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K-12 Educational
Administration

HIGH STAKES TESTING AND ACCOUNTABILITY MANDATES:
IMPACT ON CENTRAL OFFICE LEADERSHIP
(252 pp.)

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This qualitative study examined the ways in which K-12 central office administrators resolve the philosophical dilemma of maintaining democratic leadership strategies when federal mandates induce a more autocratic environment. Responses to two central research questions - how central office administrators are affected by the accountability and testing demands, and how they manage them - provided insight into efforts to resolve this dilemma. Interviews were conducted with four central office administrators from one school district in Ohio with a K-12 enrollment of 5,500 students. They included the superintendent, director of curriculum, director of elementary education and director of research and evaluation. The district was selected for study because it has operated at a state-defined 'effective' level since the 2000-01 academic year, and has maintained its highly-regarded academic reputation despite increasingly stringent federal and state accountability mandates and diverse student demographics.

Educational administration leadership theorists have proposed four leadership competencies that help guide sustainable reform. These competencies, *distributed leadership*, *development of professional learning communities*, *capacity building and sustainable leadership*, were used as a framework to examine adaptation to federal mandates. An instrumental, multiple case study design was used and each participant was treated as a separate case due to their unique roles and responsibilities. Fourteen interviews of 45-120 minute duration were conducted in 2007-2008. Relevant district, state and federal documents were examined to cross-check and corroborate facts. The interview transcriptions, descriptive and reflective field notes, and documents, were transferred using NVivo7 Version 7.0.281.0 (QSR International, 2007) software for data storage, coding, organization and analysis.

The results suggest that, while the identified leadership competencies were actively employed, noteworthy adaptations emerge. The administrators impart more directives, rely more heavily on formative and summative data to drive decisions, and adopt varying degrees of unenthusiastic attitudes toward the tests. Analysis of the results: 1) suggests that the modifications to the core competencies reflect the time pressure to meet federal and state mandates which initially displaces the consensus building aspect of the competencies, and 2) exposes the theories' implicit assumption that educational reform is internally driven, not externally imposed. Implications for educational reform are discussed and directions for future research are proposed.