. Quality Indicators may be used by school systems to help in designing local programs. Nonpublic schools that are classified as accredited shall meet all of the requirements of this Chapter except when specifically excluded or when a requirement is for districts only.
>
> 001.03 Accreditation Requirement. All public school districts in Nebraska that provide elementary and/or secondary instruction to children of compulsory attendance age are required to be accredited under the provisions of this Chapter. Accredited school systems are also considered to be approved for legal operation for purposes of state law. Approved private or parochial schools are eligible to apply for and maintain accreditation under the provisions of this Chapter. (Rule 10, September 2015, p. 1).

Rule 10 clearly defines the process through the following specific requirements. Schools are required to have a 5-year continuous improvement process that includes (1) mission and vision, (2) data on student performance, demographics, learning climate, and former high school students, (3) improvement goals, (4) plan, including professional development, and (5) evaluation of progress toward improvement goal(s). An external

visitation team visit is required once every five years. (Rule 10, 2015, p. 30) See Appendix A for 009 Continuous School Improvement.

AdvancED Accreditation is based on five standards. The AdvancED website professes the following in distinguishing AdvancED Accreditation from other accreditation models:

> With a balanced, systemic approach combining Standards, stakeholder feedback and student performance to measure quality programs, relationships and results, our systems-oriented Accreditation Process helps institutions make the most of their talents and resources. Our process aligns accreditation with accountability, emphasizing learner outcomes when evaluating institutional quality. However, it is not the outcome but the course taken over time that yields the greatest return on investment. (https://www.advanc-ed.org/services/accreditation, n.d.)

AdvancED Accreditation accredits through a balanced approach. The five quality standards are identified as Standard 1: Purpose and Direction, Standard 2: Governance and Leadership, Standard 3: Teaching and Assessing for Learning, Standard 4: Resources and Support Systems, and Standard 5: Using Results for Continuous Improvement (AdvancED Standards for Quality School Systems, 2011). “For too many years, institutions have been judged based upon disparate and unrelated test scores and other summative data points that fail to paint an accurate, holistic picture of the quality of an institution,” said Dr. Mark A. Elgart, Ed.D., president and CEO of AdvancED (2011). He continued, “These scores have been used to target schools for punitive interventions but provide no useful information to help them make needed changes.” (p. 1)

Regarding the federal government education initiatives, the similarities are evident when comparing the Race to the Top reform areas and Nebraska accreditation options; Frameworks and AdvancED. Compared to AdvancED, Rule 10 focuses more on

the process than developing a continuous process and evaluating results. When comparing the strategies of Race to the Top with AdvancED Standards and Rule 10, it is evident the match between the measures. See Appendix B for comparisons.

Nebraska schools reference Bernhardt's book, "Data Analysis for Continuous School Improvement" during statewide trainings. She identifies school improvement questions based on W. Edwards Deming's four-step plan-do-check-act cycle (Bernhardt, 2013, p. 11). She enhances the cycle by identifying four questions to implement the vision of school improvement:

- *Where are they now*, through comprehensive data analysis;
- *How they to where they are right now,* through deeper study of the results of current processes;
- *Where they want to be,* by creating or revisiting the vision and placing it at the center of everything they do, and
- *How they are going to get to the vision*, through short-term and long-term plans. (Bernhardt, 2013, p. 19-20)

Bernhardt (2013) further identifies best practices in continuous school improvement processes, she stated that

> . . . schools committed to using comprehensive data analysis to continuously improve their learning organization are able to blend creativity with discipline to create their future. Schools focused only on gaps and compliance can neither innovate nor create a future that looks different form the status quo. Such an approach inhibits systemic improvement and limits progress towards excellence and real equity. (p. 3)

Schools must shift from compliance to process. Accreditation models and federal and state requirements align with continuous improvement processes. Bernhardt continued

> . . . most schools think they are already doing it. However, many schools skip the first three components of the continuous school improvement framework and begin their school improvement plans by looking at the gaps between where they

> are now and where they want to be with respect to summative student learning results, only. While these data provide valuable information, starting here does not give schools a complete picture. By starting and ending with the gaps, schools miss the opportunities to innovate, rethink, and improve these systems. By starting and with the summative testing gaps, schools tend to add interventions to 'fix the kids.' By starting with comprehensive data analysis, schools see how they are getting their current results. Then with their vision, they can determine what *they* need to do to get different results for *all* students. (Bernhardt, 2013, p. 20)

Accountability at the state and federal levels focuses on summative assessments, such as ACT, SAT, state assessment and other national tests. Schools that have a clear plan on continuous improvement are adept at identifying their resources and processes in relation to their current data. Summative assessments are analyzed in the continuous school improvement process.

Student Achievement

Student achievement can be analyzed through several assessments ranging from (a) standardized assessments administered annually, (b) summative assessments done at designated times throughout the school year, and (c) formative assessments given on a frequent basis in the classroom.

> A summative assessment is used to determine whether a student has acquired the intended learning by a specific deadline so that the teacher can assign a final grade or score. State tests are examples of assessments that are used for summative purposes. Formative assessments are part of a process to inform both teachers and students of an individual student's progress toward mastery of an essential skill. These assessments present the teacher and student with information on the status of student learning so that steps can be taken to improve on that learning. Students are then given another opportunity to demonstrate that they have learned. One way to distinguish between summative and formative assessment is that the former is used so students can *prove* that they have learned while the latter is used so that students can *improve* upon what they are *learning*. (Dufour, 2012, p. 40-41)

States have approached accreditation through either state or regional accreditation. The role of regional accreditation was researched by Ross (2008) to compare the role of accreditation on rural, town, urban, and suburban public schools. Her hypothesis was SACS accreditation would be an equalizer for all sized public school across the state of Virginia. She used graduation rates, dropout rates, college enrollment, and passed course standards over a four-year period as the data points. Ross found significant differences in student performance between public high schools that maintained SACS accreditation and those that did not. Ross identified that the Virginia endorsement model was not as in-depth as the established regional accreditation. (2008, p. 3-4)

> The state system focuses mainly on ongoing yearly assessment of student performance and comparing assessment scores from one year to the next. The NCLB legislation also uses this method of yearly assessment. Regional accreditation on the other hand focuses on continuous improvement across all standard areas, as well as how all activities within the school focus on the school mission and improving student learning from one year to the next. According to Hilda Kelly, the Associate Director of SACS in the Richmond, VA office, regional accreditation focuses on the continued improvement of school using research, and SACS accredited schools are expected to meet all state and federal guidelines as well as SACS standards in order to achieve and maintain SACS accreditation (H. Kelly, personal communication, June 11, 2007; SACS, 2004). Regional accreditation supports both federal and state accreditation through its mission of high standards, quality assurance, and continuous improvement ("The Unification of NCA CASI, SACS CASI, and NSSE", 2006). (Ross, 2008, p. 3-4)

Ross identified the concern of costs to districts seeking regional accreditation. Increasing state and federal mandates, such as NCLB, may limit the financial resources school have for regional accreditation. It is not only the cost of regional accreditation but also the associated costs of meeting the standards. Regional accreditation includes the following

components: self-reflection, visiting committee, evaluation/ final report. The purpose of accreditation is ultimately to hold districts accountable for demonstrating student success.

Nebraska accountability for school improvement was examined in relation to the School-based, Teacher-led Assessment Reporting System (STARS) (Riibe, 2008). Riibe surveyed second and fourth grade Nebraska teachers for their perceptions of how the STARS process (a) impacted student achievement, (b) improved school curriculum, (c) improved school climate, (d) improved classroom instruction, (e) improved assessment practice, and (f) improved image of the teaching profession. There was no statistical significant difference between the responses of the two teacher groups. Riibe was able to discern that teachers do perceive accountability as part of the school improvement process.

Collins (2010) assessed parent, teacher, and student responses on the climate component of Missouri School Improvement Program (MISP) AdvanceED Questionnaire (AQ) with the schools ACT scores. Only schools who were participating in the 2004-2005 MSIP review were examined. Significance was found between the parents' responses and student ACT scores. Collins determined that a predictive model could be created based on parent perceptions for students ACT scores. Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) has an accreditation evaluation cycle of every five years. Schools are responsible for collecting data and reporting on all school programs. DESE sends out a team of evaluators to interview teachers and observe district programs. There is a weighting system of 10 student performance measures. Accreditation level determination is based on points earned from Northwest Evaluation

Association (NWEA) MAP scores, ACT scores, dropout rates, average daily attendance (ADA), percentage of students enrolled in AdvancED courses, percentage of students enrolled in vocational courses, percentage of credit earned in AdvancED and vocational courses combined, percentage of students placed in college, percentage of students placed vocationally, and percentage of students placed in college and vocationally combined. The number of points earned determined schools being recognized as accredited, provisionally accredited, or unaccredited. DESE recognizes the importance for schools to meet the minimum standards of performance and adequate yearly progress.

Langevin (2010) conducted a quantitative study to determine differences between AdvanceED accredited high poverty middle and high schools and affluent AdvancED accredited middle and high schools in a five-state region. Langevin examined if there were differences between the poverty and affluent schools on reading and math state assessments. The author identified one purpose was to provide predictors to focus on improving test scores. Data were collected from 449 schools in the five-state region of Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, and Ohio. Schools with poverty between 36% and 44% were not included in the analysis in order to establish a distinction between poverty and affluent schools. Assessment scores were collected from the respective Department of Education for each state. Langevin found significant differences in scores between accredited poverty school and non-accredited poverty schools. Schools of poverty were not rated as high as affluent schools in the accreditation process. The author determined that schools of poverty were rated significantly lower in (a) governance and leadership, (b) teaching and learning, (c) resources and support systems, and (d) stakeholder

communications and relationships standards. Langevin also noted that there was negative relationship of poverty schools test results in reading and math and their continuous school improvement standard rating.

Perceptions and Roles of Key Stakeholders

The responsibility of school improvement has been examined through different lenses of responsibility. Heckathorn (1996) examined the role of school board members and school improvement. The purpose of her study was to describe the expectation for school improvement through the perspective of school board members. This case study focused on two primary questions: What is the nature of school improvement? What role should the local board of education have in developing and implementing school improvement? (p. 7). The case study data were collected from school board members of six rural Class III Nebraska school districts with enrollments between 200 and 600 students. School district superintendents recommended the board members to the researcher to be interviewed. One board member from each of the selected school districts was interviewed. The selected board members were required to have at least five years of board experience; gender was distributed equally among the interviewees. Heckathorn concluded that the board members described their roles as supportive and relied upon school personnel for developing and implementing school improvement. A research element that was included in this study was first and second-order change. The school board members viewed their role as initiating second-order change and relied on school personnel for first-order change. This qualitative study of school improvement

focused on non-educators and not educators who are involved in the day-to-day school setting.

Heckathorn (1996) asked sub questions within the study that included: (a) How should best practices be incorporated into school improvement? (b) What is your local public's expectation for school improvement? (c) What factors (if any) are impeding school improvement? (d) Should the state and federal government have a role in school improvement? Heckathorn concluded that board members recognized the strategic plan as their sphere of influence within a school setting. The board members expressed a desire to support school improvement initiatives but were cautious if the initiatives would require more funding and consequently increase taxes. Heckathorn noted that members were content to maintain their current roles; board members expressed the current training available for school board members was sufficient.

Sieh (2009) researched the role of Nebraska superintendents in school improvement. Sieh sought to determine the degree to which superintendents were involved in administering the school improvement process. The factors that Sieh included in his study were "formal training in school improvement; AdvancED degree focused on curriculum, assessments, and/or instruction; external team leader experience; student enrollment at the superintendent's district; experience in education; and experience as a superintendent" (2009, p. 5-6). Sieh asked superintendents about their perceptions of their role and the phases of school improvement and their opinion of the factors of the study. The survey was sent to 244 Nebraska superintendents with valid email addresses during the 2008-2009 school year. The survey had a return rate of

80.7%, 197 out of 244. The results of the research noted that the majority of the superintendents (a) delegated the leadership of the school improvement process but (b) did participate on some level and (c) were aware of the process. Sieh concluded that the more involved the superintendent was in the entire school improvement process, the more likely the superintendent understood the impact of the process on student achievement. Sieh identified the process as both systemic and systematic. Sieh concluded that a school district with failing students is a district with a failing superintendent.

Hoehner (1997) studied the restructuring process of one rural Nebraska district. The study was a qualitative historical study where the researcher utilized documents collected prior to study. Her general problem statement was "Who controls the quality of education in our schools? Are you satisfied with the quality of education your child receives at McCook Public Schools? Will involvement in the restructuring process result in an improved quality of education?" (Hoehner, 1997, p. 2). The general questions guiding the study focused on (a) school restructuring, (b) stakeholder's perception of school improvement, (c) stakeholder's definition of school restructuring, (d) if school district improvement goals were realistic, (e) if staff members were open to change, and (f) if school improvement was driven by data. The analysis of documents in relation to the general questions produced three themes: (a) common language helped staff understand the school improvement process. (b) Strong leaders and cadre of teachers were the impetus for school restructuring and improvement. (c) School improvement is dependent upon educator's agreement to accountability for results.

A more current case study of one rural turnaround school in one district examined the experiences of administrators and teacher leaders. Habrock (2015) used a qualitative case study to examine a rural turnaround school. Turnaround schools are identified as schools that improve student achievement in a short period of time. The purpose was to study the challenges of reaching high levels of performance of high poverty and high minority students. Five teachers, a principal, a district administrator, a State Department of Education official, and private educational consultant from one school were interviewed. The participant interview results revealed that school leaders must address (a) low morale, (b) principal leadership, (c) community and family specialist, (d) collaboration, (e) district support, (f) literacy priority, (g) interventions and expectations, and (h) standards and assessments. Habrock concluded that the results of the study identified the call for policy makers and departments of education to "implement a common-sense approach that incentivizes continuous school improvement model" (p. 104). Two outcomes emerged: (a) the need for teacher preparation programs to establish a strong pedagogical foundation and (b) the district must provide an avenue for a guaranteed, viable curriculum that includes formative and summative assessments.

Collins (2010) included parents, students, and teachers in his study of the relationships between school climate and ACT performance for Missouri public high schools. The inclusion of the perceptions of parents and students provided unique perspectives in the school improvement process. The relationship between student-school and parent-school is critical to understanding the influences on school improvement effectiveness.

AdvancED requires surveys as part of the accreditation process. The surveys are included in the overall evaluation of a school district. AdvancED produced a white paper that explain why and how AdvancED implemented the Index of Education Quality. Excerpts are noted below.

> For too many years, institutions have been judged based upon disparate and unrelated summative data points that fail to paint an accurate, holistic review of the quality of an institution. The scores have been used to target schools for punitive interventions as opposed to providing a formative assessment that guides sustainable progress and improvement. In 2013, AdvancED introduced an innovative and state-of-the-art framework to measure institutional performance that offers a deeper understanding of organizational effectiveness. The Index of Education Quality (IEQ) provides a holistic measure of an institution's overall performance based on a comprehensive set of indicators and evaluative criteria. As a formative tool for improvement, it pinpoints areas of strength as well as those in need of support or focus.
>
> In the past, labels such as accredited, advised, warned or on probation described the status of an institution after an accreditation review relative to a set of static standards. These labels, with the exception of accredited, were often times perceived as a retributive classification and not as a formative measure by which a school or system could improve. Given the most critical aspect of an institution's work is optimizing student learning, each institution's initial IEQ establishes a starting point to assess and guide the institution on the journey of continuous improvement. Institutions can use the IEQ as a benchmark to focus their attention, activities and actions, unleashing student potential through positive impacts and measurable improvements.
>
> The IEQ score is generated by combining the ratings of the performance indicators within each AdvancED Standard, the evaluative criteria from the Student Performance Diagnostic, and results from the Stakeholder Feedback Diagnostic (surveys of students, parents, and staff/teachers). To better leverage the information obtained from an institution's score, the IEQ composite score may be segmented into three sub-scores of performance, called "domains:"
>
> - Teaching and Learning Impact
> - Leadership Capacity
> - Resource Utilization
>
> (Overview of the Index of Education Quality, 2011, ¶ 1-3)

The comprehensive requirements for AdvanceED accreditation take into account self-reflections of a district, student achievement, stakeholder feedback, and evaluation by an external visitation team. The roles and perceptions of different stakeholders are taken into consideration.

Chapter 3

Methodology

In this chapter, I present the rationale and methodology for conducting this mixed methods study, which provides for a quantitative inquiry that precedes, and directs, a qualitative inquiry (Creswell, 2015).

Purpose and Design

The purpose of this study was to determine if and how each of two accreditation options for public school districts in Nebraska may influence student achievement outcomes. The literature reviewed supported both quantitative and qualitative approaches to link accreditation methods and student achievement in public school districts. Thus, I used both approaches in this study.

I first sought Institutional Review Board approval for this mixed methods study (see Appendix C). Then I conducted a quantitative analysis of public data available from the Nebraska Department of Education prior to beginning the qualitative section of the study. I first determined whether a significant difference existed in the ACT scores and the NeSA reading and math assessments in high performing schools accredited by either the Nebraska Frameworks or AdvancED. I also determined the degree of association between accreditation process – Nebraska Frameworks or AdvanceED – and student enrollment.

These results provided a basis for selection of participants for the qualitative approach, which provided opportunity for Nebraska superintendents of high achieving

school districts to share (a) how accreditation might be linked to student achievement in their districts and (b) what best practices were in place for sustaining annual growth.

Research Questions

Phase I analysis in the quantitative section concentrated on four questions.

1. Is there significant statistical difference between ACT composite scores for Frameworks school districts and AdvanceED school districts?
2. Is there significant statistical difference between NeSA reading assessments for Frameworks school districts and AdvanceED school districts?
3. Is there significant statistical difference between NeSA mathematics assessments for Frameworks school districts and AdvanceED school districts?
4. To what degree is the accreditation system associated with enrollment?

The study's qualitative emphasis focused on three questions.

1. How do superintendents of high achieving districts explain sustained academic success?
2. How do superintendents of high achieving districts link accreditation procedures to best practices in teaching students?
3. What challenges do superintendents of high achieving districts face in Nebraska as they work to sustain their progress in academics?

Method

This research, essentially, follows the structure of a mixed-method study. The quantitative section was completed prior to launching a qualitative inquiry. I collected and analyzed data from the 2013-2014 Nebraska State of the Schools report for

enrollment, ACT, and NeSA reading and mathematics scores. District information regarding accreditation method was available from the Nebraska Department of Education website. I used *t*-tests to determine an answer to the first three quantitative research questions and Pearson correlation analysis for the fourth question.

For the qualitative portion of the study, I identified the highest-achieving schools in Nebraska for further analysis. Superintendents from school districts that maintained 86% district proficiency scores over a three-year period from 2012-2013 through 2014-2015 were surveyed and interviewed so they might share their perspectives on the association between accreditation and achievement and on best practices and challenges faced.

Study Participants

All accredited public school districts from the 2013-2014 school year in Nebraska were included in the quantitative data collection. Nineteen school districts were identified as maintaining top scores over the three-year period from 2012-2013 (the year prior to the scores collected for analysis) through 2014-2015 (the year subsequent to the scores collected for analysis). The 19 superintendents or district's curriculum directors were surveyed, and interviews were requested from each to gather qualitative data about practices. The survey sent to superintendents focused on identifying best practices and processes for high student achievement. The interviews focused on the three qualitative research questions.

Instrumentation

An eleven question researcher-created survey was reviewed for face validity and was piloted for usability. The survey consists of open-ended questions asking for direct responses from the participating superintendents. Feedback from the pilot effort was used to amend the survey before actual implementation. (See Appendix D for copy of survey distributed through Survey Monkey).

I developed an interview protocol addressing best practices, and I piloted that protocol with superintendents of districts not included in the initial pool of participants. Adjustments and additions were made to the interview protocol before administration. See Appendix E for a display of the interview protocol.

Data Collection Procedures

Quantitative data were collected from Nebraska Department State of the Schools (NDE) 2013-2014 report available on the NDE website. The survey and qualitative questions were approved by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board. The survey was distributed electronically. The 19 selected superintendents were sent an invitation to participate through postal mail. The survey was opened in Survey Monkey one week after letter was posted. Two email reminders were sent to participants that had not responded to the request to complete the survey.

Ten of the 19 superintendents responded to the request to complete the survey resulting in a 52.6% return rate. Nine of the 19 superintendents agreed to participate in an interview. Seven actually committed to the interview. Those were asked to sign an informed consent form before commencing the interview (See Appendix F).

Data Analysis Procedures

The initial data were analyzed with the assistance of the NEAR Center on the campus of University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The research questions were addressed using *t*-test and Pearson correlation analysis. Survey results and transcribed interview data were analyzed for emerging themes using in vivo techniques. Summary statements addressed the three qualitative research questions.

Validation Procedures

The numerical data collected from the Nebraska Department of Education and subsequent analysis were reviewed by consultants in the NEAR Center on the campus of the University of Nebraska – Lincoln. Survey data were peer reviewed. Qualitative interview data were peer reviewed and I asked for member checking.

Role of Researcher

The researcher collected the quantitative data from the Nebraska Department of Education State of the Schools reports for 2012-2013, 2013-2014 and 2014-2015. I had to consciously avoid bias based upon my current role as Associate Superintendent for a Nebraska school district. My role as district lead for accreditation was also taken into consideration when developing the survey and interview questions. The current accreditation model in my district was identified as a potential bias and set aside during collection and analysis of the study. The role of the researcher was not one of participant but one of observer and analyst.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher examined possible personal biases throughout the research process. The potential issues to be considered would be from the interviewees to misrepresent their school's achievement. Participants signed an informed consent letter to include a confidentially agreement prior to submitting to interview responses. IRB approval was obtained for this study (See Appendix C). Access to collected data was limited to the principal and secondary investigators. IP addresses were not collected. Only one submission per computer was permitted. Access to results on SurveyMonkey were password-protected.

The purpose of this study was to determine if and how each of the two accreditation options in Nebraska may influence student achievement outcomes. This study followed the format of a mixed methods study. School superintendents of high achieving schools shared their best practices for sustaining annual growth. Standard verification and ethical considerations were adhered to throughout the study.

Chapter 4

Results

The purpose of this study was to determine if and how each of the two accreditation options in Nebraska may influence student achievement outcomes. Data were collected in a two-step process relying on a mixed method approach. First, a quantitative analysis of public data available from the Nebraska Department of Education was completed. Data were collected from the 2013-2014 Nebraska State of the Schools report for the variables (a) enrollment, (b) district ACT scores, (c) district NeSA reading scores, (d) district NeSA mathematics scores, and (e) district accreditation method, which was available on the Nebraska Department of Education website. The NeSA reading and math assessments included all student data, including all subgroups such as Special Education, English Language Learners, Free/ Reduced Price Meals, Gender, Highly Mobile, and Migrant.

For this study, the quantitative analysis established whether a significant difference existed in the 2013-2014 ACT composite scores and the NeSA reading and math assessments in schools accredited by either the Nebraska Frameworks or AdvanceED. I also determined the degree of association between accreditation process -- Nebraska Frameworks or AdvanceED – and student enrollment. I used *t*-tests and Pearson correlation analysis to answer four quantitative research questions.

The second step focused on collection and analysis of qualitative data collected through a survey and subsequent follow-up interviews with leaders in selected school districts. In order to determine the pool of selected districts, I relied on the quantitative data to determine eligible districts. I compared the results from the state data analysis for

2013-2014 to the district scores from the 2012-2013 and 2014-2015 reporting years. Districts that maintained a three-year rating of highly successful, defined as 86% district proficiency in math scores, resulted in a pool of 19 districts that I subsequently surveyed and from which I selected interview participants. Thus, superintendents from school districts that maintained high scores in math over the three-year period were surveyed and interviewed so they might share their perspectives on the association between accreditation and achievement and on best practices and challenges faced.

General Observations and Results

For the quantitative analysis, data were collected from the Nebraska Department of Education's State of the Schools reports. All Nebraska Public Schools were reported in the data. During the 2013-2014 school year, there were 245 public schools in Nebraska. Schools were identified as Frameworks or AdvanceED accredited districts. District enrollment, ACT Scores, NeSA reading and math scores were collected for all 245 schools. ACT scores were masked for schools with limited number of students participating. The NEAR Center (Nebraska Evaluation and Research Center) on the campus of University of Nebraska-Lincoln was consulted to conduct statistical analysis to determine significance of results.

Data Analysis and Research Questions

The researcher utilized the Explanatory Sequential Design. The first two procedures define the quantitative phase for the mixed-method project. The third procedure was the qualitative phase. First, the researcher collected and analyzed data for the quantitative analysis. Second, I examined the results to determine "(a) what results

will need further exploration in the . . ., qualitative phase and (b) what questions to ask participants in the qualitative phase." (Creswell, 2015, p. 38) Third, I conducted a survey with open-ended questions and conducted interviews with superintendents that volunteered to participate after completing the survey. Quantitative research questions focused on all Nebraska Public School districts and did not sample for collection analysis.

The quantitative analysis was focused on four questions. Each question is provided and followed by a description of the analysis and the results. Table 1 displays the means and standard deviations for three assessments partitioned by accreditation of districts from which data were collected.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Assessment Data 2013-2014

	Nebraska Frameworks		AdvancED	
Assessment	*N*	*M (SD)*	*N*	*M (SD)*
ACT Composite	80	21.70 (1.47)	121	1.46 (1.53)
NeSA Reading	116	79.45 (7.98)	130	77.9 (12.17)
NeSA Math	116	76.23 (10.00)	130	72.88 (15.35)

Question 1. Is there significant statistical difference between ACT composite scores for Frameworks school districts and AdvanceED school districts? An independent-samples *t*-test was conducted for ACT composite scores between Frameworks and AdvanceED Accredited Schools. Levene's test for homogeneity of

variance was

non-significant, $F(1,199) = 0.027$, $p > 0.05$, suggesting the two groups have the same variances for ACT scores. There was a non-significant effect for accreditation style, $t(199) = -1.125$, $p = 0.262$, $d = 0.159$. The mean difference between Frameworks and AdvanceED. was -0.245, which was non-significant.

Question 2. Is there significant statistical difference between NeSA reading assessments for Frameworks school districts and AdvancED school districts? An independent-samples t-test was conducted for NeSA Reading scores between Frameworks and credited Schools. Levene's test for homogeneity of variance was non-significant, $F(1,244) = 2.140$, $p > 0.05$, suggesting the two groups have the same variances for NeSA Reading scores. There was a non-significant effect for accreditation style, $t(244) = -1.165$, $p = 0.235$, $d = 0.154$. The mean difference between Frameworks and AdvanceED was -1.5483, which was non-significant.

Question 3. Is there significant statistical difference between NeSA mathematics assessments for Frameworks school districts and AdvancED school districts? An independent-samples *t*-test was run for NeSA Mathematics scores between Frameworks and AdvanceED Accredited Schools. Levene's test for homogeneity of variance was non-significant, $F(1,244) = 2.306$, $p > 0.05$, suggesting the two groups have the same variances for NeSA Mathematics. There was a significant effect for accreditation style, $t(244) = -2.005$, $p = 0.041$, $d = 0.265$. The mean difference between Frameworks and AdvancED. was -3.3558, which was significant.

Question 4. To what degree is the accreditation system associated with enrollment? A Pearson correlation was computed to assess the relationship between accreditation system and enrollment. There was correlation between the two variables, $r = -0.196$, $n = 246$, $p = 0.002$.

Note on Effect Size

Effect size, referred to as Cohen's *d* in statistical analysis, is calculated by the difference of the two means divided by the standard deviations average.

> The effect size is the main finding of a quantitative study. While a ρ value can inform the reader whether an effect exists, the *ρ* value will not reveal the size of the effect. In reporting and interpreting studies, both the substantive significance (effect size) and statistical significance (ρ value) are essential results to be reported (Sullivan & Feinn, September 2012, p. 279)

Statistical significance is the probability that the observed difference between two groups is due to chance. If the *ρ* value is larger than the alpha level chosen (e.g., $\alpha = .05$), any observed difference is assumed to be explained by sampling variability. With a sufficiently large sample, a statistical test will almost always demonstrate a significant difference, unless there is no effect whatsoever, that is, when the effect size is exactly zero; yet very small differences, even if significant, are often meaningless. Thus, reporting only the significant *ρ* value for an analysis is not adequate for readers to fully understand the results (Sullivan & Feinn, 2012, p. 279-280)

The analysis of the NeSA Mathematics assessment resulted in the effect size (d) of .265. This effect size would be classified as small.

> A small effect of .2 is noticeably smaller than medium but not so small as to be. . . . Utilizing Cohen's d for analysis is beneficial in the planning stages of a study to determine the "sufficient power" of a study. (Sullivan & Feinn, September 2012, p. 280)

Participant Identification

Two hundred forty-five (245) school districts were assessed in 2013-14. Results for those districts performing at 86% district proficiency or above were compared to the 2012-13 year's NESA Math assessment results and to the 2014-15 year's NeSA Math assessment results. Nineteen (19) Nebraska public school districts were identified as having the prescribed high achievement of 86% proficiency for the three academic periods; 19 school superintendents were identified as potential survey respondents. See Table 2. The curriculum director responsible for accreditation, in school districts that had that position, was surveyed and interviewed at the discretion of the superintendent. Contact information was taken from the 2015-16 Nebraska Department of Education website.

Table 2

Number of Districts with 3-Year NeSA Math Proficiency (86%) Data

	Nebraska Frameworks Districts	AdvancED Districts
86% Proficiency	*N*	*N*
2012-2013	19	17
2013-2014	19	17
2014-2015	8	11

Note: Total 19 districts identified for sustainable high student achievement at 86% proficiency

The survey was administered to gather demographic information about the identified school districts. The qualitative survey, consisting of open-ended questions

and direct responses from the participants, was approved by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board (See Appendix E). The survey was conducted through SurveyMonkey. The 19 selected superintendents were sent an invitation letter, dated April 5, 2016, as initial contact through postal mail. The letter explained that an email would be sent within the week with a hyperlink to a survey and a consent form explaining the investigation. The first email note and request to participate was emailed on April 14, 2016. Seven superintendents responded to the first request. A second notice was sent, via email to those participants who had not responded; three additional superintendents agreed to complete the survey, bringing the total to ten. The survey was opened in Survey Monkey one week after the invitation letter was sent.

Response Rate

Nineteen district representatives received initial emails. There were a total of 10 responses of which one respondent completed only a portion of the survey. The completed was demographic and included in the results. This yielded a response rate for completed surveys of 47.4% (n = 9 of 19) and with the addition of the incomplete survey the response rate was 52.6% (n = 10 of 19).

Results of the Survey Sample Demographics

The seven questions are displayed in Table 3. The responses to an question eight follow. Survey responses to open-ended questions to follow.

Survey Question 8. Identification of norm-referenced tests . The majority of the responses on Norm-Referenced Tests identified NWEA MAP 7 as their district

assessment. Districts may have identified with more than one norm referenced test depending upon grade level administration.

Table 3

Summary of Responses for Questions 1 -7 of Survey

Seven Survey Question	Summary of Responses
Distribution of Years in Current Role and District	The distribution of the 10 respondents was 1-5 years, 6 respondents (60%) 6-10 years, 3 respondents (30%) 15-20 years, 1 respondent (10%)
Distribution of Years in Education	The distribution of the 10 respondents was 16-20 years 2 (20%) 20+ years 8 (80%) All had 15 or more years of experience.
District Enrollment	The range of student enrollment in the ten K-12 districts was 87 to 7500 students.
District Accreditation Process	The districts' accreditation process was reported as 6 districts used AdvancED (60%) 3 districts used Frameworks (30%), 1 non-response (10%)
Responsible Party for Choosing Accreditation	One (10%) participant credited the Board with the responsibility for choosing the district's accreditation process. Three (30%) participants credited the superintendent, five (50%) participants declared the accreditation choice was determined by both the superintendent and the board of education. One (10%) did not respond to the question.
Anticipated Change in District Accreditation Process	Eight (80%) participants responded "No" One (10%) participant responded "Yes" and One (1) did not respond. Notes: The respondent who declared that the district is planning on change identified cost as a significant concern. Public Perception is the main factor for maintaining AdvancED accreditation.
Verification of Curriculum Director Position	Six (60%) respondents indicated that "No" Two (20%) respondents indicated that a curriculum director was present Two (20%) indicated "Other" and declared that the title was assumed to be duties of a principal was an additional part of the superintendent's responsibilities.

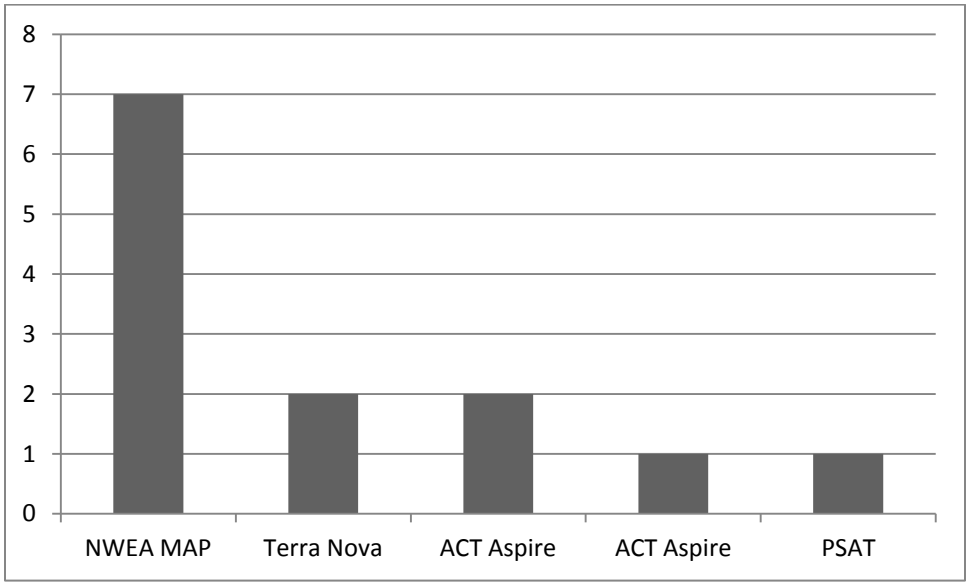

Figure 1. Identification of norm referenced tests responses by all respondents.

Interview Results

The purpose of this study was to determine if and how each of the two accreditation options in Nebraska may influence student achievement outcomes. This study follows the format of a mixed methods study. I provide the results from seven (7) interviews with participants who completed the online survey and volunteered to participate in a more in-depth interview. Josselson (2013) asserts that "[t]he purpose of the interview in qualitative inquiry is to create a conversation that invites the telling of narrative accounts (i.e., stories) that will inform the research question" (p. 4).

All participants of the survey were contacted by email to schedule a follow-up interview either in person or on the online. I had contact with ten (10) of the participants, only seven (7) participants were able to schedule interviews for a response rate of 70%. [Of the original nineteen potential participants contacted, the response rate was 36.8%.]

Three of the interviews were completed face-to-face and four interviews were conducted through electronic media. Five superintendents and two curriculum directors participated in the interviews; there were three females and four males. Josselson (2013) declared that

> [a]n interview that serves narrative (qualitative) research is an open-ended invitation to someone to talk to us about some topic that interests us as researchers, and thereby to create data for us that we may learn more about some aspect of the psychological or social world that our participant inhabits and represents. (p. 9)

Participants were asked questions concerning student achievement and accreditation. A list of the questions can be found in Appendix E. According to Josselson, 2013), "[n]arrative research. . . [allows the researcher] to analyze the complexity rather than to diminish it. In order for such analysis to take place, a researcher must first obtain, through an interview a narration of experience as it is internally represented" (p. 10).

Each interview I conducted lasted anywhere from 10-20 minutes. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. Voice Recorder Pro was an "app" used to record the interviews. The recordings were then downloaded to files stored on my computer. The transcriptions were transcribed by VoiceBase and by me. I then edited the transcriptions to ensure accuracy and to standardize the language and format. Josselson (2013) prompted that "[i]n such cases, you might listen to the recording along with the transcription – in part to check the transcription for accuracy, and in part to hear once again the participant's voice (as well as your own voice)" (p. 176). Analysis was not conducted until all interviews and transcriptions were completed. After the first three interviews, it was evident that "resources used by districts" was a common topic shared

by participants. I then amended the interview protocol with a probe in case it was needed in subsequent interviews.

The researcher coded the interviews by classifying line by line key elements of the interviews. The transcriptions were then copied on different colored papers. The key elements were disaggregated and organized into themes based upon student achievement and accreditation. Software was not utilized in this process because of the low number of transcriptions to code.

Qualitative Analysis

Eight (8) subthemes emerged from two themes through the analysis of the survey and transcribed interviews (see Figure 2).

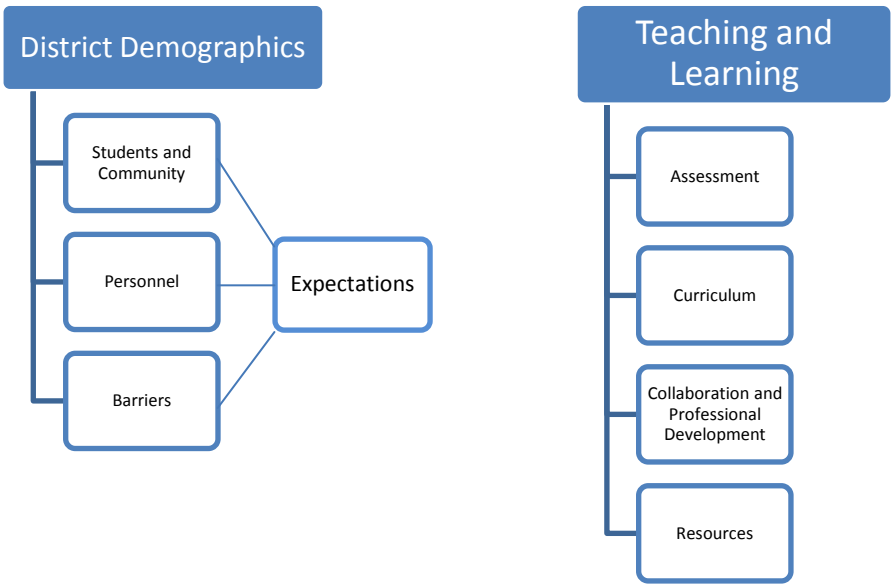

Figure 2. Themes and sub-themes.

Theme I: District demographics. District demographics encompasses four subthemes; student and community demographics, personnel, barriers, and expectations. The first three subthemes were constructed from respondents' unique qualities and focused on the past and present. The fourth subtheme was developed from the respondents' unique qualities and directed towards future actions.

Subtheme IA: Student and community demographics. Two of the participants noted that their location was a contributing factor to their success. "It's a good place that you have a really good system." One school noted that being close to a larger city contributed to their success. The advantage of being a small school was expressed by another participant. Size of school could be a positive or a negative as viewed by individual participants. Keeping progress sustainable for a small class has its own challenges. There were class sizes as small as six in some of the districts interviewed. Two of the districts interviewed have the fastest growing districts in the state. They are opening new buildings every two years to meet the needs of their growing communities. The district enrollment range for superintendents I interviewed was from 86 to 7500 students kindergarten through grade 12.

Six of the seven participants recognized parent involvement as crucial to their achievement. Parents are choosing to option into some of the smaller districts and other families are moving into districts that offer a high quality educational system. One participant noted,

> I think one of the things that's really changed dramatically in my 30 years in education is the kids' lives outside of school. Home life is much different. Parental support is different. That's why I've always stayed in -- smaller schools . . .because I feel that we still have good parental support in rural schools.

Another participant from a smaller school noted, “They’re good kids and the parent involvement – you know people are bringing their kids here because they want their kids in a small school, and our parent[s] are really involved in their kids’ education.” Two superintendents shared their views as to why some students do not perform as well on assessments – attributing cause to observations of the students’ home lives. One respondent noted “But it’s so difficult when their home lives are so unstable to get the where the state expects them to be as well,” while another participant noted that schools personnel do not know “where kids are coming from.” Another participant noted that after the last accreditation visit, the district identified parent involvement as a priority. A Parent-Teacher Association has been established and is active in the school because of the efforts of the leadership.

The mobility of families is another demographic that has affected student achievement in schools. Not knowing the families in the communities can be a result of student mobility. One respondent noted, “We’ve seen a lot more of students coming in and out. They’ve been in three or four different schools in a year, let alone in their lifetime, and so there is no consistency of their instruction.” Mobility and diminishing interest in testing by high school students were identified as two obstacles to student achievement. As one respondent commented, “High school numbers have a tendency to drop a little more just because older kids don’t seem to take the same kind of pride or whatever, there just seems to be a real apathy I think with testing as kids get older.”

Several of the participants commented that their demographics contribute to their achievement. The participants shared their districts’ free/reduced lunch percentages,

which ranged from 7% to 60%+. The school districts with participating interviewees had little diversity in ethnicity or racial groups. All of the school districts were initially rural school districts. Two of the schools have seen extreme growth in the past 5 to 20 years. One participant described the community as having: ". . . kindness and how people treat each other, and how they just feel like they belong. There's just a feeling of belonging, and [that] a lot of kids are successful, and they can do whatever they can." Another participant explained that change from rural status to suburban status in the community also affected the make-up of the school board. "It used to be the lead farmers in the community [who] were sitting on the board with their perspectives; and now it [is] very well educated urbanites."

Subtheme IB: Personnel. Several of the participants acknowledged that tenure of their teachers has positively affected their student achievement. Excluding the two districts experiencing rapid growth, the remainder have multiple math teachers with more than ten years teaching experience and some with twenty-five plus years' experience. The smaller schools have been able to hire teachers who have experience to replace teachers retiring. One of the schools experiencing growth shared, "It has been extremely difficult for us to maintain our culture and our achievement. Two-thirds of our teachers have been hired in the last five years." Fortunately, the participants noted that being able to hire teachers with experience does help in the transition when teacher openings occur. One respondent stated, "I think [hiring teachers] gives us another advantage for doing well; [it is] being able to put in an experienced person back in the classroom." Another participant noted, "We have lots of people who stay once they get here, and we have

great pools; we've been really blessed with a great pool of teachers when we need to hire as well." One survey respondent shared, "Each position hired has unique specifications, and very deliberately developed interview questions to determine if the person will be a good fit in our district, meet the teacher evaluation frameworks, understand ethical situations, and knowledgeable in content areas."

Two of the school districts represented by the respondents have secured funds and approval to hire additional teachers to sustain their achievement. One district will be hiring an additional math teacher to "help spread out our math teaching from the secondary levels who take the brunt of everything." Another district leader offered that the district. "next year, . . .[would have]a full time Title teacher, so we can add more interventions."

All of the participants identified the dedication and professional dedication of their teachers as instrumental in the success of their students' achievement. Teachers are experienced and genuinely want their students to do well.

Subtheme IC: Barriers. Participants identified federal and state mandates that affect their districts' ability to focus on student achievement as barriers. One participant explained that federal expectations are difficult to meet.

> The target goals that came down from the federal government to be 100%, was that 2014, was our target year on that. You can try and try and try, and when our class sizes are as small as we are, one kid with one bad day and you're off.

Another participant listed training requirements from the state level as a barrier for teachers to complete, including such areas as dating violence, concussion, suicide prevention, as well as local trainings. The respondent concluded,

> There's only x amount of time, and I think that it is going to become more and more difficult to manage and continue to teach kids. When you talk about all these things that we have to do now in school, when you talk about them individually, they sound like great ideas. But then when you start putting the altogether, it becomes, "Now, when are we going to have time to teach reading, writing, and arithmetic?"

Another participant identified the changing criteria for evaluating districts for accreditation as a "moving target":

> I've been involved with accreditation for 35 years. Initially it was very much -- count the library books. I've been through a lot of accreditation cycles. It seems like they really move almost on a pendulum. When I started this job, it was very much -- looking at norm referenced tests. [I] Used to have a day to teach teachers about z-scores. They got to the point where they didn't even want perception measures."

A couple of the participants identified budget concerns with meeting the increasing needs of districts to meet the needs of all students. "[Educators] struggle with having enough money to totally implement everything they want to do." Allocating resources appropriately to meet the needs of students is becoming increasingly difficult.

Subtheme ID: Expectations. All of the participants mentioned the expectations of the districts was vital to the success of students and district as a whole. One participant explained that the district adopted a behavior program, PBiS, that not only addresses behavior but also academic expectations for students. There were those that compared their teachers to coaches that have the need to motivate and encourage students to excel. "We make it competitive, we tell our kids that you are good in sports, and we want to be able to say the same thing in academics." This district leader shared that their culture was identified as outstanding by the external visitation team. Another district respondent identified that expectation that their school would outperform others. "We do

kind of point out to them that test scores are usually at the top of our conference, and our kids take pride in that just like they would a football game." One participant did identify the challenge of sustaining high student achievement:

> There is the unending challenge of staying focused and trying this year's new thing. It is, we are not glitzy. There is just unending pressure to do the next cool thing. That is what I feel like is really difficult. Everybody's got a new idea.

The expectations that all teachers will succeed is not coincidental. All participants identified the necessity to have processes in place. One district identified developing an instructional framework for teachers. Another district recognized the need to create systemic and systematic processes. The resistance to the red tape led to several veteran teachers questioning the departure from individual teacher autonomy in the classroom. One respondent noted that the ". . .teachers were asking, 'Why are you building hurdles for us to jump over?' But that was truly built by our last accreditation process of building systems." The need for a sustainable process was identified as a need for sustainable achievement, which can be hampered by the fact that the participants ranged from having one year tenure in their current position to over fifteen years. One respondent noted, "Process and the accountability piece that goes with it has definitely improved our practice of teaching math, and actually teaching every area that especially with that math goal has really caused us to focus in."

Respondents were of the general opinion that their schools performed well. Several of the respondents shared that they are monitoring progress and comparing their scores to other districts. One respondent shared that differences were noted between elementary and high schools. This respondent noted "our high schools, however, are

consistently 1st and 2nd in the rankings for mathematics. Overall, our district is the highest performing in the [education structure of the state]." Another response was

> We have taken a position adding time and support for struggling students. We have avoided remedial classes in favor of supplemental support interventions and classes. If a student is behind in math, it is an expectation that they are receiving additional time for math instruction.

District choice of accreditation was addressed within the survey responses. One respondent shared, "The administration and Board consider the recognition of a regional/national/international standard and the higher standard expected by AdvancED than the state Frameworks. The community believes striving for the higher standard is important." Another respondent wrote, "I believe the quality of your school is a direct reflection of the entire system, and therefore the AdvancED process is a greater indicator of whole school success." Yet another respondent stated, "An honest response would be that AdvancED was selected due to perceived status for AdvancED District Accreditation." Several others shared that (a) history of accreditation methods, (b) perception of process, and (c) past decisions were factors in their accreditation choice.

Theme II: Teaching and Learning. The second theme focused on facets of teaching and learning. The subthemes drawn from the responses include curriculum, assessment, collaboration and professional development, and resources.

Subtheme IIA: Curriculum. Aligning standards with the curriculum was a common theme that emerged from the conversations with all participants. For instance, one participant said,

> we made sure that our curriculum was aligned with state standards, and we gave opportunities for our teachers to communicate and talk K-12. Make sure everything was lined up, and we didn't have any gaps anywhere in our curriculum.

Another participant further identified specifically what the district's Algebra teachers have in common for curriculum. "All of the Algebra teachers across the district have a common pacing guide, and they give the same assessments. They sit down and review the data together." There was reference to teacher autonomy in choosing that which was being in taught in the class; it has been limited in a standards-based era. One respondent noted, "We narrowed our curriculum down to the point where the state says that these are the things [to] identify as important or essential learnings." The participant further clarified, "I think the whole narrowing of the curriculum, in my opinion, has probably been good for all of us because, you know, twenty years ago, I think the curriculum for everybody was all over the place." Reference was made to the expectation that teachers must also identify the essential learnings as provided by Nebraska Department of Education's table of specifications. One survey response noted that teachers are provided summer refreshers to align curriculum.

The common curriculum forces teachers to teach to the standards and allows teachers to identify specific interventions. As one respondent noted, "And there's always the continual review of the skills that they're already mastered while introducing new skills." Allusions to the ability to intervene as a direct result of having a common curriculum were made. A participant stated,

> I think as far as the sustained academic success—it is the teachers [who] do not want these kids to fail. They will do what it takes, and they will teach to the curriculum, but they're also good at intervening with the students who are struggling.

Another participant shared that teachers intervene any time they can including noon hour, before or after school, and recess.

The common curriculum forced leaders and teachers in several of the districts to evaluate their course offerings and the sequencing of courses. Traditionally, students start high school in the same courses. Accommodation by districts resulted in essentially tracking students by placing them in lower classes. If students struggle in high school, they will be placed in a support class, but the student remains in the grade level course as well. As one participant noted,

> In some cases, they had been students who had behavior problems in 8th grade. There ought to be a consequence for a behavior problem, but, quite frankly, we entered them in that general admission class, we shut the college door for them, because that wasn't going to be an option.

Another district has chosen to develop a local curriculum that fits the needs of their school system. This respondent noted,

> We get killed in our middle school, in eighth grade every year on that because our curriculum does not align with NeSA. We don't teach [subject] until freshman year. We just basically told the school board that we're just not going to do as well, because we like how our curriculum is structured and really don't want to change it.

Districts have flexibility to create curriculum that meets the needs of their students. Districts have been given autonomy to align their curriculum and implement local supports as needed. A survey response reiterated this practice, "The district has updated curriculum and aligned practices to the Nebraska

standards. Additional support classes at the secondary level have also helped improve scores." "K-8 teachers have been part of a multi-year program to improve math instruction. All elementary teachers attend at least one training per year to enhance instruction," is another survey response concerning curriculum training to meet the needs of students.

Curriculum aligned to state standards and developed by local teachers was identified as a key factor in the school's sustained student achievement. "A well-defined curriculum, with the expectations that the teachers are implementing the curriculum and using it with fidelity" was identified by a respondent as one district's top attribute to sustained academic success. Another participant shared,

> I think it is staying focused, making academic success our main thing. Our goal is that every door be open for students and so we stay very focused on it. I think there have also been some policy decisions we've made as we've looked at data.

A survey respondent identified the comprehensive approach to aligned curriculum,

> Staff development has been predominantly local and had consisted of work on common district assessments, pacing guides, curriculum development, and data analysis. Much is done in district level grade and department teams. There have also been staff development workshops form vendors and for technology.

Subtheme IIB: Assessment. Several of the respondents perceived assessment data analysis as essential to student success. Several interviewees identified their norm-referenced assessment when sharing how they analyze the data. "I feel like we're very good about looking at our MAPS data and our AIMSweb data and trying to make sense and see where we're missing [something]." Several district superintendents shared past experiences when they identified a need to dig deeper into the analysis to identify gaps.

"In 2005 we noticed – because we were paying attention to data – that our ACT non-core had dipped below national average." Another participant explained what happened after their teachers analyzed their data: "Some found holes and discovered their fundamentals and some basics that some kids were just missing." One participant shared the perils of collecting data and not analyzing the data.

> Within five years, it [the process] had swung back to where we collect data and that data did not even get looked at. Every single building had a binder of data. That binder did not get cracked for any building, and it felt more like data.

One of the survey respondents outlined their assessment alignment process,

> Numeric correlations have not been calculated. The NRT was evaluated and selected because of its close alignment to the district curriculum and Nebraska standards. The district assessments are matched to curriculum taught and aligned to the Nebraska standards. NRT is in the district curriculum evaluation and adoption cycle for the 2016-2017 year. ACT standards and benchmarks will begin to be aligned to district curriculum in the next adoption cycle.

Key stakeholders must understand the reason for assessments and what is being done with the results.

> I know teachers are thinking "why are we doing this? "we just have to give…" but I was always kind of a data geek, and so, to me, the data showed what kind of progress we were making, and I liked seeing that progress, and I liked being able to tell the public, you know, up and down on any given day about our overall trends. I like to really look at that data. And I liked the accountability piece of it.

Another observation of a participant about teachers and assessment data was, "They're concerned about the goal – our progress towards the goal. So, the teachers feel like there has been progress towards meeting goals and what our data shows about that goal." Ideally, all stakeholders must understand the purpose behind the assessments and how the data will be utilized to improve student achievement. One participant shared that the basic function of assessment is to ensure all students are improving. "[Teachers] want to

make sure that all of the kids are learning what has been identified that they need to know to be successful in the future." Another participant stated, "I do think that we need to hold schools accountable. It is good for the kids. It is good for the school. It is good for a society."

Assessment data allows districts to measure progress and internal and external accountability for school districts. One survey response in regards to assessment correlation was, "Our district summative scores, NeSA Math, and MAPS math scores are analyzed as three data points to determine if we are making adequate progress toward our target goal of improving student achievement in basic math skills, thereby strengthening overall math scores." One participant openly shared that initially they argued against the statewide testing and how their opinion has changed. "In hindsight and looking at it, I think really what the assessment process has kind of done is allowed us to narrow our curriculum."

Subtheme IIC: Teacher collaboration and professional development. Participants identified teacher collaboration as another theme that contributed to student achievement. Some schools scheduled "early outs" weekly to allow for teachers to collaborate. "Every Friday, [teachers] take that time to really go through a lot of data, they go through curriculums; it's almost a team kind of thing that's staff wide because they talk about a lot of individual kids." The time factor was addressed by another district leader when scheduled summer collaboration meetings were implemented so that teachers could discuss state assessment results. During that time, the teachers review standards and common district assessments. Another participant described their teacher

collaboration as, “A conversation that the teachers continually having about the success of our students.” One district leader noted that the district annually revises their local assessments. The teachers in a grade level give the same assessments, and they have been able to monitor their growth over time based upon local assessments. A few of the school districts use a formal Professional Learning Community approach to teacher collaboration. Teachers discuss curriculum alignment, data results, and interventions or enrichment whichever is appropriate. One participant shared they spend a lot of time discussing why students were not performing well. They ask, “What is going on? What is happening with that? There were a lot of theories.” Teacher collaboration provided an opportunity for districts to discuss beyond theories and address the needs of the individual students.

The smaller districts rely upon their Educational Service Units (ESU) for support in professional development and teacher collaboration. The ESU facilitates curriculum writing and assessment analysis for districts. One participant discussed the transition from competition to collaboration with other districts within their service area. The superintendents in one service area realized their district schools were performing poorly, and the districts’ leaders chose to work as a large school district and implement professional learning community at the ESU level to increase their student achievement. Several participants mentioned the need to individualize their needs for their teachers at the district level rather than utilizing ESU services. As one participant noted, “I just don’t think that the ‘one size fits all’ is good for kids, and I don’t think it’s good for teachers.”

The survey responses were varied in regards to professional development. The districts are given autonomy to provide the professional development needed for their needs. The professional development included topics such as (a) technology, (b) Anita Archer, (c) software programs, (d) vocabulary, and (e) differentiated instructions. Few specific responses were offered regarding math professional development. Professional development was generalized for all teachers as one respondent shared, "Our PD has focused on data analysis, goal development, and interventions to help students."

Subtheme IID: Resources. The participants identified their textbook resources for math instruction. Three of the districts used Saxon Math, two districts used Pearson Envision resources, and one district did not identify text resources and one district was going through textbook adoption. The participants that used Saxon Math highlighted the spiraling of the series.

One of the districts discussed their 1:1 technology initiative as a strong influence on their student achievement. The other districts may be using the 1:1technology, but did not share if they believed the technology integration contributed to student achievement. Several survey responses noted software programs used by students on their devices such as IXL Math and Trojan Math.

One unique response to district resources was the implementation of Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBiS), The respondent shared that this behavior program is evident in academic areas as well. The staff and students are clear about their expectations for behaviors and academics.

Research Questions

Responses to the interview protocol revealed answers to the three qualitative research questions.

Research Question 1—What do you attribute to your school's sustained academic success? The initial responses included curriculum, teacher collaboration, culture, PBiS, policy decisions and teachers. Three respondents stated that having an aligned curriculum attributed to their academic success. Two respondents credit teachers for student achievement. When probed if there were specific events that helped with the process the respondents shared differentiating between elementary and secondary approaches. The expectations of the staff and students were highlighted as elements that contributed to academic success.

Research Question 2—What impact does accreditation have on best teaching practices for students? Respondents were reluctant to attribute accreditation process to impacting best teaching practices. One respondent considers the accreditation to be a moving target. The moving target has focused on test scores, perception measures, resources, and other items that may not be considered during future visits. This respondent shared that their district has become proactive and predetermines their required action(s) prior to external visit. Another respondent stated that the external visitation team was hand-picked to help with technology integration. One respondent was frank in stating, "I never relied real heavily on anything anybody's told me in the accreditation process." This respondent relies on local and state guidance over accreditation guidance and recommendations. Another respondent supported this position

by adding, “Keeping our individuality if that is the right phrase.” The respondent uses the rubrics as a guide for collaboration time.

A respondent with rapidly changing demographics commented that it has been a challenge to keep focused on the accreditation process. The challenge is due to additional buildings and communicating expectations to more staff in different buildings. Some staff viewed the process as red tape, whereas when the district was a K-12 building, “everybody got the whole picture.” The challenge now is to share district goals and systems to all staff.

One respondent was positive about accreditation and shared benefits of the process. This respondent attributed the accreditation process for improving the practice of teaching math and development of a parent teacher organization. Accreditation process has higher accountability according to the respondent. The accreditation survey revealed lack of parent involvement. The process allows staff to focus on the whole school and not just a specific goal.

Research Question 3—What challenges have you faced to sustain your progress in academics? Three respondents shared challenges with aligned curriculum. The alignment includes narrowing of the curriculum and getting all teachers involved in the process. One respondent clarified, “. . .you didn’t really know what anybody was teaching. How much time they spend on one thing or another. Which probably dictated by what the teacher liked to teach.” The target goals for student achievement was another challenge for a respondent. This respondent noted the small class sizes affected target goals of 100% proficiency for all students.

The challenges addressed by other respondents focused on factors outside of the academic realm. One respondent said, “One of the things that’s really changed dramatically in my 30 years in education is the kids lives outside of school. Home life is much different. Parental support of schools is different.” Another respondent supported this statement, “But it’s so difficult when their home lives are so unstable to get them where the state expects them to be as well.” Student mobility is another factor identified by a respondent. One respondent stated the biggest challenge for their district would be the growth of students in the district. The respondent stated, “And it changes that structure of building, this systematic process. . . that’s the biggest challenge.”

Chapter 5

Discussion

The purpose of this study is to determine if and how each of the two accreditation options in Nebraska may influence student achievement outcomes. The mixed-methods study began with Phase I quantitative analysis and determined whether a significant difference existed in the ACT composite scores and the NeSA reading and math assessments in school districts accredited by either the Nebraska Frameworks or AdvancED. The analysis revealed that NeSA math was influenced by accreditation choice. Based on those results, a mixed-method approach was used to identify superintendents of high achieving school districts for NeSA Math so they might share (a) how accreditation may be linked to student achievement and (b) what were the best practices used for sustaining annual growth.

Phase II qualitative analysis consisted of a survey and then a follow-up interview. The initial invitation letter for survey was sent to superintendents based upon Phase I quantitative identification of high achieving school districts on the Nebraska NeSA math assessment. High achieving was determined to be 86% district proficiency, The Phase II survey collected demographic information on the identified school districts. Phase II of the study included a follow-up interview with the participants who completed the online survey. The primary research questions of this explanatory sequential design study were:

1. What do you attribute to your district's sustained academic success?
2. What impact does accreditation have on best teaching practices for students?
3. What challenges have you faced to sustain your progress in academics?

Phase I quantitative analysis analyzed data from all 245 Nebraska Public Schools. Data collected included accreditation choice, enrollment, ACT score, NeSA reading and NeSA math for the 2013-2014 school year. Accreditation and NeSA Math results yielded a significant finding. The NeSA Math scores were compared to both the 2012-2013 and 2014-2015 scores to develop a comprehensive list of schools with strong math scores for the three identified school years. The NeSA math scores for districts with 86% or better proficiency levels for qualitative research.

The identified school districts varied in their size, location, demographics and accreditation choice. The school districts ranged in enrollment from approximately 85 to 7,500 students. The free and reduced lunch percentage was as low as 7% district-wide to over 70% district-wide. The school districts were located throughout the state. There was equal representation of accreditation methods for school districts. The participants were a representative sample of the school districts throughout Nebraska.

Two (2) themes and eight (8) sub-themes emerged through the qualitative analysis of the survey and transcribed interviews. The eight subthemes identified were:

Theme I District Demographics

- Subtheme IA Student and Community Demographics
- Subtheme IB Personnel
- Subtheme IC Barriers
- Subtheme ID Expectations

Theme II Teaching and Learning

- Subtheme IIA Curriculum
- Subtheme IIB Assessment
- Subtheme IIC Collaboration and Professional Development
- Subtheme IID Resources

The identified themes focused on what school districts do to improve, who is involved in the process, and how school districts approach accreditation and improve student achievement. School districts are unique in their needs throughout the state. The professional development and resources used for improvement differed between the districts. The respondents identified curriculum alignment, collaboration, experienced personnel and high expectations as the primary reason for their success on NeSA math assessments. These respondents did not use demographics as a reason for their success nor for their challenges. The internal and external belief is that all students will succeed and these school districts are able meet this expectation as evidenced in their three year assessment results.

Three research questions guided the inquiry to determine (a) attributes of academic success, (b) impact of accreditation on best teaching practices, and (c) challenges faced by school district to sustain academic success. Respondents did not attribute their success to accreditation process. The districts' successes were based on processes that were developed by the district leaders. Personnel contributed to the success according to the respondents. Accreditation rubrics were referenced but did not attribute to academic success.

Accreditation was approached by most respondents as a task to complete. The continuous improvement process was in action for these high achieving school districts, not because of Rule 10 or accreditation requirement. These school districts recognize the need to have a plan for success and continuously modify the plan to fit the needs of their students and staff.

The challenges identified are not uncommon to all school districts in Nebraska. Changing demographics is a major concern for educational leaders. Leaders recognize the need to support students due to changes in home lives and mobility issues. When school districts are tasked to take on more responsibility for students, resources and time are reallocated. One respondent alluded to the increasing demands on districts for trainings and another respondent referenced keeping the focus on academics. Educators want to provide the free breakfast for students because it takes away a potential learning barrier, but what is sacrificed.

Limitations

This investigation was limited by the student achievement data from Nebraska public school districts. The investigation was further limited to the two methods of accreditation in Nebraska. The survey developed may limit the responses received from participants. All public school districts were included in Phase I quantitative analysis. Limiting the survey and interviews to only top performing school districts may have impacted the study.

Future Research

Throughout the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the subject matter, potential future topics of research were identified. There is limited research on a national level of accreditation for public schools at the K-12 level. The following areas present issues worthy of further study:

Accreditation variances by state. In preparing for this study, there was limited research on state accreditation practices. The state departments of education are granted autonomy in developing criteria for accreditation. Schools may opt for regional or national accreditation through agencies such as AdvancED. Research on top performing states and their accreditation practices would be valuable information for policy makers at the state and federal level. The issue of local control of accreditation at the state and district level is an area which could be researched further and the relationship between student achievement and local control.

Accreditation and federal mandates. This study focused on district initiatives and practices. The end of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the passage of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) affects student achievement. NCLB required states to have a statewide assessment system. Several states chose to enter consortiums to develop and adopt assessments while Nebraska chose to develop and adopt their own assessment system. One of the participants commented on how the change from Nebraska STARS assessment system to current NeSA testing was initially opposed but the result has been that districts are held accountable to the same standards. The participant also shared how curriculum has been aligned statewide and districts are held to a higher standard and the

impact on student learning has improved. How the new education law affects accreditation methods could be another area of research.

Accreditation and state initiatives. The research of this study focused on district accreditation and their student achievement. Nebraska Education Commissioner Matt Blomstedt introduced AQuESST to Nebraska public schools two years ago. The development and implementation of the AQuESST tenets are similar to accreditation methods. AQuESST's accountability lies within the Evidence Based Analysis (EBA) submitted by districts and schools based on specific criteria of the tenets. The research of this study focused ACT, NeSA reading and NeSA math. The accountability report of the EBA is a potential study for analyzing correlation between processes and student achievement. The EBA is more comprehensive than the criterion that was identified for this study. Graduation rates, college and career readiness, college attendance rates, and other criteria build a thorough analysis of the district's success. Expanding the accountability beyond student achievement on standardized tests would provide an opportunity for further research as well.

Impact of demographics on student achievement. Several of the participants of the survey expressed how demographics have impacted student achievement. The two larger school districts have very low poverty rates in their districts. The other participants shared how having smaller districts contributed to the success of their students. Accountability at the state and national level do not exempt subgroups from the reporting and may factor into the scores of other districts achievement scores. Further research would be warranted in determining the effects the various demographic

differences within schools. While demographics may help construct an understanding of school's challenges, demographics are not to be exploited as excuses for not succeeding. Research into public schools with challenging demographics and propensity for success would provide strategies and practices for other school districts to replicate.

The student achievement data focused on high performing schools. It would be beneficial to also investigate what the low-performing schools attribute to their achievement results. A comparative study of practices between high and low performing schools may gain another perspective to help districts and policymakers identify the best practices for improving student achievement. Although this study focused on what districts are doing to perform well, identifying what districts are doing that is not gaining the desired results is equally important.

Conclusion

Accreditation of school districts is used as a barometer of their success and evaluates the processes in place to ensure that students have the opportunity to succeed. This research emphasized the need for collaboration not only within districts but also between districts. As the participants were interviewed, it was obvious the unique strengths and challenges of each of the districts. It was evident of the passionate dedication from the school leaders to provide the opportunity for all students to succeed. Accreditation is an accountability process that varies between Nebraska schools based upon their accreditation choice.

The Nebraska Frameworks is based upon Rule 10 requirements. AdvancED is based upon criteria in five major categories. Student Achievement is taken into

consideration of the whole process. Every Student Succeeds Act at the national level and AQuESST at the state level are two mandates that require compliance from districts in addition to accreditation requirements. When evaluating additional mandates, federal and state policy makers must take into account what is required and what efforts are being duplicated for both accountability and accreditation requirements. One participant addressed his concerns with the multiple requirements placed upon school districts to meet state and federal mandates.

Nebraska public schools have a long tradition of honoring local control. The choice of accreditation method has been one of those choices for many decades in Nebraska. Policymakers and state leaders must consider the two methods and determine if other accountability systems would be able to meet the same standard of accreditation within the two choices currently available and potentially have only one statewide system. If the AdvancED accreditation method is considered to be a higher standard, why that isn't the expectation for all schools to be AdvancED accredited. School districts are responsible for the additional cost of AdvancED accreditation. Nebraska as a state could choose to have one accreditation model, similar to Wyoming which has statewide AdvancED accreditation. The state could negotiate and subsidize the cost. School districts currently have the choice to be AdvancED in all or some of their buildings. School districts that choose AdvancED accreditation for only a limited number of schools, usually choose to AdvancED accredit their high schools.

Whether it is to accredit or determine accountability for school districts, the need to monitor the processes falls within the state department of education. In Nebraska, the

AQuESST tenets and Evidence Based Accountability (EBA) are handled through the Assessment Department in collaboration g with Teaching and Learning Department. There is a separate department for accreditation. These departments work together but the requirements requested from school districts should be evaluated for repeated data requests and reports. Policymakers should focus on reducing the requirements for various systems which would allow districts to focus on improving student achievement.

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United States Constitution. Amendment X.

Appendix A

RULE 10, 009

TITLE 92 - NEBRASKA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
CHAPTER 10 - REGULATIONS AND PROCEDURES FOR THE ACCREDITATION OF SCHOOLS

009 Continuous School Improvement.

009.01 Quality Indicator: A systematic on-going process guides planning, implementation, and evaluation and renewal of continuous school improvement activities to meet local and statewide goals and priorities. The school improvement process focuses on improving student learning. The process includes a periodic review by visiting educators who provide consultation to the local school/community in continued accomplishment of plans and goals.

AQuESTT Tenet: All students experience success through a continuous improvement process that builds student, parent/guardian/family and community engagement in order to enhance educational experiences and opportunities for all students.

009.01A The school system develops and implements a continuous school improvement process to promote quality learning for all students. This process includes procedures and strategies to address quality learning, equity, and accountability. In public schools, the process incorporates multicultural education as described in 004.01F. In all school systems, the continuous school improvement process includes the following activities at least once within each five years.

009.01A1 Review and update of the mission and vision statements.

009.01A2 Collection and analysis of data about student performance, demographics, learning climate, and former high school students.

009.01A3 Selection of improvement goals. At least one goal is directed toward improving student academic achievement.

009.01A4 Development and implementation of an improvement plan which includes procedures, strategies, actions to achieve goals, and an aligned professional development plan.

009.01A5 Evaluation of progress toward improvement goals.

009.01B The school improvement process includes a visitation by a team of external representatives to review progress and provide written recommendations. A copy of the school system's improvement plan and the written recommendations of the external representatives are provided to the Department. The external team visits are conducted at least once each five years.

009.01B1 The AdvancED External Review may be used by a school system to fulfill the requirement for an on-site visitation if all the requirements of Section 009 are met.

009.01B2 The Progress Plan developed by a public school designated as a priority school as outlined in Subsection 010.02D of this Chapter shall be included within the continuous improvement requirements of Section 009 of this Chapter for the district in which the priority school is located.

Appendix B

Comparison of Nebraska Accreditation Option and Race to the Top

	AdvancED Standard 1: Purpose and Direction	**AdvancED Standard 2: Governance and Leadership**	**AdvancED Standard 3: Teaching and Assessing for Learning**	**AdvancED Standard 4: Resources and Support System**	**AdvancED Standard 5: Using Results for Continuous Improvement**
Race to the Top	Rule 10: 009.01A1	Rule 10: 009.01A5	Rule 10: 009.01A3 09.01A4		Rule 10: 009.01A2
Adopting standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace and to compete in the global economy	The system maintains and communicates at all levels of the organizations purpose and direction for continuous improvement that commit to high expectations for learning as well as shared values and beliefs about teaching and learning (MATCH)		The system's curriculum, instructional design, and assessment practices guide and ensure teacher effectiveness and student learning across all grades and courses. (MATCH)		The system implements a comprehensive assessment system that generates a range of data about student learning and system effectiveness and uses the results to guide continuous improvement. (MATCH)
Build data systems that measure student growth and success, and inform teachers and principals about how they can improve instruction.		The system operates under governance and leadership that promote and support student performance and school effectiveness. (MATCH)	The system's curriculum, instructional design, and assessment practices guide and ensure teacher effectiveness and student learning across all grades and courses. (MATCH)		The system implements a comprehensive assessment system that generates a range of data about student learning and system effectiveness and uses the results to guide continuous improvement. (MATCH)
Recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals, especially where they are needed most.	The system maintains and communicates at all levels of the organizations purpose and direction for continuous improvement that commit to high expectations for learning as well as shared values and beliefs about teaching and learning (MATCH)			The system has resources and provides services in all schools that support it's purpose and direction to ensure success for all students. (MATCH)	

	AdvancED Standard 1: Purpose and Direction	**AdvancED Standard 2: Governance and Leadership**	**AdvancED Standard 3: Teaching and Assessing for Learning**	**AdvancED Standard 4: Resources and Support System**	**AdvancED Standard 5: Using Results for Continuous Improvement**
Turning around our lowest-achieving schools		The system operates under governance and leadership that promote and support student performance and school effectiveness. (MATCH)	The system's curriculum, instructional design, and assessment practices guide and ensure teacher effectiveness and student learning across all grades and courses. (MATCH)		The system implements a comprehensive assessment system that generates a range of data about student learning and system effectiveness and uses the results to guide continuous improvement. (MATCH)

Appendix C

IRB Approval Letter

University of Nebraska Lincoln

Official Approval Letter for IRB project #14993 - Change Request Form

March 9, 2016

Tami Eshleman
Department of Educational Administration
25571 W Highway 30 Hershey, NE 69143

Barbara LaCost
Department of Educational Administration
127 TEAC, UNL, 68588-0360

IRB Number: 20151114993EX
Project ID: 14993
Project Title: Comparison of Nebraska's Accreditation Choices in relations to student achievement outcomes and enrollment

Dear Tami:

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects has completed its review of the Request for Change in Protocol submitted to the IRB.

The change request form has been approved to implement the following change(s) and procedures as described in the form:

1. Inclusion of a face-to-face or Skype interview with participants following the online survey
2. Addition of two questions to the online survey

The stamped and approved informed consent/assent form(s) has been uploaded to NUgrant. Please use the stamped form(s) to make copies to distribute to participants. If changes need to be made, please submit the revised form to the IRB for approval prior to use.

We wish to remind you that the principal investigator is responsible for reporting to this Board any of the following events within 48 hours of the event:
* Any serious event (including on-site and off-site adverse events, injuries, side effects, deaths, or other problems) which in the opinion of the local investigator was unanticipated, involved risk to subjects or others, and was possibly related to the research procedures;
* Any serious accidental or unintentional change to the IRB-approved protocol that involves risk or has the potential to recur;
* Any publication in the literature, safety monitoring report, interim result or other finding that indicates an unexpected change to the risk/benefit ratio of the research;
* Any breach in confidentiality or compromise in data privacy related to the subject or others; or
* Any complaint of a subject that indicates an unanticipated risk or that cannot be resolved by the research staff.

This letter constitutes official notification of the approval of the protocol change. You are therefore authorized to implement this change accordingly.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB office at 402-472-6965.

Sincerely,

for the IRB

Association for the Accreditation of Human Research Protection Programs, Inc. Full Accreditation

Appendix D

Survey Questions

Survey Questions

Study Title:	Comparison of Nebraska Accreditation Choices and Student Achievement
Principal Investigator:	Tami Eshleman
Co-Investigator:	Dr. Barbara LaCost

Informed Consent

* 1. Study Title: Comparison of Nebraska Accreditation Choices and Student Achievement
Principal Investigator: Tami Eshleman
Co-Investigator: Dr. Barbara LaCost

This consent form will give you the information you will need to understand why this research study is being done and why you are being invited to participate. It will also describe what you will need to do to participate as well as any known risks, inconveniences or discomforts that you may have while participating. We encourage you to ask questions at any time. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to digitally consent and it will be a record of your agreement to participate.

Purpose and Background

You are invited to participate in a research study to compare Nebraska Accreditation Choices and Student Achievement. As a school leader you are in a position to provide us with valuable information concerning this topic. You have been chosen to participate in this study because your district has been able to maintain high achievement scores on NeSA Math since 2012-2013 school year. We ask your help in completing an online survey to share your strategies for high student achievement The information gathered will be used to better understand the what successful districts have implemented which has resulted in high student achievement for NeSA Math.

Procedures

If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to complete an online survey. The survey will take approximately 30-45 minutes to complete. Survey results will be collected electronically and analyzed for similarities.

RISKS/ DISCOMFORTS

There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research.

BENEFITS

There will be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study. However, the information that you provide may help other districts in improving their achievement results and choice of accreditation method.

EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY

Reasonable efforts will be made to keep the personal information in your research record private and confidential. Any identifiable information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential and

will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. The IRB monitors research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research participants.

Your name will not be used in any written reports or publications which result from this research, unless you have given explicit permission for us to do. Data will be kept for three years (per federal regulations) after the study is complete and then destroyed.

PAYMENT/COMPENSATION

There will be no compensation for participating in this study.

PARTICIPATION IS VOLUNTARY

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw from it at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

QUESTIONS

If you have any questions or concerns about your participation in this study, you should first contact the principal investigator at tamieshleman@gmail.com or (308) 539-0476.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University of Nebraska Institutional Review Board (IRB), which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research

◯ I agree to participate in the study.

Please type your name as confirmation of consent for participation in study.

Demographics

1. How long have your served in your current role as either Superintendent or Curriculum Director for your current school district?

- ◯ 1-5 years
- ◯ 6-10 years
- ◯ 10-15 years
- ◯ 15-20 years
- ◯ 20+ years

2. How many years total have you been in the education field?

- ◯ 1-5 years
- ◯ 6-10 years
- ◯ 11-15 years
- ◯ 16-20 years
- ◯ 20+ years

3. What is the current enrollment for your district? (Do not include preschool enrollment.)

[ ]

NeSA Math

1. Please share your perception of how your district performs on NeSA mathematics assessments.

2. Please share any district initiatives that have improved your scores.

3. Please share any staff development that was provided to faculty.

4. Please share if your district has hiring criteria for hiring new staff to sustain high achievement.

5. How are common district formative and summative assessments developed and analyzed, if applicable.

6. What is your reported norm-referenced test? (ie. Terra Nova, NWEA MAP, ACT, ACT Aspire)

7. What correlation does your district have with NeSA Math, ACT Math, Norm Referenced Test, District Summative Assessments?

Accreditation Choice

1. How is your school currently accreditated?

- ◯ Rule 10 Nebraska Frameworks
- ◯ AdvancED

2. Who is responsible for selecting Accreditation Method?

- ☐ Superintendent
- ☐ Board
- ☐ Both
- ☐ Other (please specify)

3. What factors are considered for final determination of Accreditation Method?

Appendix E

Interview Protocol

Study Title: Comparison of Nebraska Accreditation Choices and Student Achievement

Principal Investigator: Tami Eshleman

Co-Investigator: Dr. Barbara LaCost

Face to Face/ Skype Interview

1. What do you attribute to your school's sustained academic success?
   Probe(s): Can you describe a specific event? Is there a difference between elementary and secondary?

2. What impact does accreditation have on best teaching practices for students?
   Probe(s): As a result of your last accreditation visit, what changes did you make?

3. What challenges have you faced to sustain your progress in academics?
   Probe(s): How has staffing contributed to your challenges? Can you describe a specific event that challenged your progress?

Ask participants if there is anything else they would like to add to the interview relevant to the study.

Appendix F

Informed Consent

Study Title: Comparison of Nebraska Accreditation Choices and Student Achievement
Principal Investigator: Tami Eshleman **Co-Investigator:** Dr. Barbara LaCost

This consent form will give you the information you will need to understand why this research study is being done and why you are being invited to participate. It will also describe what you will need to do to participate as well as any known risks, inconveniences or discomforts that you may have while participating. We encourage you to ask questions at any time. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to digitally consent and it will be a record of your agreement to participate.

- **PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND**

You are invited to participate in a research study to compare Nebraska Accreditation Choices and Student Achievement. As a school leader you are in a position to provide us with valuable information concerning this topic. You have been chosen to participate in this study because your district has been able to maintain high achievement scores on NeSA Math since 2012-2013 school year. We ask your help in participating in an interview to share your strategies for high student achievement. The information gathered will be used to better understand the what successful districts have implemented which has resulted in high student achievement for NeSA Math.

- **PROCEDURES**

If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to participate in an online survey and followed up with an interview. The interview will take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. Interview results will be collected electronically and analyzed for similarities.

- **RISKS/ DISCOMFORTS**

There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research.

- **BENEFITS**

There will be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study. However, the information that you provide may help other districts in improving their achievement results and choice of accreditation method.

- **EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY**

Reasonable efforts will be made to keep the personal information in your research record private and confidential. Any identifiable information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. The IRB monitors research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research participants.

Your name will not be used in any written reports or publications which result from this research, unless you have given explicit permission for us to do. Data will be kept for three years (per federal regulations) after the study is complete and then destroyed. Survey Monkey has the following Privacy Policy in the Extent of Confidentiality. (https://www.surveymonkey.com/mp/policy/privacy-policy/)

- **PAYMENT/COMPENSATION**

There will be no compensation for participating in this study.

- **PARTICIPATION IS VOLUNTARY**

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw from it at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

- **QUESTIONS**

If you have any questions or concerns about your participation in this study, you should first contact the principal investigator at tamieshleman@gmail.com or (308) 539-0476.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University of Nebraska Institutional Review Board (IRB), which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. You may reach the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Office of Research at (402) 472-3123 or unlresearch@unl.edu.

DOCUMENTATION OF CONSENT

I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the project described above. Its general purposes, the particulars of involvement and possible risks have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand I can withdraw at any time. I may copy this page for future reference if I so desire.

_____ _____

Signature of Participant Date

_____

School Represented