If I can just find the uninterrupted time to complete an evaluation I feel lucky. I think the government has too much input in education and needs to get out. Everything has gone downhill since they starting sticking their nose in things they know nothing about.  
(Anonymous Principal, 2014 open-ended survey response)

The purpose of this study was to identify and develop an understanding of the relationships between the perceptions of principals as implementers of the Michigan mandatory evaluation policy and job satisfaction, self-efficacy, and stress as principals navigated the roles of building manager, instructional leader and policy stakeholder. Significant studies existed examining teacher empowerment and site-based decision making, but studies focusing upon principal empowerment and the impact of educational policy on principal performance were lacking (Addi-Raccah, 2009; Reeves, 2006). This was the impetus driving a study by this researcher.

In a qualitative study completed by this researcher in 2013, principals were interviewed to discover their perceptions of the process driving implementation of a new evaluation tool. Themes of stress, loss of voice and power, and leadership definition emerge throughout the interview process.

The researcher then sent a questionnaire to Michigan principals in 2014 using the three themes, previously identified, to drive item design in the questionnaire. A final open-ended question has led to additional coding and supported two of the previously identified themes as well as identifying two additional themes. Stakeholder theory was selected to be the theoretical framework for the study.

The motivation to complete a quantitative study was to gather a sense of what was happening in schools throughout the state of Michigan: a focused view of how principals were perceiving the implementation of a new evaluation policy. Questions in the survey were designed to collect demographic data and uncover perceptions held by respondents regarding policy implementation, prior experience in the evaluation process, how respondents defined their role(s) as a principal, how principals (as stakeholders) felt supported throughout the implementation process, and to gather perceptions regarding the implementation process, job satisfaction, self-efficacy, and stress.

As a correlational study, responses were not to determine causes or the impact of a mandatory policy, but rather to examine relationships between variables and predict causal relationships through regression analysis. A brief description of this educational policy is necessary to provide insight into how the policy was implemented.

In 2009, the Michigan Legislature passed the Michigan School Reform Law addressing new responsibilities assigned to school districts and the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) with the goal of increasing student achievement (State of Michigan, 2009). Districts were now required to conduct annual educator evaluations using data collected from student academic growth. Evaluations would have a direct impact on teacher tenure, merit pay, and career longevity (Michigan Department of Education, 2011, January 6).

The Michigan Council of Educator Effectiveness (MCEE) was the agency charged with recommending an evaluation model and evaluation tool for teachers (Michigan Office of the Governor, December, 2011). In a process complete with politics, policy, and an apparent lack of direction, the April 2012 deadline for an evaluation process and instrument passed without a selection made.
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In a new proposal, the MCEE selected four evaluation models to pilot for the 2012-2013 school year in thirteen different school district across Michigan. As delineated in their report, the MCEE (2013) was to recommend an evaluation model by June of 2013 (p. 2).

Along with the challenges of implementing a new Michigan evaluation process and having concerns regarding the validity of value added measures (a form of assessment such as the MEAP), the responsibilities of Michigan principals increased due, in part, to the time requirements necessary to complete the yearly evaluations mandated for all educators (Mack, 2011, November 13).

The researcher began to analyze the data collected from the June 2014 anonymous web-based survey sent to all Michigan principals in this ongoing study. Basic demographic information underwent a univariate analysis to examine the variability of the responses and frequency tables were created to allow for a clear “picture” or profile of the respondents. A total of 426 principals (14 percent) responded to the survey. Within the respondents, 200 respondents were male, 224 respondents were female and 2 respondents were transgender. The distribution of the race/ethnicity variable had 395 of respondents reported as “White;” 28 respondents as “Black;” 2 respondents as “American Indian;” and 1 respondent as “Hispanic.” This was somewhat reflective of the racial demographic for principals in Michigan, but nevertheless disappointing. Therefore the questionnaire underwent a second distribution.

The respondents of the questionnaire reflected experience in their role of educator. Over 377 of the principals reported having more than six years of teaching experience with 184 principals having elementary certification and 168 principals having secondary certification. When examining administrative credentials, 158 principals had a masters, specialist or doctorate in a leadership program. Another 236 principals reported having administrative certification. Finally, 260 of the respondents reported six or more years of experience as a principal.

After an initial data analysis to examine demographics, the first ten items in the questionnaire were examined as a second step. To examine the knowledge of the principals, each item was a statement pertaining to either the Michigan Reform Law or recommendations made by the MCEE. (Although Likert scale variables are considered ordinal variables with an intensity of one to five, this researcher treated the intensity scales as interval/ratio measures when looking at subscales.) The results reflected an overwhelming lack of knowledge by principals regarding the law and MCEE recommendations.

The pre-set coding of themes from the previous 2013 qualitative study led to the reinforcement of the themes of self-efficacy, job satisfaction, stress and time in the open-ended question. The additional discovery of emerging codes in 2014 reflected a need for additional training (possibly impacting self-efficacy and job satisfaction) and consistency in the evaluative rating process to guarantee a level of “fairness” in the process across the state. One anonymous principal noted, “It is important that evaluations be consistently implemented across the school, district, and state” (2014 open-ended survey response).

Additional research is required focusing on the impact on principals of policy creation and implementation (from a district, state and/or federal level). A second area lacking substantiated research is the role government should play in the creation of educational policy and the impact of that policy on educational stakeholders. Perhaps this anonymous principal encapsulates the themes identified through the 2014 open-ended question and the first ten items in this researcher’s 2014 questionnaire by writing, “Our leaders in Lansing just don’t understand that we WANT to support our teachers with meaningful feedback but the laws in front of us right now have moved us from meaningful feedback to surface level compliance.”
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References


