Navigating Accountability:

Delaware Schools' Response to the

State's Student Accountability Plan

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Lisa A. Banicky, Ph.D.
Sr. Associate for Policy Analysis

Audrey J. Noble, Ph.D.
Director

Yaron Siach-Bar, Ed.D.
Educational Researcher

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report represents the first year of a three-year case study that explores how schools and educators are responding to the Delaware Student Accountability Plan. It provides an insiders' view of the accountability plan and uncovers schools' reactions to high-stakes accountability.

Most educators support the idea of accountability and the goals of the accountability plan. In addition, some educators expressed positive views regarding the plan's objectives to enhance students' performance through changing the educational climate. Many agreed with the general idea of doing something drastic to break the status quo, yet, at the same time, expressed concerns about specific elements of the plan.

The specific reactions to the student accountability plan are best understood in the context of the original goals of the plan as indicated by Delaware policymakers.[1] These goals, along with the major findings of the case study, are reported in the table below.

Policymakers' Expectations	Schools' Reactions
Improving student achievement by providing a system for measuring student performance against the state content standards.	The state content standards are viewed as an important instructional tool that also can bring focus to professional development offerings. While the standards are seen in a positive light, concerns are expressed over the use of a single test to make high-stakes decisions.
Ensuring that all children can achieve by establishing an educational system that expects more and provides more.	Schools are responding to increased demands by making changes in the area of assessment, instruction, professional development, and resource allocation. Some of these changes are viewed as positive and some as negative. Both principals and teachers express concern over the allocation of existing resources (to meet the plan agenda, and the lack of funding and professional development.

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[1] Noble, A.J., & Banicky, L. (2000). *Synchronizing the Accountability Clocks: A Policy Study of Delaware's Student Accountability Plan.*

Policymakers' Expectations	Schools' Reactions
Better preparing the workforce by motivating educators toward continuous improvement as professionals and responsive service to their communities.	Teachers do express a desire for continuous improvement in their teaching but do report some loss of professionalism as a result of the accountability plan. Principals and teachers express concern that decision making has moved away from the school.
Focus the educational system on student outcomes by motivating changes (through a system of external reward and sanctions) in performance and behavior.	Teachers and principals expressed concern about the emphasis on competition over cooperation and the impact of increased pressure on teachers and students. The most often cited responses include anxiety and confusion.

"On Thursday, we reach refusal speed. We can elect to stay on the ground, or we can elect to fly. I believe it is time to fly."

Governor Thomas Carper on a bill addressing Teacher Accountability, Fall 1999

INTRODUCTION

A Question of Perspective

The phenomenon of an apparent change in the direction of an object, caused by a change in observational position that provides a new line of sight is called "parallax." In flying an airplane, for example, the pilot views the set of the navigating instruments from a direct angle, whereas a passenger, sitting aside, views it from a different angle. The readings of the instruments are dissimilar from these different standpoints.

While aviation designers, navigators, and mechanical experts have considerable knowledge of what is important in creating the necessary conditions for flight, the ultimate responsibility rests on the pilot. Within the educational context, the teacher pilot has several passengers. Policymakers, coordinators, and other district administrators accompany the teacher in the course of taking our children to the desired destination. Yet, they all see the readings of the navigating instruments from different angles (experiencing the "parallax" phenomenon). However, teachers and principals, the pilots we trust to fly our planes—due to their position, have an unobstructed view of what takes place in schools and classrooms. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to more closely examine educators' perspectives with respect to the student accountability initiative.

The present case study intends to describe the actual circumstances from the front seat and from a direct undeviating view. Our ethnographic research approach is designed to do precisely that, to describe reality from the viewpoint of the people in the field. What is going on in schools? What do teachers and students feel about this initiative? What are their concerns and understandings? And, what is the nature of the change occurring in schools since the initiative was first introduced? These central guiding questions will be examined primarily through the language and perceptions of schoolteachers and principals.[2]

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[2] The current analysis is based on interviews with principals and district coordinators, structured and semi-structured interviews with teachers, school/classroom observation, and document review. Other sources that will be used to inform the ongoing case studies include: the policy study examining policymakers' perspectives and a longitudinal study designed to follow two cohorts of students.

The case study is an investigation of five selected schools. The insights gained from the case study are put in context by examining the results in relation to a previously conducted policy study examining policymakers' perspective on the Delaware's Student Accountability Initiative.

Context of The Study

The current study is being conducted in response to an effort by the Delaware State Board of Education to monitor the impact of the accountability legislation on students in the state. The State Board's 1998-2003 goals include: (1) efforts to "ensure that the accountability system is implemented in a manner that is consistent with high quality education and high standards for all students" and, (2) developing future policy so that "unintended negative outcomes are minimal and are being addressed." This research is designed to inform the Board about these two goals and primarily address the question of impact from two perspectives: (1) "What are the long-term effects of the state accountability plan on elementary and secondary students in Delaware?" (2) "What is changing over time in Delaware schools in response to the student accountability plan?"

The overall research plan involves three different types of studies. The first, a policy study[3], was designed to examine what policymakers intended to promote through the student accountability plan. The second, a statewide longitudinal study, examines the impact of the plan on students (focusing on one elementary 3rd grade cohort, and one secondary 6th grade cohort, for a period of 5 years, in areas such as achievement, retention, graduation/dropout rates, placement in special education, attendance, and discipline). The third is this case study component, designed to explore what is changing in schools over time. The case study will be conducted for a period of three years, and will include observations before and after the high-stakes testing periods.

The Study's Objectives

The current study was guided by the following question: What is changing over time in Delaware schools in response to the student accountability plan. More specifically, the objectives of the study are as follows:

> ✈ To understand the effects of the high-stakes accountability on Delaware's students and educators.

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[3] The results of the policy report were presented to the Delaware Board of Education in May 2000. Copies of the report are available from the Delaware Education Research and Development Center.

✈   To understand students' and educators' concerns and motivations regarding the overall standard-based reform.

✈   To identify the characteristics of the educational reform, and to understand the impact of the change on students and on school staff.

✈   To identify the structure and the process of change in school's cultures.

This is the first year of the case study, therefore examining what is "changing over time" is not a feasible objective. Instead we view this first year of the case study as an initial examination of how schools are responding to the accountability plan and what initial changes have resulted. The following two years of the study will provide the opportunity to more fully address the change over time issue.

NAVIGATING ACCOUNTABILITY

The analogy of the reform initiative to aviation was made repeatedly by Governor Thomas Carper, one of the dominant figures behind Delaware's student accountability plan. As the major themes emerged from the case study reported here, we chose to continue with this metaphor as a means of describing how the student accountability plan is affecting schools and the manner in which schools are "navigating" the plan.

Charting the Course

In a prior report entitled *Synchronizing the Accountability Clocks: A Policy Study of Delaware's Student Accountability Plan* the Delaware Education Research and Development Center investigated and reported Delaware Policymakers' goals for the Student Accountability Plan. From this study four major goals for the plan emerged:

- ✈ Improving student achievement;
- ✈ Ensuring that all children can achieve;
- ✈ Preparing a qualified workforce; and,
- ✈ Focusing the educational system on student outcomes.

In many ways these goals represent the desired destinations of the current reform movement that has been underway in Delaware for over a decade. Educators recognize and value these same goals, wishing to arrive at the same destinations.

> *I think they're trying to improve the graduation rate, and the product that we're graduating from Delaware schools. So I think they're trying to make it more of an even distribution of who we're graduating, so at least all the kids have the minimum of skills that they feel are needed.*
>
> *They're [the state] just trying to raise the academic standards, and hopefully when the students go out into the job market . . . they'll be better able to maintain a job, and hold a job.*

One elementary schoolteacher expressed her support for the plan saying that she agrees with the motivation behind the initiative. This teacher hoped that the initiative will be a motivator for students to adopt more serious attitudes towards school.

One high school teacher expressed the belief that students should be held accountable, and that the accountability plan could create a new atmosphere of schooling where students would have to study to advance to the next grade or graduate. Another high

school teacher viewed the test as a good tool to find out students' areas of weakness. In this way the test could help teachers organize their teaching material and focus on the areas where students need help.

While educators expressed support and agreement with the goals of the plan, disagreements arose with respect to the best means of achieving the goals. Some believed that decision-making power was being moved away from the school and that the final plan failed to take into account their knowledge of what really occurs in classrooms.

> *I think the goals are honorable, in that they would like to raise the standards and the overall performance. Unfortunately, they're (policymakers) dealing from a position of deep, dark ignorance. They apparently have very little idea of what goes on in the classroom. And I say that because, within a classroom, to talk about such things as a school will either improve or they'll cut funds... That takes into account nothing dealing with the students, the student behavior, and the problems associated with it.*

> *And I think that an awful lot of people don't understand the complexity of a variety of learning styles, a variety of learning paces. You know, just an awful lot of things that go into information processing. I don't think business people...[and] politicians came to the table with that kind of understanding. And therefore, when educators bring the complexity of information processing to the table, it's automatically perceived that we're being defensive. And I think that really complicates things.*

Educators also expressed concern over the lack of "pre-flight" checks prior to lift-off. Before taking off, the pilot and co-pilot are required to complete a thorough checklist to ensure that the plane is ready. Educators, in regards to their level of readiness, believed that they were not adequately consulted prior to the implementation of the plan and that their lack of participation could have affected initial buy-in to the plan.

> *[The plan] implementation, and the work that needed to go into making this plan work, and getting people on board for this plan, and buying into this plan, all of that was just skipped. It was like, you guys [researchers] are talking to us now. But no one talked to anybody two years ago. Or three years ago. All these teachers that have been here 30 years, no one ever asked their opinion then. And you would think if you wanted students to be accountable, you would talk to the people who are so closely related to the students, and have been teaching students, and get their input, before you just said, "Okay, we want to make students accountable, here's the test, it's law now." The whole middle was missing.*

The governor wasn't interested in listening to anyone. The governor took any suggestions as criticism. The governor took any suggestions that there may be some flaws, as attempts on the part of school administrators, school districts, school boards, to derail the system, and was unwilling to recognize, listen, and what have you, that there really were some, you know, a fair amount of . . . on the goals. . . . needed to have some adjustment.

School administrators know that to bring about any genuine and lasting change in classrooms, the teachers in those classrooms must accept the changes being proposed and see them as being instrumental to making them better professionals. Principals expressed concern that politically-driven proposals were unlikely to generate such response from teachers.

You've got to have buy in....You can legislate until you're going to bed, but those teachers can close their doors and say, 'To hell with you.' So you've got to have buy in.

You get buy in by giving people staff development, by working with them. I have them pretty fired up. And I had one teacher say, 'I take it as a challenge. I take it as a personal challenge.' Guess what, if you had every teacher saying that, you'd have a tremendous force. You'd have an army of people saying that, 'I'm taking this thing personally'. That's the kind of attitude you want. You don't want to have attitude, 'well, this is coming from Dover.'

Charting Progress

While educators generally agree with the current course or intended destinations of the student accountability plan, many concerns were raised with the instrument currently used to chart progress, the Delaware Student Testing Program (DSTP). Many educators discussed what they saw as problems with regards to the misuse of the state testing program. They explored the limits of the tests.

I don't believe in standardized testing. We don't teach standardized students. There is no norm anymore in students. They're just, what used to be in the '50's, '60's and '70's as a norm, a normal child, that doesn't exist today. There are too many variables. There're too many things that interfere. And their [the students] home life is not reflected. They bring that with them to school. They can't leave that at the door.

> *And that's a real problem when you're making high stakes decisions. So, while I applaud the intent, and while I believe in the value of, as a piece of the pie, I don't believe that the test is the be all, end all.*

They also expressed concern over what they saw as misalignment of the standards, the DSTP, and their teaching strategies.

> *And I never, ever give multiple choice tests -- ever. Yet half the test is multiple choice. That's why you have to go back and teach the kids how to take a multiple choice, when in fact, you never really give multiple choice.*

Some educators worried about the changing views of the value of assessment and the potential outcome.

> *I think what changed was, people now fear a test, instead of seeing it as a real measure of how far we've come. It's no longer a popular thing. When we were first talking about testing in this district, our teachers were excited about it. 'Okay, let's create some measures that will let us know how far along we've come.' Now it's dreaded. People are paranoid over... 'If I give good grades to a kid that's performing well in my classroom, and then they don't do well on the state test, it's going to reflect back on me.'*

> *The testing itself, I think one of my biggest concerns is that there's an extraordinarily good set of standards... The test itself is an excellent test. I'm afraid that the misuse of these things is going to make people rise up and say, 'Throw it away.' And we're going to go back, not ten years, we'll go back 25 years.*

Although the comments about the test itself were not all negative, most everyone disagreed with the use of a single indicator to make high-stakes decisions. Instead they supported the use of multiple indicators of student performance, which could include the DSTP, but also portfolios to show the growth from the beginning to the end of the year.

> *And therefore, the need for a particular test or score is a simple way to inspect what's going on. The problem, of course, and this has been all part of the discussion the last couple of years, the problem is, the simpler the score, the simpler the number, the less it means. And so, you have one test, one score, that's an easy thing to look at. But it's more complicated than that.*

> *…One test saying it all about a child is just not how it works.*

> *I think that in general [teachers and parents] . . are against a single test to determine promotion and retention. I think there are supporters of the concept of having the test, and one indicator to be used as part of the decision. . . and also use the, chart the progress of students.*

Several timing issues were also raised with respect to the DSTP. Teachers stated that the test was too long, and that many students were fatigued or rushed through to complete it. There were also concerns about the timing of the DSTP administration. Teachers believe that students are being tested on material they have not had the opportunity to learn because the test is in April and some of the skills are not mastered until towards the end of the year. Furthermore, teachers are concerned that if the DSTP is administered earlier than April (as was being considered), it will result in the children being tested on even more material that they have not had the opportunity to learn.

In addition to specific criticism of the DSTP, educators also expressed more general criticisms of high stakes tests. According to those interviewed, high stakes tests:

✦ Do not "reflect" the new standards-based curriculum and are therefore not a reliable tool;

✦ Are limited in that they measure only a certain kind of knowledge (student's knowledge involves much more than one test can measure);

✦ Create a high level of pressure and a strong sense of anxiety among students, parents, and educators (a minority of educators view this as a necessary element in education and as a source of vital motivation);

✦ Require "impractical" focus on the test and test preparation which results in a narrowing of curriculum;

✦ Promote competition; and,

✦ Assume that it is agreeable, feasible, and desirable to determine who is "successful" and who is not.

In addition to criticism leveled at the DSTP and high stakes testing in general, many educators noted that there is a gap between what is being taught and what is being tested, and that the curriculum does not correspond to the tests. These educators made it clear that narrowing the gap is a question of time and new resources.

Beyond Pilot Error

Many principals and teachers expressed concern over being solely responsible for student performance. Teachers and principals believed in being held accountable but also asserted that "others" should share the responsibility. "Others" included the policymakers, the district coordinators and administrators, as well as parents.

> *The policymakers need to listen to the people. Most teachers want to be accountable. I bet you if I had a faculty meeting and said, 'Hey folks, do you want to be accountable?' Most of them would raise their hands… because they want to do the right thing. They want to be accountable, but they don't want to be the sole person to take the burden of society.*

> *Accountability, I have no problem with it, as long as you hold everybody else accountable.*

> *You cannot hold a teacher solely accountable for all of this. There's got to be some other stakeholders.*

> *As a teacher, I should be held accountable for what I teach. But I don't think I should be held accountable for what my kids are not prepared to learn.*

> *[Who should be accountable?] It's got to be the teacher. It's got to be the parent. You know, you've got to have that. But it's got to be [also] the principal of that school. It's got to be the superintendent. [And] it's got to be lawmakers who look at these dynamics.*

> *I'm just saying that, yes, hold students accountable, hold parents accountable, hold administrators accountable. Hold the community responsible, accountable for that kid. Hold them all. All of us need to be accountable.*

> *Superintendents ought to be accountable. School boards ought to be accountable. The State of Delaware, I don't think they're accountable.*

> *I think that people always have to be held accountable for what they do. And I think, in education, we've become much too passive, and too filled with clichés about, these children can't be helped because they're from this type of family. Or, they haven't had this or that. When you start putting in an accountability system, where everybody's accountable at every level, I think it raises the energy level, and people become a little bit more excited about what they're doing. They want to look for the right thing to do.*

Principals also questioned the means the legislature had chosen in their attempts to motivate change. They questioned the value of constant criticism of schools and the subsequent effect of such public criticism. They felt scrutinized and criticized by the legislature and the press and saw the attacks as diverting attention from important issues.

> *They're quick [the policymakers], even in the News Journal; they're quick to put the thumb on [the principal]. 'You bum. You administrator. You're not doing your job. Your kids are not achieving.' They're quick to do that.*

> *I think they [policymakers] need to be a little kinder and gentler to teachers . . . instead of presenting the image . . . 'Well, if you don't meet this, too bad, so sad, you're out', -- [even] after 20 years of teaching. . . that seems to be the attitude, or at least that's what's perceived by teachers. . . teachers work hard already.*

In some cases, teachers have been told that they could be replaced by new and better-educated teachers. One principal noted that in order to prepare students for the tests his school is looking for new teachers, and is willing to pay them more than the standard pay, based on "EPER," extra pay for extra responsibility.

Many teachers reported that increased criticism has contributed to a diminishing sense of morale. New criteria of success, while accepted as needed, also provoke concerns among school personnel regarding a variety of issues including professional status, promotion opportunities, and salary.

Turbulence

Continuing with his aviation metaphor, Governor Tom Carper also said, in regard to pushing school reform ahead: "While it's acceptable to pull back a bit on the throttle in the months ahead, and we will, we must not turn from our course we undertook." Over the course of the past year, the Delaware state legislature revisited the student accountability plan, delaying the onset of consequences for students and school. Such maneuvering, however necessary for political reasons, tended to create turbulence.

This political maneuvering throughout the year provoked confusion within the schools, generating concern about the plan's final structure and objectives.   Moreover, educators felt that students suffered from the mixed messages sent by the politics involved in education reform.

We want our school to look good. But still, telling them, telling them, telling them [the kids] be ready... then all of a sudden someone else is changing the law and says: Oh, yeah, it doesn't matter, don't be ready yet.

[A teacher's observation regarding accountability's effect on students:] I honestly don't see any impact at this point. I think especially since the legislature has really bounced around this year about, 'We will implement it, we won't implement it.'... I mean, they (students) know there's stuff going on, and they know we're going to take a test, but I don't think they understand how it will affect them, at this point.

The other thing I have a problem with is that I've told these kids that there's one test, because I'm not going to [to lie]. The law is out there. I'm not just going to say, you know, let's shove it off to the side maybe the law will change. I tell the parents, I tell the kids, and I tell the teachers: You know, it's out there. So now I've had two assemblies with our kids and I shared with them: This is how information will be sent back to us. If you don't succeed on this test, you're going to be retained and placed into a summer school program... and we don't want that. Here's how you can succeed. . . . And now I'm going to have to stand up to these kids and say: The law has changed and it's no longer going to affect you. You don't have to do well on this test. . . . The only other avenue I have is to share with them: we're going to compete against other schools, because it's going to be published.

Some of the turbulence reported by educators also involves leadership change issues and continued commitment to the current plan. The belief that the "course" was not decisively determined, also created conflict within the schools.

Not to be critical of any one individual, but the Department of Education has changed faces so much. I'm not seeing continuity there...it seems like new ideas just keep rolling out of there. And they have talked about accountability forever since I've been here, really. And a plan, as such, has never been completed... the Senate has passed one plan, and there's been revisions, and so forth, and so on.

The DOE has, in my estimation, has become a political arm of the government. It no longer stands up and says what's right and what's wrong. And they'll tell you that. It is very distressing.

Mid-flight Adjustments

The belief, among educators, that accountability is here to stay is best demonstrated in the variety of ways that they have reacted to the increased demands of the accountability system.

> *And there's a pretty traditional view of, 'Okay, this is a new little reform, but it will pass. And we'll just go on and close our doors, and do what we always do.' The accountability has changed that.*
>
> *People are realizing that at least, in whatever format it comes out, accountability is here to stay. . .*

Principals stressed that their schools' staffs react generally in a collaborative spirit, focusing on productive ways to change school policy and to find creative ways to enhance the new teaching. These reactions, or mid-flight adjustments, have included changes in assessment, instruction, professional development, and resource allocation.

✈ **Assessment**

Many district test coordinators indicated that schools were responding to the accountability plan with off-grade tests to better track student performance and provide assistance where needed.

> *We've created, at this point, an accountability plan that incorporates teacher grades of student performance, and DSTP results for grades 3, 5, 8 and 10. But we've also gone beyond that. We have an off-grade assessment in our district. Using . . . multiple choice, and the open-ended. And we use teacher assessment of student performance, and those results, also, to hold students accountable.*
>
> *But those students that take the off-grade assessment will also have the opportunity, as a result of their scores, and their teacher's input for their performance for the past year, to be involved in extended time programs. If I'm a second grader, I'm a third grader the following year, go into an extended time program. We'll use that data to help us identify students for Title I programs, for remedial programs, for altered schedule programs.*
>
> *So we were gradually increasing the amount of assessment we were doing with our kids, to monitor how they were doing.*

✈ **Instruction**

Principals and teachers emphasized the value of being more focused on standards and testing.

> *In my school, right now, and I'm bragging. The teachers' lesson plans have to be directed at standards . . . or [we] don't teach it.*
>
> *[Our curricular decisions are being joined with the State standards]. Everything is aligned with the standards. I think as soon as the standards were implemented, we began addressing them through the lesson plans. And we were looking, those are the things I look for when I go in and look at a teacher's class. I want to see what standards they're addressing, what they're lesson... If you're not addressing a standard, it better not be there.*
>
> *Every district now is running around trying to be accountable, trying to get their kids ready. Trying to do well on these tests. I don't think that's the way to do it. . . . You either look at the long term, or you look at the short term. The long term is curriculum development. Staff development. Articulate your standards with that curriculum. If you do that, then everything you teach ought to be related to the standards.*

In addition, many teachers indicated that their classroom instruction was more focused as well. They stated that they looked at performance indicators more so than the standards when planning their lessons because the indicators are more specific.

> *I think the teachers are already changing their method of teaching. I mean, the standards came out in 1995. The first thing we did was to align our curriculum with the standards. But the work that has gone out since then . . . make sure that every student in our classes has the opportunity to learn those things upon which they will be tested. That's a fundamental right that we take very seriously, that every student has to have. We've changed a bunch of our criteria for special education students.*
>
> *The time lines have meant that we are providing services to our lower performing children on a specific time line. We've been providing standards-based instruction, and follow up with teachers, and looking at how our students are performing. But because of the specific time lines that affect... Statewide, that affect promotion, and also graduation, we have directed our time lines to that accountability plan. So a lot of the things that we're doing, we were doing anyway, but we adjusted time lines.*

And the most common thing I'm hearing from teachers now is, 'Yes, teach me a new way, show me a new way. Because obviously, what we were doing before, isn't working.' So it's helping the people who want to make change.

In the course of interviews, many educators also mentioned increased attention to test taking strategies and test preparation materials.

Here at [our school] for a year and a half, we've had the staff totally involved in this test that we have to take in April. And they're really focusing on it. We're actually doing curriculum, other curriculum things [different from our regular curriculum].

We have a math teacher that gives kids a pack of problems every week that are modeled after the Delaware assessment. She gets them ready. It's just like anything else. Before you run a race, you've got to get warmed up. Before you play a game, you've got to be in condition. That's what I believe, and that's what we're trying to do.

Teachers also indicated that subject areas not on the test receive less attention until after the administration of the state test. For example, many teachers indicated that they wait until after the DSTP administration in April to teach science and social studies.

You have a body of knowledge that they say that we're supposed to be dealing with, that's supposed to be on that exam, and that's what I want to do first. And that's what we do [at our school] here right now. If they want to do any kind of enrichment activities, well then that's fine too.

✈ **Professional Development**

Schools have also responded to the student accountability plan by building teacher capacity through professional development. While many district coordinators speak of the positive changes to professional development, offering activities more closely aligned with content standards, many feel that more professional development is necessary.

And since then, we have increased our efforts of teacher… What we are now calling, subject matter experts. Teachers who are well-versed and well-practiced in these standards' based instruction, they're working with teachers in their classrooms. So now we have at least eight or nine teachers who are working with our teachers, not only in workshops, but then visiting their classrooms and helping them work out the details at the classroom level.

Gee, before you would have, expect different results, you've got to have different input. Before you get different output, you've got to have different input. And to get different input, you've got to give those people the strategies. First, they've got to have the content. So in that way, we've changed a lot of our content of our professional development.

Our professional development is certainly aligned to the standards. And we are very involved in professional development, and very committed to it.

But not all of the changes in professional development have been positive, some concern was expressed over the change in focus and the amount required to achieve the goals of the accountability plan.

Teachers that come to the training now, are, want more prescriptive kinds of information. They want more...'How do I raise the test score?'

So I think it has changed our professional development program in the sense of urgency, of quick fix. It has changed it to spreading very few people, very, very thin. Because, how many people actually knew this stuff... I mean, you also had to train the trainers.

✈ **Resource Allocation**

Schools are also responding to increased pressure for performance by using their monies differently and offering special activities to students. Available resources have been allocated for Saturday academies, extended time programs, and updated curriculum materials.

In terms of the language arts group, we bought $28,000 worth of textbooks. . . We needed some up-to-date English textbooks. . . . Thousands of dollars of test ready material. . . money was spent there. [Also] we had an after school reading program. We have increased our after school reading program. We have a Saturday academy. . . The teachers have stepped up their efforts in the classroom.

When the standards first came out, we took that very seriously, and got our teachers together, and came up with grade by grade performance indicators in all four subjects. As extra time money became available, we took very seriously after school programs, doing . . . tests, that kind of thing. When we worked with developing our grade-by-grade performance indicators, what we're now calling

our curriculum guides, those people who had been part of the state effort, led those meetings with other teachers. We're ready with two plans for summer school. Obviously, principals are working with the director on space. You know, I mean, we've got our contingency plans. We're just waiting for the final word. We've been increasing our efforts. It's just, which grade level do we focus on?

If the consequences are steep enough that we're talking about taking a year out of a child's life, and having them repeat an entire grade level because of a single test score, then we're going to obviously have to do something very differently with staffing. I think there will be some program changes. And I think how we use our extra time money, and our extra time programs.

And then the other thing that we have in our plan is options for intervention during the school year, such as using the information that we have from teachers and the tests, at all grades, in our off-grade assessment and our district, or state assessment, to do assignment to extended time programs, to Title I, to remedial reading programs. And then also we have, at our high school and at our middle school, options for students to be involved in double periods, where we've provided them double periods of English, or double periods of math, if that's their area of weakness, instead of going to electives, or study hall.

As monies have become available for beyond the school day activities, we have increased those activities. We have increased our monitoring of student progress.

Flying Economy Class

It appears that educators are doing what they can with available resources but feel that more resources are needed. School personnel emphasized the need for resources such as time, appropriate educational material, staff development, and funding for special programs to narrow the gap between high and low performing students. In addition, many school administrators saw their capacity to support teachers as restricted and expressed concern about the ultimate result of this limitation in a high-stakes environment.

You have to have the materials. You have to give teachers staff development. You just cannot hold a teacher accountable, and then you've done no staff development, and then all of a sudden you say, 'Well, there's teacher accountability 260. We're going to fire you if your kids don't do well.'

I'm not saying that this is the end [crisis]. . . [But] you have to have the materials. You have to give teachers staff development. You just cannot hold a teacher accountable, and then you've done no staff development.

There is a better way. You've got to get it all together. You have to be able to buy textbooks.

Well, the law, for example, in the timing issue, as the law currently exists, Senate Bill 260, where one is supposed to make decisions within about a two day turnaround, for students to be able to go into summer school, have a high quality summer school, when, you know, you get the test back in virtually a couple of days before you're sending the kid out for the summer.

Fear of Flying

Nearly everyone experiences some degree of anxiety the first time they fly. This "fear of flying" was also a theme to emerge from the current study. According to educators, the maiden voyage of the student accountability plan has left many educators and students alike, feeling tense and anxious.

Teachers, in particular, expressed concerns about losing their jobs. They worry that their positions are at risk if certain percentages of their students do not meet the standards. A spin-off of this issue is that now many teachers are overly aware of the "type" of students they have in their classes. If the focus of the new plan is on the overall class success i.e., the percentage of students passing the tests, teachers said that they would prefer to deal with "strong" students, as opposed to being held accountable for "low achievers."

For teachers the most frequently cited responses to the student accountability plan included fear, confusion, and stress.

There are still pockets of resistance. It's fear of the unknown. It's fear of not knowing what to do to change. I think initially there was a lot of anger and fear. I think the anger came from fear of the unknown.

I feel an awful lot of pressure, because the test is in 8th grade. And it was very hard for me, even in the beginning of the year, I felt like I was carrying the weight of the whole school, or my whole team, on my shoulders. Because I was the 8th grade language arts teacher. And if they didn't pass this test, it was my fault.

I think it [accountability] adds a very negative . . . to everything that you do. You feel like you can't do anything right. I believe it adds to the stress level.

The teachers, of course, are feeling great pressure (very great pressure). I think some teachers who have been doing an excellent job for years have all of a sudden turned into first-year teachers. They're very shaky now. 'I can't do this. I can't do that. I'm worried about this. I won't have enough time for this' . . . I know they're feeling a lot of pressure. They're more demanding, in some respects because of that pressure. They want everything, and they want it now. 'I can't do this unless I have this, and I don't have it, so I can't do it'…It's kind of like the wet blanket got thrown over them, and they're panicked. And I think, hopefully, unnecessarily, in many cases.

And now, yes, there is. I mean, and there's such emphasis, so that there's more pressure on the teacher as far as getting all of this information into the children to . . . pass the state standards, and the state testing.

In addition to expressing concern over the amount of pressure placed on students, some educators feared that the accountability system might damage students' views of themselves as learners.

The very first year, I had children in tears. And I didn't have that, because there's more preparation now, than what there was earlier. And it's very frustrating for the [special education] students. It's frustrating for me as a teacher. I think it damages their self-esteem.

It [the test] stresses the kids. It stresses the teachers, and it wastes valuable teaching time.

So I think when people are making this policy, they have no idea what it does to a school. We have to schedule it, you know, get kids ready. We have to motivate them. We have to be careful with the anxiety issue. Some of these kids… get sick thinking about it. And I'm talking about honors kids. You know, honor students who you would think would do well.

We're nervous. Stressed. And I know the children are. And you want to be able to tell the parents what's going on. But at the same time, I don't want to worry all the kids. I think right before the testing, everybody was really anxious.

One test saying it all about a child is just not how it works. . . . And, you know, some of the kids don't test well. . . Some of them are really afraid of this.

Accommodating All Passengers

Principals and teachers also expressed concern over applying the same standards to regular education and special education students. For many children, especially in special educational programs the test is too difficult and too long. Because of its length children quit trying and give up by the end of the test. There is also a great deal of confusion over how the test results will affect the promotion of these students. Teachers indicate that there have been rumors, but no concrete statement issued explaining how these results will be used.

> *There are still going to be those students who fail. And that's something that I've been talking with our special education supervisor about, what do we do. I don't think the legislature has thought about that.*

Many educators applaud the state's attempt to accommodate special education students. One teacher noted, however, that even with accommodations, most students who are significantly below grade level are unable to do well on the test. In addition, there were those who believed that Title I students should be a special consideration because they receive accommodations in instruction, but when it comes time for the state testing, they are not given accommodations.

SUMMARY

The results of the current study indicate that policymakers and educators alike are in agreement about the desired outcomes of a student accountability plan. Educators would like to see improvements in student learning, higher graduation rates, the creation of a system that focuses on the achievement of all student groups, and a better prepared workforce. In addition, educators generally support being held accountable and focusing on student performance, but feel more people should be included as accountability partners. The singling out of school personnel has left many feeling less professional and often demoralized..

While nearly all educators are supportive of Delaware's content standards, many hold the DSTP in less high regard. The primary criticism of the DSTP is not the quality of the test itself but how it is being used as a single indicator for making high-stakes decisions. Concerns were raised over the lack of alignment of the DSTP and the content standards.

It is clear that schools are working hard to navigate the student accountability plan. Schools are making changes in the areas of assessment, instruction, professional development, and resource allocations. Not all of these changes are viewed as improvements. Educators expressed a need for more resources to build capacity.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

✈ **Charting the Course**: At this point in the process, how can the State Board foster more genuine involvement of educators in the ongoing implementation and any subsequent modifications of the student accountability plan?

✈ **Charting Progress**: Given that so many educators responded negatively to a single indicator system, what multiple indicator systems are feasible? What role should teachers' appraisals have in a multiple indicator system? How might the Board gain public and educator confidence in a multiple indicator system? What is needed so that teachers' evaluations can be seen as valid and reliable judgments of student performance?

✈ **Beyond Pilot Error:** How can the Board promote more shared accountability among all stakeholder groups?

✈ **Turbulence**: Are there ways to anticipate and ease the amount of turbulence caused by changes in legislation, regulations, and leadership?

✈ **Mid-flight Adjustments:**

   ✈ **Assessment:** For many people accountability is equivalent to testing. Is this the message that the State Board wants to send about the Student Accountability plan? If not, what should be the focus of future decisions?

   ✈ **Instruction:** How much test preparation is too much? What can the Board to do prevent the narrowing of curriculum or the lack of emphasis placed on non-tested subject areas?

   ✈ **Professional Development**: What can the Board do to ensure that the quality of professional development programs offered is not compromised by over-concern for more prescriptive sorts of information, such as how to raise student test scores?

   ✈ **Resource allocation**: How can the Board determine if existing resources are being used to the best of their advantage? How can the Board determine if good programs are not being funded because they do not directly relate to test scores?

✈ **Flying Economy Class:** What changes could be made to the existing resource allocations to upgrade schools from "economy" class model of operation? What priorities for upgrades need to be established?

✈ **Fear of Flying**: How might the Board more clearly communicate the goals and elements of the accountability plan so educators can understand what it is and the supports available to them?

✈ **Accommodating All Passengers**: How can the Board ensure that the needs of all students regardless of classification, race, or class are fairly addressed?

APPENDIX A

STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

The Research Approach (Paradigm and Methods)

According to ethnographic research methodology, the intent of the study is to elicit knowledge through structured and semi-structured interviewing with the involved groups (i.e. principals, teachers, and students), and through contextualized observations at the selected sites. While this study focuses on the school, the idea is to generate questions and hypotheses in situ during the interviewing and the observation methods employment, predominantly from the point of view of the interviewees and the observed.[4]

> Qualitative methods can be used to uncover and understand what lies behind any phenomenon about which little is yet known. . . . [Q]ualitative methods can give the intricate details of phenomenon that are difficult to convey with quantitative methods. (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.19)

Strategies for Enhancing Validity

The following strategies were selected to ensure the validity of the collected data: (a) triangulation; (b) reliability; (c) internal validity; (d) inquiry audit; and (e) interviewing and participant observation.

(a) The triangulation analytical technique, using different methods of gathering data from different sources at different times, enhances the credibility of the qualitative data. "The multi-stranded character of ethnography provides the basis for triangulation in which data from different kinds can be systematically compared" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1990, p. 24).

(b) The credibility of the study means reliability. It refers to the accuracy of the observations, the fit between what occurs and what is recorded. (McMillan, 1992). To ensure reliability while conducting participant observation, detailed field notes are taken.

(c) Internal validity, the trustworthiness of the data, means maintaining a match between the emerging categories and the interpretations of the actual reality. It is strengthened

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[4] About the merit of ethnography as a genre of choice for educational research and the focus on teachers as the main audience for data collection, see the article by M. M. Kennedy (1999). A test of some common contentions about educational research. *American Educational Research Journal, 36,* 511-541.

through a prolonged period of time devoted to data gathering, in-depth data analysis, and continuous search for negative or disconfirming evidence.

(d) The inquiry audit strategy intends to keep the balance of competence, skill, and rigor with flexibility, insight and tacit knowledge (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It provides a way to guard against the researcher's imposition of subjective interpretations upon the inquiry process and product. The inquiry process and product are associated respectively with gathering and recording the raw data. Thus, auditors review the data to oversee the process of the inquiry in the interest of objectivity, accuracy, accountability, and dependability.

(e) Interviewing and observation were the primary data collection methods. These methods are highly suited for studying school cultures (Bernard, 1988).

Research Sites and Site Selection Criteria

The selection of the schools (site sampling) was made among several schools that initially agreed to participate in the study (see: Case Study's Participation Request Letter. Appendix B). The selected schools were found to match the study's predetermined criteria to best characterize other schools in their area. The study's criteria for selecting schools include the following parameters:

- Grade configuration: elementary school (2), middle school (2), high school (1)[5]
- Districts and counties (rural and urban areas)
- DSTP: low, average, and high
- Size of school: small, medium, and large
- Minorities: Percent of low, average, and high
- LEP (Limited English Proficiency)
- Income Level (SES): low, average, and high
- Special Education

Due to the objective difficulty in finding schools that fit all of these criteria and then matching the selection to achieve a perfect representation, the best effort was made to select the optimal combination.

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[5] The original plan was to include two schools at each level. However, unexpectedly, one high school withdrew from the study in late February 2000. At that point in time it was unreasonable to negotiate access with a replacement high school due to the degree of administrative work involved in gaining access. Every attempt will be made to include another high school during the 2000-01 school year that meets the demographic criteria of the site selection design.

Sources and Methods of Data Collection

Table 2. Sources of Knowledge and Methods of Data Collection

Interviews	Observation	Documents Review
Teachers School Principals District Coordinators Policymakers	School Classes Team leader Meetings Public Meetings Legislative Assemblies	Curricula Media School Material State Publications Other Studies

In the winter of 1999, a letter concerning the student accountability study was sent to several Delaware school principals, informing them of our intention to collect data in their schools beginning January 2000. A sample of schools was chosen to represent the Delaware educational school system. At the same time, teams of researchers conducted introductory visits to the schools to meet with principals and teachers. These visits were aimed at presenting the study in more detail through question-answer interactions, stressing the confidentiality element and the data collection methods, as well as the unobtrusiveness of the data collection employment. These visits were primarily set for establishing accessibility and initiating rapport with the school staff.

The first phase of interviews was conducted during the period of December 1999 to March 2000 with principals from schools representing Delaware elementary, middle, and high schools. The second phase of interviews was conducted during February and March 2000 with district coordinators. Lastly, the interviews with elementary, middle, and high school teachers were completed in May 2000. These interviews were transcribed and arranged for analysis. The data were coded according to core categories and subsequent sets of themes developed through the ethnographic process. The categories were developed based on the interviews' guiding questions as well as on the interviewees' responses. Different parts of the data were analyzed using qualitative analysis software[6]. Class observations and document review constitute additional sources of data.

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[6] QSR: NUD*IST4 (1997): Qualitative Solutions and Research: Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing Searching Theorizing.

Research Instrument Development

The main instrument in data collection was an interviewing protocol. The questions modified to fit the different interviewee groups. The final protocols for the interviews appear on the following pages.

INTRODUCTION: As you know we are interested learning about how schools, teachers, and students are being affected by and are reacting to the state's student accountability plan. I'd like to ask you a few questions about your thoughts. Please know that everything that you say will be held strictly confidential and that none of the reports released by the R&D Center will name yourself, your school, or your district. I have just four (4) main questions that I'd like to explore with you.

Focus	*Questions*	*Keywords*
Perceived Intentions	**1. What are your thoughts about the state's efforts to hold students accountable?** **-** What does accountability mean to you? - What do you think the state is trying to accomplish? - What do you think motivates this effort?	Assumptions Intentions Purposes
Perceived School-level Changes	**2. Since the original law was passed two years ago, has your school responded in any specific ways?** Have there been changes in - curriculum? - instructional emphasis? - professional development? - use of test data? - other policies?	Adaptation Focus Narrow
Perceptions of Attitude	**3. From your perspective, what has been the reaction of** - your teachers? - your students? - the parents in your community?	Support Concern Conflict Burden
Perceptions of Future Changes	**4. As we get closer to the time that students will be directly affected by the accountability policy (i.e., retention, summer school), is there anything that you anticipate may happen in your school or district?** - policy changes? - resource issues? - community response? - teacher response?	Policy Practice Attitude Resources

5. **Is there anything else that you might like to share in regards to your thoughts about the state's student accountability effort?**

INTRODUCTION: As you know we are interested learning about how schools and districts are being affected by and are reacting to the state's student accountability plan. I'd like to ask you a few questions about your thoughts. Please know that everything that you say will be held strictly confidential and that none of the reports released by the R&D Center will name yourself, your school, or your district. I have just four (4) main questions that I'd like to explore with you.

Focus	Questions	Keywords
Perceived Intentions	1. **What do you think the state is trying to accomplish through the student accountability initiative?** What do you think motivates this effort?	Assumptions Intentions Purposes
Perceived School-level Changes	2. **Since the original law was passed two years ago, has your school responded in any specific ways?** Have there been changes in - curriculum? - professional development? - use of test data? **How have you as a [3rd grade, math, etc.] teacher responded?** Has anything changed in the way… - you teach? - you choose your curriculum or plan your lessons? - you see yourself as a professional	Adaptation Focus Narrow
Perceptions of Attitude	3. **From your perspective, what has been the reaction of your fellow teachers?** **How have you seen your students respond?** *[get concrete examples]* - to the idea of accountability to the DSTP itself?	Support Concern Conflict Burden
Perceived Validity of DSTP	4. **One more question about the DSTP, do you see the test as representative of the state standards?** - Are the test results reflective of your judgments of students' performance? - Have you ever been surprised by the results of the DSTP?	

5. Is there anything else that you might like to share in regards to your thoughts about the state's student accountability effort?

DELAWARE STUDENT ACCOUNTABILITY MONITORING STUDY
CASE STUDY COMPONENT
District Testing Coordinator Interview Protocol

INTRODUCTION: As you know we are interested learning about how schools and districts are being affected by and are reacting to the state's student accountability plan. I'd like to ask you a few questions about your thoughts. Please know that everything that you say will be held strictly confidential and that none of the reports released by the R&D Center will name yourself, your school, or your district. I have just four (4) main questions that I'd like to explore with you.

Focus	Questions	Keywords
Perceived Intentions	**1. What does the student accountability initiative mean to your district?** - What do you think the state is trying to accomplish? - What do you think motivates this effort?	Assumptions Intentions Purposes
Perceived School-level Changes	**2. Since the original law was passed two years ago, has your district responded in any specific ways?** Have there been changes in - curriculum? - instructional emphasis? - professional development? - use of test data? - other policies?	Adaptation Focus Narrow
Perceptions of Attitude	**3. From your perspective, what has been the reaction of** - Your district and building administrators? - Your school board? - The parents in your community?	Support Concern Conflict Burden
Perceptions of Future Changes	**4. As we get closer to the time that students will be directly affected by the accountability policy (i.e., retention, summer school), is there anything that you anticipate may happen in your district?** - policy changes? - resource issues? - community response?	Policy Practice Attitude Resources

Is there anything else that you might like to share in regards to your thoughts about the state's student accountability effort?

Delaware Education Research & Development Center

APPENDIX B

ANALYSIS

Guiding Questions

During the initial data collection and the analytical process,[7] an encompassing list of questions was developed to set the frame of the study. This list includes the following questions:

- What are the dimensions for examining the accountability plan and assessing its effects?
- How was the accountability plan introduced to schools?
- How should the accountability plan work according to the plan initiators' assumptions and expectations?
- What is happening in schools since the plan was introduced?
- How do schools react to the plan? What elements in the plan do schools consider beneficial or detrimental?
- What is the impact of the high stakes testing on teaching quality, student motivation, and educational policy decisions?
- How do students react to the high-stakes tests?
- What is the role and level of participation of the different involved groups (i.e. teachers, principals, students, parents, policymakers, administrators,) in the decision-making, design, and implementation of the accountability plan?
- What are the assumptions and expectations of the different groups involved regarding the plan?
- How have schools changed in terms of policy, resource allocation, teacher instruction, teacher training, and student learning?
- What are the immediate and long-term effects of the plan on teacher instruction, teacher morale, and student learning and motivation (self-efficacy)?
- How do teachers create new conditions for learning?
- How do students' class activities constitute a culture of learning?
- In what ways does the teachers' test-oriented approach, encouraged by the new testing program, affect the students' culture (the micro-level culture)?

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[7] The ethnographic analysis used involved an emic-etic approach. The emic perspective is the insider or native perspective of reality. This is the primary perspective sought by the researcher. The etic perspective is the outsider perspective, the usual practice of social science that describes the world as others see it.

- In what ways does the new testing program affect the school's culture (the macro-level culture)?

Identifying Categories and Themes (Open and Axial Coding)

The initial identification of categories was determined through inductive process to find "cultural units." These cultural units at the initial stage were tentative categories. Three sets of core categories, somewhat different for each group, were developed to lead the coding analysis. Accordingly, through inductive and deductive searches additional data were collected to ensure that the initial categories were supported. Then, further observations and interviews provided examples and anecdotes to saturate the categories. The following table presents the central topics in the student accountability program pertinent to each group. Their broad perceptions and articulations of specific concerns, according to these categories, mirror their own distinctive culture.

Table 3. Initial Core Categories

3.1　School Principals' Set of Categories

1	Groups/Cultures dynamics (perceptions on the relationships among the different forces involved)
2	Plan introduction and implementation (how the initiative was introduced and intended to be implemented?)
3	Philosophy (principal's view on standards and high stakes testing)
4	Principal's views on teachers' reaction and concerns
5	Principal's views on students' reaction and concerns
6	School reaction and new policy
7	Test preparation
8	Principal's views on the district coordinators' role
9	Observations about the issues of cooperation and conflict
10	Transformation
11	Intended and unintended consequences
12	About the nature of the educational reform

3.2   Teachers' Set of Categories

1	Pro/Con regarding the core idea/philosophy, and the structure of the plan
2	Teacher's ideas and concerns about implementation, immediate and long-term effect, competition, shared objectives, cooperation, and conflict
3	Teacher's (new) approach in class and students' response
4	Teacher's views on the students new learning habits (how the plan, directly and indirectly, affected their learning)
5	Teacher's views on their school policy. How the new policy is realized by the teacher? How different the policy is from the previous one?
6	Test preparation. How students are being prepared? What is the level of attention and concentration on tests preparation
7	Teacher's views on standards and testing
8	Teacher's perspective of changes in instruction
9	Effects of the plan on teacher's status, attainment, and compensation
10	Intended and unintended outcomes

3.3   District Coordinators' Set of Categories

1	Plan introduction and implementation
2	Teachers' reactions
3	Students' reactions
4	School reaction, new policy, and test preparation
5	Views on standards and testing
6	Role in the plan (implementation)
7	Cooperation, and conflict
8	District transformation
9	Intended and unintended outcomes

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