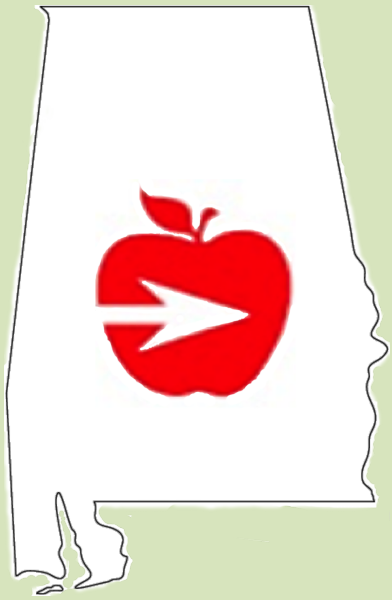
The Alabama Journal of Educational Leadership



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1. Promoting continuous dialog among Educational Leadership Professors;

2. Exploring and promoting research, thus making distinctive contributions to the field;

3. Recognizing and examining strengths and weaknesses in Educational Leadership Programs,

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Notes from the Editor

Welcome to Volume VIII of the *Alabama Journal of Educational Leadership* (AJEL). AJEL uses a peer-reviewed, triple-blind process upheld by the Alabama Association of Professors of Educational Leadership (AAPEL). AAPEL is celebrating the continued growth of AJEL with enthusiasm and is indexed with the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) at https://eric.ed.gov/ and has acquired the ISSN 2473-8115. Manuscripts in Volume VIII focus on several topics stemming from the main theme of *Leadership in Times of Transition and Crisis* such as visionary leadership, empowering other school leaders, and student achievement and assessment.

Chism and Newton begin this issue with a research study to determine whether participation in three years of professional learning in the Hope Leadership Academy (HLA) impacted the school as a caring community. In the next article, *Sparks* highlight transformational leadership best practices for navigating through the most unpredictable global health crises that has impacted the United States. *Harrison and Ashley* conclude this section with an examination of the culture and climate of selected middle and high schools in Alabama's River Region using the School Culture Survey (SCS) and the Organizational Climate Description Questionnaires (OCDQ-RM/OCDQ-RS).

The next section begins with an examination of support for comprehensive counseling program implementation through an exploration of principals' and school counselors' perceptions and experiences from programs awarded the Alabama School Counseling Program of Distinction by *Birdsong and Yakimowski*. The next article, by *Owens and Thornbrough,* is a case study exploring the academic growth mindset of adolescent female students placed in a residential group home and what perceptions the teachers have regarding their ability to learn. *Maye* explored examined teachers' perceptions of co-teaching and the impact it had on student achievement between general and special education subgroups. The final article by *Davis*, focuses on the central and prevailing importance of faculty judgment and how that judgment (or lack thereof) influences perceptions related to ethics and assessment of students.

Finally, to Brad Bizzell with The International Council of Professors of Educational Leadership (ICPEL) Publications, AJEL would not be possible without your direction, and support. To the readers, I hope the content will provide you with a deeper awareness of the many features of Instructional Leadership, Teacher Leadership, and best practices within the field of educational leadership. Leadership Matters, especially in Times of Transition and Crisis!

Yvette P. Bynum
The Univeristy of Alabama

Hope Leadership Academy Professional Learning in Character Education Supports Schools in the Creation of a Caring Community

Kara Chism and Jodie Newton, Samford University

Abstract

The purpose of this research study was to determine whether participation in three years of professional learning in the Hope Leadership Academy (HLA) impacted the school as a caring community. The participants were schools that participated in the HLA and administered the School as a Caring Community Profile-II (SCCP-II) to students and adults in January 2018 and again in May 2020. This study used descriptive statistics, and results indicated an increase in schools as a caring community. Each of the five subsets of the caring community increased, indicating schools may improve as a caring community after participating in the HLA.

Keywords: Leadership, Character Education, School Culture, Climate, Professional Learning

Schools were originally created for two purposes: to help students become smart as well as to help them become good (Lickona & Davidson, 2017). In the United States, a focus has been placed on providing students with an academically challenging curriculum as evidenced by the national education laws No Child Left Behind of 2001 (NCLB) and Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA). No Child Left Behind required rigorous academic state testing with the end goal of one hundred percent of students proficient in reading and mathematics by the end of the 2014 school year along with stringent accountability measures (No Child Left Behind Act, 2001). This educational reform set the standard higher for student learning than previous laws. In 2015, Every Student Succeeds Act replaced No Child Left Behind Act and reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). Every Student Succeeds Act requires all students to be taught to high academic standards with annual statewide assessments that measure individual student's progress toward meeting high academic standards. This law included accountability and positive action measures to ensure a process was in place to improve schools with consistently low graduation rates and academic progress (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). No Child Left Behind Act and Every Student Succeeds Act both focused on students becoming smart.

Every Student Succeeds Act has an additional emphasis on providing a school environment to help students become good. According to the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) (2016), ESSA's foundation is based on the strong connection between a positive school climate where students develop character skills that result in student learning that leads to success. The act encourages and provides funding for states, districts, and schools to improve conditions for all students, enhance peer interaction, provide well-rounded education, incorporate community involvement, and service learning that ties to the curriculum (Grant et al., 2017). Schools receiving funding must use evidence-based interventions that have a positive impact on the students' intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies in addition to academic achievement. ESSA requires an increase in academic achievement and support to develop positive character: the smart and the good.

As part of the accountability portion of ESSA, states are required to use four measures: academic achievement, graduation rates, English Language proficiency, and one indicator of school or student success selected by the state in a plan (Alabama State Department of Education, n.d.; Kostyo et al., 2018). The Alabama State Department of Education chose to use school climate as the state selected indicator. Alabama's ESSA plan, submitted and approved to the state department of education, says, "Alabama plans to address school culture, student behavior, and discipline infractions" (Alabama State Department of Education, 2019, p. 41). One of the strategies listed in Alabama's ESSA plan is to "build a culture for school safety by promoting best practices in schools and local education agencies" (Alabama State Department of Education, 2019).

According to the United States Department of Education Final Report of the Federal Commission on School Safety (2018), the best way to provide a safe learning environment is through character education and by the creation of a positive school climate. The final report specifically suggested using the PRIMED character education framework by Dr. Marvin Berkowitz. PRIMED is an acronym for: Prioritization, Relationships, Intrinsic Motivation, Modeling, Empowerment, and Developmental Pedagogy (Berkowitz et al., 2016). Similarly, Character.org's Eleven Principles of Character Education provides a framework for effective character education that serve as guideposts for schools to develop positive character and to provide meaningful and challenging academic curriculum. The 11 Principles are: (1) promotes core values, (2) defines "character to include thinking, feeling, and doing," (3) uses a comprehensive approach, (4) creates a caring community, (5) provides students with opportunities

for moral action, (6) offers a meaningful and challenging academic curriculum, (7) fosters students' self-motivation, (8) unites staff through collaborative learning, (9) fosters shared leadership, (10) engages families and community members as partners, and (11) assesses the school culture and climate (Lickona et al., 2007).

The non-profit Hope Institute (2021) located in Birmingham, Alabama, hosts a three-year professional learning experience called the Hope Leadership Academy (HLA). The purpose of HLA is to inspire school teams to build a character-focused school culture in order to develop character in students. Year one of the Hope Leadership Academy consists of six professional learning sessions led by national character education experts. Year two of the HLA includes a book study, three professional learning sessions, one site visit, and a half-day of onsite consulting for each participating school. HLA participants of year three attend a two-day Eleven Principles of Character Education training, a day-long Showcase of Promising Practices, a book study, and a one-day session led by a nationally recognized character education expert. The HLA used both the PRIMED model and 11 Principles of Character Education as foundations of the leadership training.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine whether a school that received three years of professional learning through the Hope Leadership Academy indicated an increase as a caring community. While many positive results have been expected from HLA participation, one of the expected results has been the establishment of a caring community, consistent with both the PRIMED model and the 11 Principles of Effective Character Education. This study analyzed surveys and descriptive statistics to compare changes in perceptions in the school as a caring community between January 2018 and May 2020.

Population

Six schools that participated in the Hope Leadership Academy provided access for students and adults to complete the School as a Caring Community Profile-II (SCCP_II) after the first session in January 2018, and five schools offered the survey in May 2020 after the completion of year three in the HLA. Alabama schools that participated in the HLA administered the SCCP-II to students third grade through twelfth grade, with written parental permission, and to adults, which included teachers, staff, parents, community members. Six schools participated in the survey in January 2018 and five schools in May 2020. There were three schools that participated in the January 2018 and the May 2020 administration of the survey. Three schools only participated in January 2018 and two different schools only participated in May 2020. In January 2018, 133 students and 113 adults from six Alabama schools that represented public, private, elementary, middle and high schools participated in the survey. After three years of professional learning in the HLA, schools had the option to administer the SCCP-II a second time. Five schools administered the survey to 223 students and 244 adults in May 2020.

Research Design and Instrument

The School as a Caring Community Profile-II (SCCP-II) developed by Lickona and Davidson (2003) was designed to determine stakeholder perceptions of the school regarding a caring community. The survey developers recommend administering the survey at the beginning of a character education initiative and at another point later to assess progress (Lickona & Davidson, 2003). There are 42 items with a 5-point Likert format on the survey. Students complete the first 34 items only, while adults complete all 42 items, as items numbered 35-42 refer to perceptions of adults with other adults in the school community.

Items on the questionnaire were broken down into five sub-scales: IA: Perceptions of Student Respect, IB: Perceptions of Student Friendship and Belonging, IC: Perceptions of Students' Shaping of Their Environment, IIA: Perceptions of Support and Care by and for Faculty/Staff, and IIB: Perceptions of Support and Care by and for Parents. Perceptions of Student Respect, sub-scale IA, contained items 1, 4, 7, 9, 12, 15, 17, 20, and 23 with reversed scores for items 12, 15, and 17. Perceptions of Student Friendship and Belonging, sub-scale IB, contained items 2, 3, 5, 10, 13, 16, 18, 21, and 24 with reversed scores for item 2. Perceptions of Students' Shaping of Their Environment, sub-scale IC, contained items 6, 8, 11, 14, 19, 22, and 25. Perceptions of Support and Care by and for Faculty/Staff, sub-scale IIA, contained items 26, 29, 31, 32, 34, 35, 36, 38, 39, and 40 with reversed scores for item 32. Perceptions of Support and Care by and For Parents, sub-scale IIB, contained items 27, 28, 30, 33, 37, 41, and 42 with reversed scores for item 28.

Authors of SCCP-II computed Alpha range from .73 to .86 for students and from .73 to .88 for adults. Alpha for each sub-scale for the whole sample is as follows: SS_IA, 0.84; SS_IB, .85; SS_IC, .87; SS_IIA, .80; and SS_IIB, .70. Alpha for each sub-scale for students is as follows: SS_IA, 0.75; SS_IB, .81; SS_IC, .86; SS_IIA, .80; and SS_IIB, .70. Alpha for each sub-scale for adults is as follows: SS_IA, 0.88; SS_IB, .88; SS_IC, .88; SS_IIA, .73; and SS_IIB, .73.

The 5-point Likert score ratings is 1 = almost never, 2 = sometimes, 3 = as often as not, 4 = frequently, and 5 = almost always. The higher the number the greater the number of times the behavior occurs in the school community. The lower the number the fewer the number of times the behavior is perceived to occur.

Data Collection

The School as a Caring Community Profile-II (SCCP-II) was put into Qualtrics. Students accessed the 34-question survey on Qualtrics via a web link or a QR code provided by the teacher. Adults used a web link or a QR code for Qualtrics to access the 42-question survey. Web links and QR codes were made available to adults by school newsletters, emails from the principal, and hard copies of the links and QR codes in the front office. Links and QR codes survey participants used were direct links to Qualtrics where the data were collected.

Data from the student survey and from the adult survey were downloaded from Qualtrics into Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26 for analysis. Descriptive statistics, including number, mean, and standard deviations, provided the data analysis.

Data Analysis

The researchers used descriptive statistics to rank the five sub-scales from SCCP-II from the highest sub-scale to the lowest sub-scale from the January 2018 and the May 2020 surveys. The number of participants that responded to each variable, calculations of the means, and standard deviations for students in January 2018 are listed in Table 1. There were 133 students who participated in the January 2018 survey. The number of students who answered the survey items for each variable ranged from 126 to 133 which means that all students did not answer all survey items. If a student did not answer all survey items pertaining to a variable, then that student's rating would not be included in the calculation of the mean. Means (*M*) ranged from 3.10 to 4.26 out of 5.00. Standard deviations (*SD*) ranged from .73 to 1.02.

Table 1
Student Survey January 2018: Variable Means

Variable	*N*	*M*	*SD*
SS_IIB: Perceptions of Support and Care by and for Parents	133	4.26	0.88
SS_IIA: Perceptions of Support and Care by and for Faculty/Staff	132	3.81	1.02
SS_IB: Perceptions of Student Friendship and Belonging	124	3.33	0.73
SS_IA: Perceptions of Student Respect	126	3.28	0.74
SS_IC: Perceptions of Students' Shaping of their Environment	127	3.10	0.89

The number of student participants that responded to each variable, calculations of the means, and standard deviations in May 2020 are in Table 2. There were 223 students who participated in the survey in May 2020. The number of students who answered the survey items for each variable ranged from 211 to 217 which means that all students did not answer all survey items. If a student did not answer all survey items pertaining to a variable, then that student's rating would not be included in the calculation of the mean. Means (*M*) ranged from 3.70 to 4.68 out of 5.00. Standard deviations (*SD*) ranged from .48 to .89.

Table 2
Student Survey May 2020: Variable Means

Variable	*N*	*M*	*SD*
SS_IIB: Perceptions of Support and Care by and for Parents	217	4.68	0.48
SS_IIA: Perceptions of Support and Care by and for Faculty/Staff	216	4.49	0.71

SS_IA: Perceptions of Student Respect	214	3.87	0.67
SS_IB: Perceptions of Student Friendship and Belonging	211	3.80	0.73
SS_IC: Perceptions of Students' Shaping of their Environment	214	3.70	0.89

The student survey sub-scale with the highest score in January 2018 was IIB: Perceptions of Support and Care by and For Parents (*M* = 4.26, *SD* = .88) which asked how students, teachers, and parents treat adults in the building. The student questionnaire sub-scale with the highest score in May 2020 was IIB: Perceptions of Support and Care by and for Parents (*M* = 4.68, *SD* = .48).

The lowest scoring sub-scale on the student questionnaire in January 2018 was IC: Perceptions of Students' Shaping of their Environment (*M* = 3.10, *SD* = .89) which asked if students felt that they had an opportunity to have input into the school environment. The lowest scoring sub-scale on the student questionnaire in May 2020 was IC: Perceptions of Students' Shaping of their Environment (*M* = 3.70, *SD* = .89).

The sub-scale with the greatest change in mean for students between January 2018 score (*M* = 3.81, *SD* = 1.02) and May 2020 (*M* = 4.49, *SD* = .71) was IIA: Perceptions of Support and Care by and for Faculty/Staff. Sub-scale IIA solicited responses from participants about how teachers and other adults in the building take care of students.

The number of adult participants that responded to each variable, calculations of the means, and standard deviations in January 2018 are listed in Table 3. There were 131 adults who participated in the survey in January 2018. The number of adults who answered the survey items for each variable ranged from 129 to 131, indicating all adults did not answer all survey items. If an adult did not answer all survey items pertaining to a variable, then that adult's rating would not be included in the calculation of the mean. Means (*M*) ranged from 3.10 to 4.20 out of 5.00. Standard deviations (*SD*) ranged from .71 to 1.08.

Table 3

Adult Survey January 2018: Variable Means

Variable	N	*M*	*SD*
SS_IIA: Perceptions of Support and Care by and for Faculty/Staff	129	4.20	0.71
SS_IIB: Perceptions of Support and Care by and for Parents	131	4.16	0.71
SS_IB: Perceptions of Student Friendship and Belonging	131	3.61	0.91
SS_IA: Perceptions of Student Respect	131	3.53	1.00
SS_IC: Perceptions of Students' Shaping of their Environment	131	3.11	1.08

The number of adult participants who responded to each variable, calculations of the means, and standard deviations in May 2020 are listed in Table 4. There were 244 adults who

participated in the survey in May 2020. The number of adults who answered the survey items for each variable ranged from 240 to 237 which means that all adults did not answer all survey items. If an adult did not answer all survey items pertaining to a variable, then that adult's rating would not be included in the calculation of the mean. Means (*M*) ranged from 3.82 to 4.61 out of 5.00. Standard deviations (*SD*) ranged from .49 to .87.

Table 4
Adult Survey May 2020: Variable Means

Variable	*N*	*M*	*SD*
SS_IIA: Perceptions of Support and Care by and for Faculty/Staff	237	4.61	0.54
SS_IIB: Perceptions of Support and Care by and for Parents	239	4.52	0.49
SS:_IA: Perceptions of Student Respect	238	4.04	0.71
SS_IB: Perceptions of Student Friendship and Belonging	240	3.99	0.77
SS_IC: Perceptions of Students' Shaping of their Environment	237	3.82	0.87

The adult survey sub-scale with the highest score in January 2018 was IIB: Perceptions of Support and Care by and for Parents (*M* = 4.20, *SD* = .71) which asked how students, teachers, and parents treat adults in the building. The adult survey sub-scale with the highest score in May 2020 was IIB: Perceptions of Support and Care by and for Parents (*M* = 4.61, *SD* = .54).

The lowest scoring sub-scale on the survey answered by adults in January 2018 was IC: Perceptions of Students' Shaping of their Environment (*M* = 3.11, *SD* = 1.08), which asked adults whether students had an opportunity to have input into the school environment. The lowest scoring sub-scale on the survey answered by adults in May 2020 was IC: Perceptions of Students' Shaping of their Environment (*M* = 3.82, *SD* = .87).

The sub-scale with the greatest change in mean answered by adults for between January 2018 score (*M* = 3.11, *SD* = 1.08) and May 2020 (*M* = 3.82, *SD* = .87) was IC: Perceptions of Students' Shaping of their Environment. Sub-scale IC solicited responses from adult participants whether students had an opportunity to have input and shape the school environment.

Sub-scale IC: Perceptions of Students' Shaping of Their Environment scored lowest in January 2018 for students (*M* = 3.10, *SD* = .89) and adults (*M* = 3.11, *SD* = 1.08). In May 2020, sub-scale IC was still the lowest sub-scale, yet had the second greatest change for students with an increase of .60 in the mean and the greatest change in the mean of .71 for adults.

As the findings indicate, results showed an increase in schools as a caring community after participation in HLA. Interestingly, the greatest amount of change for students was in Support and Care by and for Faculty/Staff, followed closely by Students' Shaping of their Environment. For Adults the greatest change was in Students' Shaping of their Environment. While all areas of the caring community showed increases, the student teacher relationship and student voice were the strongest. Each of the five subsets of the caring community increased based on both student and adult data, indicating schools may improve as a caring community after participating in the HLA.

The schools may see extensive gains in student - teacher relationships, which have been generally associated with overall school improvement.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations include that all participants in HLA did not administer the survey. Since school students and adults self-reported, the researchers trusted that participants reported honest reactions. The study was delimited to the HLA participants who administered the survey. The researchers determined to include all schools that provided data after the January 2018 session and after the 3-year participation, rather than including matched pairs only, an additional delimitation.

Recommendations for Practice and Research

The data collected indicated increased perceptions of a caring school community over time consistent with professional learning related to character development and school culture. This indicates schools could benefit schools from engaging in professional learning about character development and making character education a school priority.

Further qualitative and quantitative research would provide additional information on how school cultures changed. Information is needed to determine what schools did to increase student input into shaping the school environment as sub-scale IC was the lowest sub-scale in January 2018 yet increased significantly for both students and adults by May 2020. Additional studies could conduct student focus groups on students' impact on a school environment to determine ways to include students into the decision-making process. A quantitative study on the academic achievement, discipline referrals, attendance rates, in-school and out-of-school suspensions over the three years schools participated in the HLA could offer insight to themes when schools create a culture of character.

Summary

Results indicated an increase in schools as a caring community. Each of the five subsets of the caring community increased in both the student and adult surveys, indicating schools may improve as caring communities after participating in HLA. Schools may find multiple ways to establish a caring community. However, schools who participated in HLA created caring communities; thus, HLA can be a path toward these ends.

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Understanding Transformational Leadership during a Time of Uncertainty

Jana' Sparks, *Auburn University at Montgomery*

Abstract

In the past year, the coronavirus has been one of the most unpredictable global health crises that has impacted the United States. The decision to move in person learning to remote learning caused uncertainty and unpredictable challenges for the entire education system. This article will highlight transformational leadership best practices for navigating through uncertainty. Transformational leadership has been one of the most influential leadership models applied to educational leadership over the past several decades (Berkovich, 2016). Hooper and Bernhard (2016) characterized transformational leadership as a model for the school stakeholders to work together for the same common goal.

Keywords: transformational leadership, instructional leadership, uncertainty, leadership practices, student achievement

The coronavirus and the disease it causes, COVID-19 has caused a lot of uncertainty within school districts throughout the United States. The coronavirus pandemic has impacted educators as they attempt to ensure high quality teaching and learning through remote learning. Transitioning to remote learning may require for radical changes in attitude, values and beliefs for some stakeholders (Heifetz & Laurie, 2001). Doraiswamy (2012) stated that empathy, compassion and flexibility are crucial for crisis management. Instructional leaders impact the direction of schools through their thinking, practices, and relationships (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Redding and Corbett (2018) acknowledged the importance of a school's culture, particularly when a leader wants, or needs, to make changes to improve school outcomes. A principal is influential to the successful functioning of a school and the quality of school performance is linked to the principal's style of leadership (Nir & Hameiri, 2014). In order to support remote learning, instructional leaders must use a new toolbox of intellectual stimulation, idealized influence and inspiration (Fernandez & Shaw, 2020). This purpose of this article is to highlight transformational leadership best practices for navigating through uncertain challenges such as the coronavirus pandemic.

The Instructional Leader

Glover (2007) stated that real leadership, challenges the leader, before it challenges others. This past year instructional leaders have had to redefine their role. Researchers have indicated that effective leadership influences academic outcomes for students and prepares them for career, college, and life (Day, Gu, & Sammons, 2016; Kouzes & Posner, 2017; Pietsch & Tulowitzki, 2017; Ross & Cozzens, 2016). Instructional leaders impact student achievement in various ways, such as clearly framing and articulating the school's goals and objectives to collaboratively create a mission for the school (Rey & Bastons, 2018). The instructional leader brings all stakeholders together through a shared mission and everybody moves towards achieving a school's vision through the instructional leader's actions (Kafele, 2017). Ritchie (2013) indicated that an instructional leader must develop a vision as "the single goal of creating and nourishing the best possible environment for teaching and learning" (p. 21). This is acquired through their supportive and caring behavior, in which instructional leaders can positively impact productivity of their staff as a whole (Gülsen & Gülenay, 2014; Scallion, 2010). Hitt and Tucker (2016) discussed the strong link between student achievement and how the instructional leader influences expectations for quality instruction. There are many leadership characteristics and practices that influence leaders. Kouzes and Posner (2017) studied leaders from a variety of organizations at all levels to identify five common leadership practices. The five leadership practices are good leaders model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart (Kouzes & Posner, 2017).

The Role of the Instructional Leader in Managing Change

The role of the instructional leader is continuously evolving and the demanding expectations are constantly rising. Leadership is "a main indicator in determining the success of an organization" (Goolamally & Ahmad, 2014, p. 123). Leadership during uncertainty involves the need to embrace challenges that will arise. It is important to challenge the process, encourage creativity and learn from mistakes (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). School leaders are vital to maintain

sustainable education reform and could be the change agents to move schools from what worked in the past to what is needed for the future (Mercer, 2016). Proper leadership to implement this change requires the ability to influence the thoughts and actions of other people (Taleghani, Salmani, & Taatian, 2011). These alternative models of teaching and learning offer the possibility for educators to reinvent the teaching and learning process (Gonzales & Vodicka, 2012). Because many students are now bombarded by technology at every turn, educational classrooms may benefit from implementing technology tools that could potentially heighten student interest and provide a more personalized learning experience (Gonzales & Vodicka, 2012). Kotter (2012) stated, "Change leadership is much more associated with putting an engine on the whole change process, and making it go faster, smarter, more efficiently.

Transformational Leadership

The transformational leadership theory, according to Berkovich (2016) has been one of the most influential leadership models in education over the past several decades. Prior to being recognized as a leadership model for educational leaders, this model was designed for political and business leaders (Berkovich, 2016). The transformational leadership style is broadly viewed as the most utilized leadership style, because those individuals who practice it try to change, inspire, and engage followers (Hassan, 2008). The transformational leadership theory is leadership that cares less about positional power and more about influential power (Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987). Transformational leadership that is displayed in Figure 1 is a model of leadership that embraces the importance of inspiring and motivating followers to achieve a shared vision along with emphasizing the importance of relationships (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). Transformational leaders are interested in converting their followers into leaders (Gardiner, 2006).

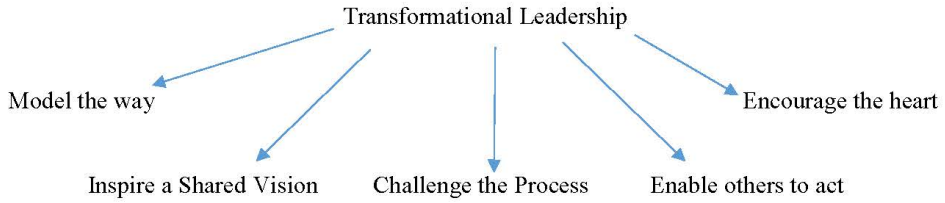

Figure 1. Exemplary transformational leadership practices (Kouzes & Posner, 2017).

As proposed by Kouzes and Posner (2017) transformational leadership is grounded in the concepts of inspiring and motivating people toward a shared vision to achieve goals at a higher standard. Hooper and Bernhard (2016) characterized transformational leadership as a model for the school stakeholders to work together for the same common goal. A transformational leader intentionally designs structures for collaboration within a school to be culturally responsive and inclusive of all students to support teaching and learning (Hooper & Bernhard, 2016). Kouzes and Posner (2017) conducted an extensive study of over 75,000 leaders over a 30-year time frame and their findings resulted in the creation of a leadership framework that identified five exemplary leadership practices that are transformational: (a) model the way, (b) inspire a shared vision, (c) challenge the process, (d) enable others to act, and (e) encourage the heart. According to Kouzes and Posner (2017), these exemplary leadership practices endure over time regardless of the leadership context or generational factors such as age. Quin, Deris, Bischoff, & Johnson (2015)

concluded that the five leadership practices from Kouzes and Posner (2017) were frequently identified in high-performing schools.

Researchers have developed leadership models in education that are generally characterized by a set of unique leadership qualities that are clearly articulated and can be applied to different educational contexts (Berkovich, 2016). Even further, building upon previous work in transformational leadership, Poutiatine (2009) developed nine principles of transformational leadership that provide a framework for leaders to follow:

- Transformation is not synonymous with change.
- Transformation requires assent to change.
- Transformation always requires second-order change.
- Transformation involves all aspects of an individual's or organization's life.
- Transformational change is irreversible.
- Transformational change involves a letting go of the myth of control.
- Transformational change involves some aspect of risk, fear, and loss.
- Transformational change always involves a broadening scope of worldview.
- Transformation is always a movement toward a greater integrity of identity–a movement toward wholeness (p. 190).

Conclusion

Ramsey (2009) states that when school leaders communicate effectively, students learn, parents and community members understand and support what the school is doing, and the process of teaching and learning moves forward. However, as school leaders begin to consider implementing the tools needed for personalized learning, they are quickly confronted with the challenges of locating content; finding, hiring, and managing teachers; organizing systems to support students; and selecting and managing technology (Watson & Gemin, 2009). Leading a school as an instructional leader in a time of crisis is stressful especially in times of change. Instructional leaders must work to promote positive relationships with the teachers in the building as relationships and bonds between teachers and principals are vital to the success of collaboration efforts (Malloy & Leithwood, 2017). Instructional leadership practices should focus staff on teaching and learning, inspire teacher belief in the achievement of all students, provided practical assistance in developing faculty knowledge and instructional skills, and create school conditions for teacher potential to meet the needs of all students (Hallinger et al., 2018). "Leaders are learners. They learn from their failures as well as their successes and they make it possible for others to do the same" (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p. 20).

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Implications for School Administrators of the Perceptions of School Culture and Climate in Selected Public Secondary Schools in Alabama's River Region

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Abstract

In this study, the researchers examined the culture and climate of selected middle and high schools in Alabama's River Region. Teachers and administrators from nine middle and eleven high schools completed two electronic surveys: (a) the School Culture Survey (SCS) and (b) the Organizational Climate Description Questionnaires (OCDQ-RM/OCDQ-RS). The results were analyzed using SPSS and based on responses to the SCS from 100 middle school stakeholders and 95 responses to the OCDQ-RM. The researchers discovered no statistically significant difference in the perception of school climate and culture between middle and high school stakeholders. The researchers chose this demographic region because currently, there is no known research on culture and climate specific to the counties in this region of the state. Additionally, multiple schools in various districts are listed on the state's Under-Performing Schools List. The researchers found that the climate in participating middle schools is more collaborative. Therefore, the researchers determined that middle schools in this region have more open climates than high schools. After compiling the analytics, the researchers reported the findings and recommended that school leaders employ strategies to increase the trust levels between teachers and administration.

Keywords: School Climate, School Culture, Student Achievement, School Leadership, Stakeholder Perceptions

Culture and climate are the central nervous system of any organization and the determining factor of its thoughts, behaviors, and, ultimately, the outcomes (Schuneman, 2019). Some consider school culture and climate among the top influencers that affect student achievement outcomes, especially during a worldwide pandemic (Panchal et al., 2021). The failure to produce and provide quality schools that promote high academic standards, appropriate leadership, and collegiality among staff members (Hoy et al., 1991) has shortchanged America's students, schools, and school systems. This breach results from schools and districts' negligence in fostering and supporting student success and achievement. Federal and local governments have acknowledged this and responded by enacting specific legislation intended to address educational needs. One of the first major education legislative acts was The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). There have been subsequent reauthorizations of this bill to include the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 (NCLB) and the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA).

The elements of culture and climate are separate and distinct constructs; however, according to an article by AES Impact (2020), they are codependent, and "one drives and determines the other" (p.1). Culture affects every aspect of school and every educational process, while climate directly influences the mental health, the social and emotional well-being of students, staff, and administrators (Maxwell et al., 2017). In an attempt to improve academic environments and student achievement, the absence or inattention to school culture and climate is a major concern contributing to the detriment and decline of education nationally.

The purpose of this quantitative study was to assess and describe the factors of culture and the dimensions of climate in secondary public schools located in central Alabama from the viewpoint of school administrators and teachers. The researchers emphasized the importance of understanding and differentiating between the definitions of culture and climate and how each element contributes to successful student achievement, allowing education policymakers, school administrators, and classroom teachers to be more proficient and effective in their professional practices. Most importantly, clarifying this distinction and the need for both elements will create a path to greater student achievement and diminish the performance gaps between races, genders, and social classes. Gruenert and Whitaker (2017) define "climate" as the entire school's attitude, expressing that it is a mutual feeling within a group and is evident when members have similar reactions to certain stimuli. Schweig, Hamilton, and Baker (2019) contradicted this notion claiming that climate is based on individual perceptions. The authors provide an empirical analysis that supports the simultaneous existence of multiple climates in the academic setting to support their belief. He further refutes Gruenert and Whitaker's (2017) viewpoint by stating that group members possessing varying perceptions of the climate will respond differently to the same stimuli. Alternatively, "culture" is the unspoken and often unconscious norms, values, beliefs, traditions, and rituals held and observed by group members. Thus, culture is established over time as people work together, solve problems, and confront challenges (Retnowati et al., 2018; Peterson & Deal, 1998).

Review of Literature

School Climate

Many researchers express an unwavering agreement on two essential premises: 1) there is an identified set of factors that determines school climate and 2) students benefit in many ways from positive school climates (Kwong & Davis, 2015; Santikian, 2011; Smith et al., 2014; Thapa et al., 2013). While the school climate is defined by the beliefs of school stakeholder groups, such

as parents, students, teachers (ScholarChip, 2020), others define it differently (Owens & Valesky, 2015). Lindahl (2011) refers to school climate as stakeholders' perception about the school's leadership in cooperation with the working environment. Owens and Valesky (2015) suggest that climate is the characteristic of the entire organization; however, understanding these characteristics is the key to defining climate.

According to The National School Climate Council (2021), school climate considers the quality and character of school life. School climate is based on students, parents, and school personnel's behavior patterns as they experience school life; it also reflects on the norms, values, goals, teaching and learning practices, interpersonal relationships, and organizational structures. Additionally, AES Impact (2020) defines school climate as the atmosphere that permeates the organization and generally exemplifies the actions, thought processes, and experiences of stakeholders such as students, teachers, and administrators. The National School Climate Center (NSCC) conducted a research study. It revealed that "school climate includes major spheres of school life such as safety, relationships, teaching and learning, and the environment as well as larger organizational patterns (e.g., from fragmented to shared; healthy or unhealthy)" (p.1).

According to Deal and Kennedy (1982), Renato Taguiri's 1968 taxonomy describes climate's characteristics in four dimensions: ecology, milieu, social system, and culture. He suggests that the four dimensions engage in a high-powered relationship within the confines of the organization. Subsequently, the organization is engaged in an identical relationship with its external environment. The first dimension is ecology, and it refers to the physical design of the organization. For example, in a school, this would include the facilities size, quality of the building, desks, chairs, elevators, chalkboards, and anything used to conduct organizational activities. The second is the milieu, which is associated with the social description of people within the organization. The milieu includes characteristics, socioeconomic status, salaries, morale, influences, self-efficacy, and job skills. The third is the social system; it encompasses the hierarchical structure of the organization – the way the school is organized from administration to subordinates. Culture is the final dimension mentioned by Taguiri. He stated that culture refers to the assumptions, values, norms, belief systems, way of thinking, history, myths, visible and audible behavior pattern of an organization (Owens & Valesky, 2015).

School Culture

Sparks (2019) asserts that school culture is the "just how things are" attitude of school stakeholders. Deal and Kennedy (1982) described culture as "the way we do things around here". Gun and Caglayan (2013) proclaimed that culture is an intangible but mighty factor that can promote continuous improvement efforts and strengthen teaching and learning; conversely, it has the potential to derail these elements and the totality of the school. Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) agree that there are varying definitions of culture, as they identified more than 150 in their research. Norman (2019) cited Deal and Peterson (2009), who proclaimed that culture is the traditions, values, and beliefs that are deeply rooted and formed over time and shared among the stakeholders in the organization. These traditions, values, and beliefs are typically accepted and practiced by newcomers to the organization and contribute to forming one of the six culture types defined by Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) as collaborative, comfortable, contrived collegial, Balkanized, fragmented, and toxic.

Culture and Climate: The Leadership Factor

The Principal's Role in Shaping School Culture is an informative report published by Deal and Peterson (1990). School leaders, such as principals, can influence their staff and students. The perceptions of each group are subject to change based on each stakeholder group's perception of the principal's competency level (Grobler et al., 2012). Leading and fostering a positive culture and climate are imperative for administrators, especially during the global pandemic and a move to hybrid or virtual instruction.

When the instructional leader successfully creates a pleasant school climate, stakeholders fare better physically, socially, and emotionally (ScholarChip, 2020). Teacher and student perceptions of school are influenced by safety, relationships, teaching and learning, and the school's processes. Perception also includes the physical educational environment (Santikian, 2011; Smith et al., 2014; Thapa et al., 2013). School officials who attempt to identify any activity that takes place in their buildings that is not associated directly or indirectly with climate and culture would find their efforts futile (Horton Jr., 2018; Sweetland & Hoy, 2000; Wang, Hartel, & Walberg, 1997). The most critical job of the instructional leader is to ensure that the school has a positive climate and culture. School administrators who can unify a faculty, clearly communicate, and reinforce a vision effectively enough that others are convinced to accept and embrace it, have achieved success in creating a positive culture and climate (Mosley et al., 2014).

Methods

The researchers collected data for this quantitative study using the SCS and the OCDQ RM and RS. A descriptive research design was employed based on the advanced number of previous studies that employed this design. The researchers implemented a descriptive normative survey design, which allows them to use surveys made to reflect a normative sample or condition for comparison to local results (Calmorin, 2001). Teachers and principals with a minimum of three years of experience were invited to participate in the study. The surveys were accessible to participants via email utilizing a link forwarded by the researchers, and participants responded to each item on the instruments using a Likert scale. Surveys sent to middle school stakeholders included the OCDQ-RM (34 items) and the SCS, while the OCDQ-RS (50 items) and the SCS (35 items) were sent to high schools. A follow-up email was sent to building leaders to encourage participation.

According to Hoy, Tarter, and Kottkamp (1991), the detailed questionnaires measure school climate and the openness of principal and teacher behaviors. The subtests include teacher collaboration, collaborative leadership, professional development, unity of purpose, collegial support, and learning partnership. The participant response rates varied and ranged from 0% to 100% of each school's staff who met the participation criteria. The researchers used independent samples t-test as the statistical analysis to definitively support whether a difference in mean scores exists in the SCS responses from middle and high schools.

Table 1
OCDQ-RM (Middle School) and OCDQ-RS (High School) Teacher and Administrator Participant Response Rate

School	Participants	Response Rate	School	Participants	Response Rate
RM 1	10	45%	RS 1	12	67%
RM 2	7	16%	RS 2	9	90%
RM 3	28	100%	RS 3	11	23%
RM 4	3	38%	RS 4	16	18%
RM 5	7	14%	RS 5	20	43%
RM 6	3	25%	RS 6	16	35%
RM 7	6	14%	RS 7	14	35%
RM 8	6	75%	RS 8	1	0.02%
RM 9	21	48%	RS 9	1	0.02%
RM 10	2	13%			
MS11	1	0.01%			

The data in the chart indicated the number of participants at each school and the percentage of eligible participants. RM (Middle Schools) RS (High Schools)

Analysis

The study was guided by the overarching question: What is the overall culture and climate in middle and high schools in Alabama's River Region? The researchers were able to determine the following:

- When assessing climate in high schools, Directive Behavior had the highest standardized score (579.92), indicating that principal leadership in high school is perceived as rigid and domineering.
- Engaged Teacher Behavior received the lowest standardized score (345.45), denoting that teachers exhibited low levels of pride and did not enjoy working together or supporting each other.

- The openness index score of 456 indicates that the behaviors associated with open school climates did not occur regularly. According to Hoy (2020), the school climate openness index provides a score to establish how willing the faculty is to express their perceptions of climate in their organization.
- When assessing climate in middle schools, Directive Principal Behavior had a standardized score of 679.17, which is higher than 97% of the schools represented in the normative sample, suggesting that middle school teachers perceive leadership as rigid and overpowering.
- The lowest standardized score for middle schools was Disengaged Teacher Behavior (395.87), lower than 84% of the schools represented in the normative sample. According to the data, stakeholders are less inclined to agree that teachers are disengaged and lack focus. Teachers were pleased with the level of administrative support, and they closely monitored teacher activity.
- The teacher openness index for middle schools was 539 and denotes that stakeholders' perceptions of climate are above average compared to the normative sample population.
- Professional and collegial relationships between teachers exist. Teachers are devoted to student success and connected to the vision and mission of the school.
- When assessing culture in middle and high schools, the data revealed that Professional Development was the highest-scoring factor, signifying that high school stakeholders perceive their professional learning as sufficient to meet their professional needs. There was no statistical difference in the perceptions of middle and high school stakeholders concerning this factor.
- The Learning Partnerships factor for middle school received the lowest mean score, surmising the stakeholders are more undecided than inclined to believe that common expectations for student performance exist in their schools. Middle school stakeholders rated Learning Partnerships the lowest factor, which suggests that middle school stakeholders' perceptions were closer to "undecided" than they were to "agree" when referencing teacher and parent relationships.

Using the SCS, the researchers conducted an independent samples *t*-test to understand if a statistically significant difference exists between the perceptions of middle and high school stakeholders. The confidence interval was set at 95%, indicating that alpha is 0.05. All factors show significant differences between the means of middle and high schools except for professional development. This suggests no differences in how principals and teachers in middle and high schools in Alabama's River Region perceive professional development. All SCS factors show a significant difference between middle and high school stakeholders except professional development. Perceptions for this factor were relatively the same. The OCDQ-RS determined that the morale in high schools was less than favorable, instructional time and tasks were not protected, and teachers failed to maintain winsome relationships among themselves. The OCDQ-RM revealed that middle school teachers in the River Region had a mean for Restrictive Principal Behavior lower than the normative sample, indicating that middle school teachers view their principals positively. They feel supported and not burdened by busywork.

Due to limited teacher participation in this study, the information obtained is subject to a lower accuracy rate than studies with greater participation. The data from the OCDQ-RS was gathered by surveying 100 high school and 95 middle school teachers and administrators from schools located in Alabama's River Region. High schools had an average climate score lower than

the normative sample. Supportive Principal Behavior and Directive Principal Behavior had mean scores slightly higher than those of the normative sample. High school teachers perceived their building-level principals as supportive and apprehensive about the health of the organization.

Nonetheless, the Teacher Behaviors: Engaged Behavior, Frustrated Behavior, and Intimate Behavior all had mean scores lower than the normative sample. These findings proved encouraging to the researchers considering the study was conducted at the height of a worldwide pandemic. According to research by Panchal et al., 2021, adults are experiencing a drastic decline in the state of their mental health. The stress levels were exacerbated as the educators moved, without warning, to online and hybrid instructional methods. It is reasonable to deduce that the results of a global pandemic would have some effects on education and could account for the diminished morale of high schools.

Conclusion

The researchers provided valuable insight into stakeholders' perceptions of culture and climate in middle and high schools in Alabama's River Region by conducting this research study. The review of the literature supports the premise that positive culture and climate are essential to school success. The implications were based on the findings of this study, and the researchers determined that stakeholders should devise a strategic plan that will facilitate educators in becoming more familiar with the definitions and impact of culture and climate on educational outcomes, including but not limited to student achievement. School leaders at the high school level should work to be more supportive of teachers and increase the level of professional autonomy. Furthermore, school leaders should include components of culture and climate when writing mission and vision statements to ensure that the most important factors are addressed when planning for positive outcomes. The implementation of these recommendations will foster positive change in professional practices, which creates climate. Subsequently, when these positive behaviors are increased and sustained for extended periods, the result will be an improved culture.

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Principal and Counselor Cupport for Comprehensive Counseling Program Implementation[1]

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Abstract

To examine support for comprehensive counseling program implementation, we explored principals' and school counselors' perceptions and experiences from programs awarded the Alabama School Counseling Program of Distinction. A mixed-methods explanatory sequential design was employed. We found substantial agreement and no statistically significant differences between principals and school counselors on the *Assessment for School Counselor Needs for Professional Development* survey (Dahir & Stone, 2014). Interview results revealed four themes essential for program support: advocacy, collaboration, principal-school counselor relationship, and data use. Implications are presented, such as the need for communication and collaboration, and future avenues of research are provided.

Keywords: School counselor, school counseling, principal-counselor relationship, national counselor models, counselor accountability

[1] This manuscript was developed from a Samford University doctoral dissertation with committee members Drs. Mary E. Yakimowski, Amy Benton, and Charlotte Freeman.

Students experience mental health problems at increasingly alarming rates (Center for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2020). These problems have been compounded by the coronavirus pandemic, which has significantly affected students' educational experiences (Coronavirus [COVID-19], 2021). Without appropriate intervention and support, these concerns can pose significant barriers to students' academic, career, and social/emotional development and success (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2020). While children and adolescents diagnosed with mental health disorders may experience limited access to treatment outside the school setting, students can receive comprehensive support facilitated by school counselors through comprehensive school counseling programs (CSCP) (Kaffenberger & O'Rorke-Trigiani, 2013).

Principals employ school counselors as credentialed educators to support students' success (ASCA, 2019a). Trained at the graduate level, school counselors are qualified to support students' academic, social/emotional, and behavioral needs. Under the guidance of the principal, school counselors implement CSCPs that are "comprehensive in scope, preventative in design, and developmental in nature" (ASCA, 2017, p. 64). School counselors implement CSCPs through the ASCA's National Model, herein, the National Model (ASCA, 2019a), and corresponding state plans. These programs are "integral to the school's academic mission" (p. xii), and through implementation, school counselors support all students' development and success, including improvements in student achievement, attendance, college-and-career readiness, and discipline outcomes.

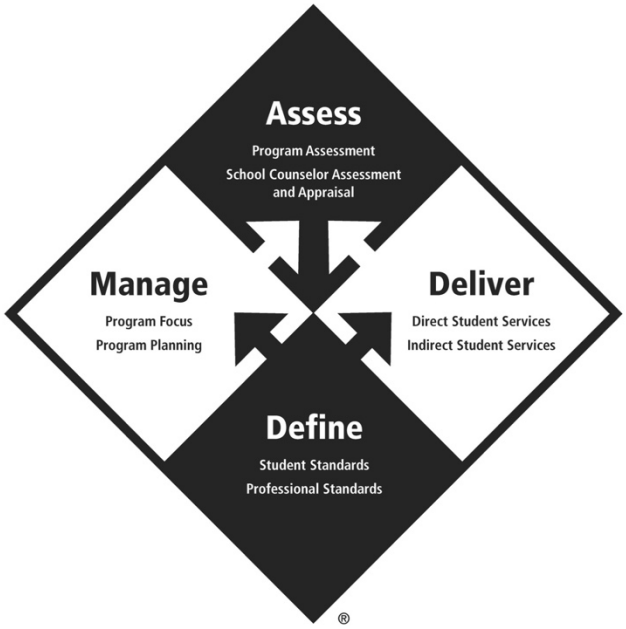
Literature Review

School counseling, as a profession, began as vocational guidance during the turn of the 20th century (Gysbers, 2010). Vocational guidance focused on students' school-to-work transition and centered on adjustable psychological and personal problems (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012). In the 1960s and 1970s, the developmental guidance movement began, which shifted the focus from career transition and problem adjustment to holistic student development and problem prevention (Gysbers, 2010). This movement expanded in the 1980s and 1990s as developmental comprehensive school counseling programs emerged (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012). Today, most school districts and other organizations (such as state departments of education) embrace the concept of developmental comprehensive school counseling programs conceptualized through the National Model (Erford, 2019).

Guiding the work of school counselors, the National Model defines the components, domains, and standards for implementing data-informed CSCPs (ASCA, 2019a). The model further describes programs that are systemically delivered to all students and developmentally appropriate in addressing students' academic, social/emotional, and career development. Through the delivery of direct and indirect activities, programs focus on the mindsets and behaviors necessary for college-and-career readiness. Additionally, programs focus on closing gaps of opportunity and achievement as well as improving student outcomes. As shown in Figure 1, this model is divided into four components: define, manage, deliver, and assess.

Figure 1

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model Diamond



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Researchers have examined the correlation between National Model implementation and student outcomes. For example, Carey and Dimmitt (2012) found that school counseling programs more fully implemented and aligned with the National Model were associated with improved student outcomes such as academic achievement, attendance, and behavior. Similarly, by examining high school outcome measures and program implementation, Palmer and Erford (2012) discovered that as reported levels of implementation increased, academic performance improved. These authors further noted improvements in student attendance with increased levels of implementation. In a similar study, Carey et al. (2012) found that with increased implementation of differentiated program delivery systems, student outcomes improved, including lower suspension rates ($r = .59$), lower discipline incident rates ($r = .39$), higher mathematics proficiency ($r = .37$), and higher reading proficiency ($r = .53$).

After the publication of the National Model, the ASCA developed the Recognized ASCA Model Program (RAMP) award designed to recognize CSCPs fully aligned with the model (Akos et al., 2019). Because RAMP recipient schools represent an objective standard of excellence in implementation, researchers have examined the relationship between RAMP status and student outcomes (Akos et al., 2019; Wilkerson et al., 2013). To recognize CSCPs that demonstrate excellence, the Alabama School Counselor Association (ALSCA), in collaboration with the Alabama State Department of Education, developed the Alabama School Counseling Program of Distinction (herein called Program of Distinction) award (ALSCA, 2021). Schools seeking recognition complete a 15-component application fully documenting program implementation aligned with the National Model and Alabama State Counseling Plan, herein, the State Plan, and award recipients are automatically eligible to receive RAMP status.

Limited research exists examining CSCP implementation through the National Model and the State Plan (Dahir et al., 2009). While researchers have published multiple articles on the topic of implementation (Burnham, Dahir, & Stone, 2008; Chandler et al., 2018; Dahir et al., 2009), these publications have primarily examined the findings of one study conducted in 2005 following the initial implementation of the State Plan (Dahir et al., 2009). Beyond base level implementation data collected in 2005, few studies have examined aspects of implementation in Alabama.

Reflecting on the expansion of school counseling programs and accountability in Alabama, Cecil and Cecil (1984) stated that "school counselors have a definite function in the school and that the services they provide are worth whatever investment they require" (pp. 4-5). Despite the call to program accountability, school counselors may experience challenges implementing CSCPs as a result of large caseloads (Kim & Lambie, 2018), non-school-counseling responsibilities (Chandler et al., 2018), and limited principal support (Studer et al., 2011). While the National Model and corresponding state plan guide school counselors, ultimately, principals determine school counselors' roles and functions within the school (Chandler et al., 2018). Therefore, understanding principals' perceptions and experiences of implementation in successful programs may contribute to improved alignment and delivery.

As the role of the school counselor evolved through time, additional responsibilities and functions were added, modified, or removed (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). Unfortunately, the additional responsibilities and functions may contribute to role confusion and subsequent misalignment with the role as defined by the National Model (Chandler et al., 2018). Despite the potential for role confusion and misalignment, research demonstrates that school counselors can influence principals' perceptions of the role of the school counselor (Dollarhide et al., 2007; Leuwerke et al., 2007). If school counselors' roles are better understood, principals may serve as protective factors for an ASCA-defined role conceptualization and National Model implementation, enabling school counselors to influence student outcomes and school improvement initiatives (Carey & Dimmitt, 2012). As principals have the potential to facilitate or limit implementation (Amatea & Clark, 2005), understanding the perceptions and experiences of school counselors and principals who have demonstrated excellence in implementation may inform the practices of school counselors in Alabama and throughout the nation seeking to increase their level of CSCP implementation.

Researchers (e.g., Burkard et al., 2012; Carey et al., 2012; Dimmitt & Wilkerson, 2012) have examined the implementation of the National Model throughout the nation. In Alabama, limited original research has been conducted examining the implementation of the National Model through the State Plan (Burnham, Dahir, & Stone, 2008; Chandler et al., 2018; Dahir et al., 2009). While called to implement CSCPs, school counselors may face barriers to implementation, such as limited principal support (Studer et al., 2011). Some researchers (e.g., Amatea & Clark, 2005; Leuwerke et al., 2009; Zalaquette, 2005) have explored principal perceptions and the principal-school counselor relationship (Dollarhide et al., 2007; Janson et al., 2008; Waalkes et al., 2019). No known studies have examined principal and school counselor perceptions and experiences regarding implementation through the national and state plans. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the implementation of and support for CSCPs through the National Model and State Plan in Program of Distinction schools.

Methods

To examine the research question exploring the implementation of and support for CSCPs, we utilized a mixed-methods approach by analyzing both quantitative and qualitative data to

understand Program of Distinction recipients' perceptions and experiences. We employed an explanatory sequential design to broadly explore Program of Distinction principal and school counselor perceptions of the priorities, roles, activities, and expectations in implementing CSCPs. Through the explanatory sequential design, the following specific research questions examined posited:

1. What are the perceptions of principals and school counselors regarding the priorities, roles, activities, and expectations in implementing CSCPs?
2. How are the perceptions of principals and school counselors similar and different?
3. What are the experiences of principals and school counselors implementing CSCPs?
4. What are the experiences of principals and school counselors providing or further obtaining support for CSCPs?

We used purposeful sampling to identify participants who were 2018-2019 Program of Distinction recipients. As the award was first presented recognizing accomplishments from the 2018-2019 school year, five schools were recognized, including three elementary schools and two middle schools (Alabama School Counselor Association, 2021). As described in Table 1, the names of the schools are provided, as these data are publicly accessible online. Each of the five schools employed at least one full-time school counselor and one half-time school counselor. Our target population was 15 individuals from these recognized schools (5 principals, 10 school counselors).

Table 1

Description of the 2018-2019 Alabama School Counseling Program of Distinction Schools

School Name	District	Grade Levels	Total Student Population	% of Free/Reduced Lunch	Student-to-Counselor Ratio
Fairhope Elementary	Baldwin County	PK-3	1,020	26.18	510:1
Fairhope Intermediate	Baldwin County	4-6	878	22.89	439:1
Foley Middle	Baldwin County	7-8	763	64.74	382:1
Helena Elementary	Shelby County	K-2	847	23.38	565:1
Homewood Middle	Homewood City	6-8	1,026	24.66	513:1

Note. Information obtained from the Alabama State Department of Education (2021).

For the quantitative component, we administered the *Assessment for School Counselor Needs for Professional Development* survey (Dahir & Stone, 2014). Burnham, Dahir, Stone, and Hooper (2008) examined the survey's technical properties through reliability estimates and an exploratory principal component factor. Their findings suggested strong evidence of validity and reliability. The internal consistency evaluated by Cronbach's alpha coefficient was determined to be within the acceptable range of .69 to .94. A total of six factors were detected, and subscale correlations were all moderate to high, ranging from .20 to .57 ($p < .01$).

For the second qualitative phase, we used a semi-structured interview protocol. We sought information regarding their perceptions of the role and function of the school counselor as well as their perceptions and experiences implementing CSCPs. Participants additionally described their experiences providing or obtaining support, including the principal-school counselor relationship and strategies to increase program support.

Specifically, to address the first specific research question examining the perceptions of principals and school counselors of the priorities, roles, activities, and expectations in implementing CSCPs, we calculated descriptive statistics. Analyses included frequency distributions, measures of central tendency (i.e., mean, median), and dispersion (i.e., standard deviation) measured by survey item and construct. To examine similarities and differences between principals and school counselors in the second specific research question, we used inferential statistics. The independent variable, measured at the nominal level, was the participant's position (i.e., principal or school counselor). The dependent variable, measured at the interval level, was participants' survey responses as measured by the survey. Because of the study's small sample size, we utilized the nonparametric Mann-Whitney *U* to test the following null hypothesis:

> *There is no statistically significant difference between principals and school counselors in terms of their perceptions of the priorities, roles, activities, and expectations of the school counselor in implementing a CSCP.*

To answer the third and fourth specific research questions examining the experiences of principals and school counselors regarding program implementation and support, we coded the data by the interview question. Following an initial exploratory analysis of the codes, we grouped the codes by similarities and differences. After grouping the codes, we examined the data to identify all relevant categories. We further reduced the categories into broad cross-cutting themes, reaching the saturation point at which no new themes or details of existing themes emerged. Then, we developed the identified themes to provide a detailed description of the central phenomenon of participants' perceptions and experiences (Mills & Gay, 2019).

Finally, we coded for soft triangulation by comparing the results of both phases (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). We compared extreme survey responses (e.g., items with high and low means) with interview responses to provide a greater understanding of the general research question examining program implementation and support. Open-ended survey responses were compared to corresponding interview responses to provide cross-validity.

Results

The first phase yielded a 100% response rate as all 15 participants completed the survey. We had 8 of the 15 participants (53.33%) voluntarily participate in individual interviews (2 principals, 6 counselors; all but 2 from the elementary level).

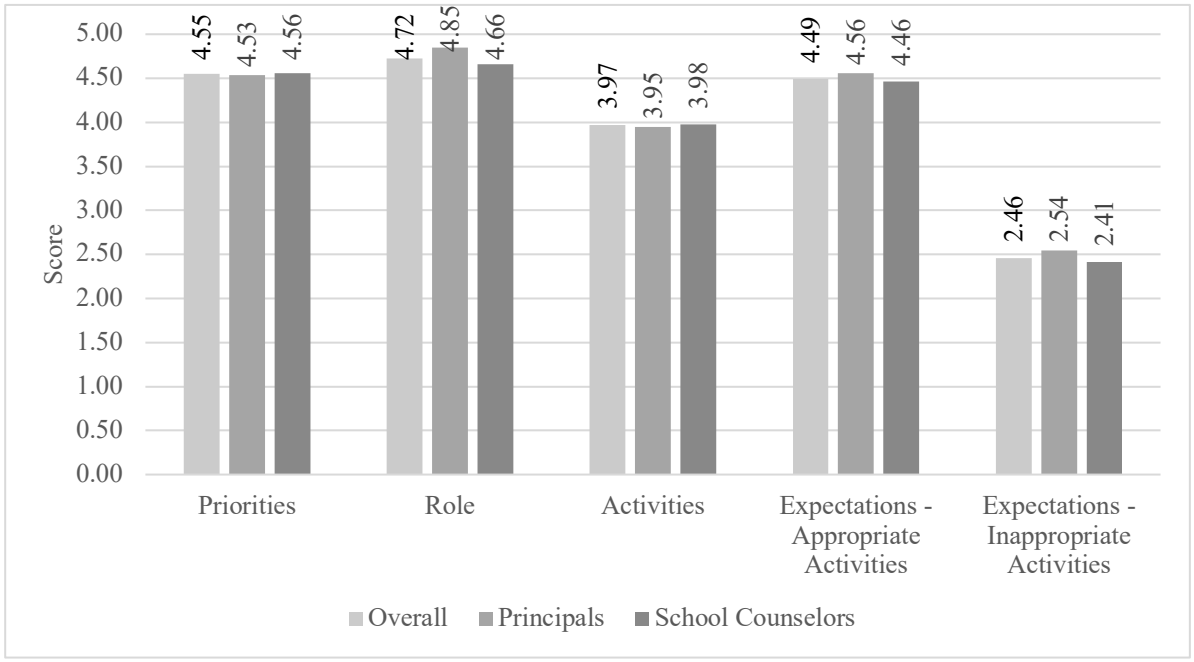
Overall means of survey responses among principals and school counselors indicated much agreement in perceptions. Considering priorities, principals' and school counselors' overall means were 4.53 and 4.56, respectively, indicating very minimal differences (≤ 0.03) in perceptions of school counseling priorities. Means of 4.85 and 4.66 were recorded for principals and school counselors, respectively, regarding perceptions of the school counselor's role, similarly indicating agreement (≤ 0.19 difference). It is interesting to note, however, that principals perceived the counselor's role to be more aligned with the National Model than counselors.

Addressing perceptions of activities, principals' overall mean was 3.95, and school counselors' was 3.98, indicating little to no differences (≤ 0.03) in perceptions of activities. Considering expectations, the means addressing ASCA-defined appropriate activities for

principals and school counselors were 4.56 and 4.46, respectively, indicating minimal differences (≤ 0.10). Means for items addressing ASCA-defined inappropriate activities for principals and school counselors were 2.54 and 2.41, respectively, similarly indicating minor differences (≤ 0.13). Figure 2 provides a visual representation of the means of each subscale overall and by participants' position.

Figure 2

Subscale Means Overall and by Position



In examining perceptions (i.e., priorities, roles, activities, and expectations) between principals and school counselors, Mann-Whitney *U* tests showed similar results by subscale, as summarized in Table 2. Similarly, we conducted Mann-Whitney *U* tests to examine differences in perceptions at the item level. Again, results indicated no statistically significant differences across any survey item.

Table 2

Principal and School Counselor Perceptions by Subscale

Subscale	Total	Principals	School Counselors			
	Mdn	*Mdn*	*Mdn*	*U*	*z*-value	*p*-value
Priorities	5.00	5.00	5.00	8608.00	1.02	0.31
Role	5.00	5.00	5.00	8224.00	-1.56	0.12
Activities	4.00	4.00	4.00	6529.00	0.27	0.79
Expectations	4.00	4.00	4.00	3418.00	-0.57	0.57

Note. *p ≤ .05 indicates a statistically significant difference between principals and school counselors.

Through qualitative analysis, we identified four cross-cutting themes describing participants' perceptions and experiences implementing and supporting CSCPs. As noted in Table 3, these themes were (1) advocacy, (2) collaboration, (3) principal-school counselor relationship, and (4) data use. All participants (n = 8) discussed advocacy, collaboration, the principal-school counselor relationship, and data use in describing their CSCP implementation and support. Specific participant quotes are provided to illustrate each theme further.

Participants described counselors as advocates for students and their programs. One counselor participant stated, "We're constantly looking for barriers that may be impacting students' success." In describing advocacy for program implementation, one principal participant described his school counselor as "really instrumental in maintaining a focus to follow the model with the greatest fidelity possible." Participants discussed their perceptions of and experiences in day-to-day collaboration with faculty/staff and the principal-counselor relationship. One counselor participant shared, "We work with general education and special education teachers…you just have to create those [collaborative] relationships." One principal participant discussed "having an open door, a willingness to listen, and building a collaborative relationship." Participants described the critical principal-school counselor relationship as essential for obtaining and providing implementation support. One counselor shared, "The biggest support, to me, is having a principal who values what you do and who you have built trust with." Principal participants spoke to their intentional efforts made to show tangible program support. Participants described their data use in CSCP implementation. One counselor participant shared, "We, in looking at our data, look at where we can impact our students' success…and develop programs to affect change." Participants described a continual process of collecting, analyzing, and reflecting on data. Data use was not only essential in participants' program implementation but also in gaining support for implementation.

Table 3

Qualitative Themes Emerging from Participants' Perceptions and Experiences (N = 8)

Theme	Example Code(s)	Example Quote	Corresponding SRQ(s)	n (%)
Advocacy	Removing barriers, student-centered	"We're constantly looking for barriers that may be impacting students' success."	1, 3, 4	8 (100)
Collaboration	Teamwork, working with stakeholders	"Everybody works as a team, and I think having a culture in a school that sees school counselors as an important team member is critical."	1, 3, 4	8 (100)
Principal-school counselor relationship	Resources, training	"The biggest support, to me, is having a principal who values what you do and who you have built trust with."	3, 4	8 (100)
Data use	Data-driven, outcome data	"We, in looking at our data, look at where we can impact our students' success…and develop programs to affect change."	1, 3, 4	8 (100)

Note: SRQ = Specific research question

We additionally found significant agreement among participants' quantitative and qualitative responses. For example, in the quantitative phase, participants indicated five items as extremely important, addressing counselors' work in assessment, collaboration, consultation, and counseling. Throughout the qualitative phase, participants clearly described these ASCA components. For example, one counselor participant stated, "Without communication and collaboration with all of the different stakeholders in a student's success, you cannot implement a comprehensive program." Similar results were found comparing each survey subscale with participants' interview responses.

Discussion, Implications, and Future Avenues of Research

In this study, participants described their perceptions and experiences implementing CSCPs. For example, participants emphasized school improvement and students' holistic needs through differentiated program delivery and services. This finding is consistent with Carey et al. (2012), who found that student outcomes covaried with the implementation of a differentiated program delivery system. Participants described their experiences implementing and supporting CSCPs and identified four cross-cutting themes of advocacy, collaboration, principal-school counselor relationship, and data use. Participants repeatedly mentioned the importance of the data use from their experiences implementing and supporting CSCPs. This finding is similar to Young and Kaffenberger (2011), who discovered that recipients of the national RAMP award valued data to use in program implementation because of observed positive student and school-wide benefits.

This study yields implications for practicing principals, school counselors, counselor educators, and professors of educational leadership. Participants discussed the importance of stakeholder understanding of the school counselor's role. As such, principals may benefit from familiarizing themselves with the National Model and the role of the school counselor. Participants discussed the importance of implementing CSCPs aligned with the National Model to fidelity. As such, school counselors may benefit from utilizing ASCA resources, including the Implementation Guide (ASCA, 2019b) and National Model implementation templates. Participants discussed the importance of collaboration in the principal-counselor relationship. In training future counselors and leaders, counselor educators and professors of educational leadership may benefit from providing opportunities for pre-service collaboration between educational leaders and school counselors, such as described by Morton and Upton (2020).

Future avenues of research could consider additional stakeholders—such as students, teachers, and parents/guardians—as this study considered the perceptions and experiences of principals and school counselors. This study described the perceptions and experiences of principals and school counselors from five schools receiving the Program of Distinction designation from the 2018-2019 school year. Future avenues of research could expand this study's findings to examine other Alabama schools, including all Alabama schools.

Another future avenue of research could examine the relationship of Program of Distinction status to student achievement, as has been examined in RAMP-designated schools (Akos et al., 2019; Wilkerson et al., 2013). As programs pursuing Program of Distinction and RAMP status must demonstrate improved student outcomes to achieve the designation, additional studies could examine student outcomes in several potential avenues. Studies could examine student outcomes before and after earned designation to measure potential differences. Additionally, studies could compare student outcomes in Program of Distinction-designated schools with student outcomes in non-designated schools. Understanding the relationship of

Program of Distinction status to student outcomes could potentially bring greater awareness to the role and work of school counselors.

As reported by participants in this study, CSCP implementation aligned with the State Plan and National Model is a complex process implemented over time. Additionally, support is essential for programs to implement these plans, particularly the principal's full support. As a result, school counselors should consider focusing their efforts on increasing and improving their advocacy, collaboration, principal-school counselor relationship, and data use. These critical findings may contribute to increased program implementation and support, so that more stakeholders, especially principals, may agree with the sentiment, "School counselors have a definite function in the school…and are worth whatever investment they require" (Cecil & Cecil, 1984, pp. 4-5).

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A Case Study Which Explores the Mindsets of Students Placed in Residential Care Home and Perceptions of Their Teachers

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Abstract

To enrich a nurturing school environment, educators must become aware of the social and emotional byproducts of student removal from traditional homes. Many schools host students while they are placed in residential facilities, a number that is increasing across the United States (Department of Health and Human Services, 2017). Educational leaders need to deal with this transition in society. With the changing landscape of more students displayed from their homes, educational leaders need to know how to prepare. This case study focused on female high school students placed in one residential facility attending one suburban school district located in Alabama. We used the conceptual framework of social and emotional learning. Our purpose was to qualitatively explore the academic growth mindset of adolescent female students placed in a residential group home and what perceptions the teachers have regarding their ability to learn. Using document analyses and interviews, we found that while most students had mindsets of being equal to their peers, they struggled with the perceived added pressures of performing at higher levels to be accepted as equals by peers and teachers alike. Classroom teachers believed that they do not distinguish their approaches toward students from a facility-of-care, contradicting the perceptions of the students themselves. Students felt additional tutoring and other help from the facility gave them a distinct advantage over their peers, as evidenced by their increased academic performance once enrolling at the residential facility. The lack of personal technology was identified as the most significant educational barrier for the students. Results gain insight into students' specific needs to better individualize educational environments. Although this study focused on female students, future research could include male or middle school-aged students to see if there are any differences. Due to pandemic regulations, observations were not allowed. Therefore, we recommend that studies be conducted that allow classroom observations to validate these interesting findings.

Keywords: residential care, facilities-of-care, mindset, trauma, social and emotional learning

Many schools host students while they are placed in residential care facilities, a number that is increasing across the United States (Department of Health and Human Services, 2017). Almost half a million children on any given day in the United States have been removed from their traditional homes and placed in some form of custodial care (Children's Rights, 2020) for reasons of abuse, neglect, drug and alcohol addiction, or a combination thereof. With the alarming rise in opioid abuse and other traditional maladies infecting our children's security, residential care facilities increasingly become secondary homes to more children than ever before. Today's educational leaders are tasked to reach and educate a subpopulation of students who may be more focused on surviving their home conditions than caring about learning in school. Students from these facilities may walk into schools each day with social-emotional baggage educators cannot fathom, yet the students are asked to be quiet, pay attention, and learn.

The aforementioned social-emotional baggage often negatively affects students' growth mindset. Growth mindset has long been shown through numerous research models to directly affect academic achievement (Boylan et al., 2018; Claro et al., 2016; Snipes & Tran, 2017). Growth mindset is defined as the belief that one's intelligence can ascend to higher levels over the life span of an individual as opposed to the notion we are all born with a set, concrete intellectual ability that is forever chiseled in our DNA (Boylan et al., 2018; Chao et al., 2017; Claro et al., 2016; Dego et al., 2018; Jach et al., 2018; Seaton, 2018). Snipes and Tran (2017) found that a combination of growth mindset between the teacher and the student is the vehicle in which higher academic achievement is carried to fruition. As the number of youths placed in non-traditional housing continues to rise due to abuse and drug addiction, much emphasis has been placed on understanding the dynamics of these children's lives and educating them. Researchers (e.g., Bick et al., 2015) have shown children experience trauma before, during, and after residing in a facility of care. Although institutional care of children is not seen as a solution to the ills that befall many of our youth, it is a civilized, if not predictable, the byproduct of adult behavior and supervision (Skoog et al., 2014).

Despite research on mindset in multiple populations exploring gender (Degol et al., 2018), socioeconomics (Chao et al., 2017, Claro et al., 2016), classroom teacher perceptions (Snipes & Tran, 2017), and career aspirations (e.g., science, mathematics, engineering, and technology careers; Degol et al., 2018), there are no known studies that have examined mindset in the population of students who reside in residential care facilities nor any that explore how mindset affects the academic achievement of this population to help guide the educational leader on what works. A greater emphasis in research studies has been placed on understanding the dynamics behind why children are placed in residential care facilities, what issues they face while there, the lasting effects of trauma associated with residential care, and how society can better serve these children. These students have also been known to have experienced trauma. Bick et al. (2015) have shown children experience trauma before, during, and after residing in a residential care facility. Institutional care, facilities-of-care, out-of-home care, residential care, and several other labels refer to similar environments complete with commonly associated programs and practices. Though known by many names, all residential care facilities are faced with the same charge, and that is to provide a nurturing, safe, and secure environment for everyday activities and to provide opportunities for children where there previously were none (Attar-Schwartz, 2014; Oliveira et al., 2015). Skoog et al. (2015) further stated that though this ideology is noble, out-of-home care is characterized as continual removal and placement in various facilities for children who have the misfortune of finding themselves in an environment other than their primary home. Therefore, the study's purpose was to investigate students' mindset who have experienced trauma and live in an

Alabama residential group home and the perceptions teachers possess about the same students' ability to learn.

Review of Literature

Our conceptual framework for this study was developed by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2019). Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which students understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2019) and is appropriate for adolescent development (Ross & Tolan, 2018). Thus, the CASAL conceptual framework was selected to approach adolescent development from a positive lens and viewpoint (Ross & Tolan, 2018).

CASEL has five core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Ross & Tolan, 2018). Self-awareness involves knowing your strengths and limitations and possessing a 'growth mindset.' Self-management encompasses effectively managing stress, controlling impulses, and motivating yourself to set and achieve goals. Social awareness is the understanding of the perspectives of others and empathizing with them. Relationship skills incorporate communicating clearly, listening, cooperating, resisting inappropriate social pressure, negotiating conflict, and seeking help when needed. Responsible decision-making includes making constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions.

Effective and coordinated strategies to help enhance students' social-emotional competence, academic performance, health, and citizenship have been researched to help prevent and reduce mental health and behavior problems. For example, this includes studies on SEL development for children reducing risk factors and fostering positive adjustment (Benson, 2006; Catalano et al., 2002; Guerra & Bradshaw, 2008; Weissberg et al. 2003), targeting positive effects on targeted social-emotional competencies and attitudes about self, others, and school (Durlak et al., 2011), and those with students' behavioral adjustment in increased prosocial behaviors (Ross & Tolan, 2018). These outcomes consistently built on positive reports to youth development or the prevention of negative behaviors (Catalano et al., 2002; Greenberg et al., 2001; Hahn et al., 2007; Wilson et al., 2001; Wilson & Lipsey, 2007).

Through her interest in why some students persevere through setbacks and others became devastated to the point of failing to continue, Dweck (2000) coined the terms "growth mindset" and "fixed mindset" to explain individuals' internal beliefs of intelligence and abilities. Growth mindset is malleable and can be developed in a positive trend, whereas a fixed mindset is just the opposite; intelligence is an innate quality and is fixed, static throughout one's lifetime and cannot be improved upon (Boylan et al., 2018; Chao et al., 2017; Claro et al., 2016; Degol et al., 2018; Jach et al., 2018; Seaton, 2018).

A positive growth mindset has long been associated with higher academic achievement (Boylan et al., 2018; Claro et al., 2016; Snipes & Tran, 2017). For example, Boylan et al. (2018) saw a growth mindset to prepare young learners to take more responsibility in their academic growth and achievement. Through their research of students in Chile, Claro et al. (2016) contended that growth mindset was a reliable litmus test in predicting positive academic achievement and development. Many researchers (e.g., Chao et al., 2017; Degol et al., 2018; Jach et al., 2018) have shown students achieve far more academically if they possess an attitude their abilities can be honed and developed rather than if they feel their intellectual traits are immutable. Snipes and Tran (2017) took this concept a bit further in strongly suggesting a very high correlation (r = .75)

between positive implicit theories and academic growth and achievement in secondary and post-secondary students.

While studies have addressed students' perspectives and attitudes regarding positive growth mindset, little is known regarding the effects of teachers' perspectives of growth mindset and how they aligned to student success in their classrooms (Boylan et al., 2018; Seaton, 2018). Focusing on students in grades 4-12 in Clark County School District in Nevada, Snipes and Tran (2017) found that what teachers exemplified through their speech and actions had a direct relational effect on students' mindset about their abilities to sharpen and grow their achievement in the classroom. These researchers used 'wise critical feedback,' a practice whereby students receive corrective responses because the teachers believe in the students' ability to grow and produce better work. They concluded that teachers' perceptions are critical as they can produce harmful, negative trends in students' growth and achievement.

A study such as Snipes and Tran's reiterated growth mindset's power as an important part of the intervention process to develop higher academic success. Because interventions using academic mindsets have shown positive effects on academic achievement, specific groups of students are more predisposed to benefit from growth mindset interventions. Due to the consistencies found in attitudes and beliefs among low-achieving and minority students regarding a positive growth mindset, intervening to foster better attitudes and beliefs of a growth mindset should be especially powerful for students in the marginal subgroups.

Supplementing literature on growth mindset were studies on trauma. The National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence (2013-2014) found that over 60% of children surveyed experienced some form of trauma, crime, or abuse in the prior year, with some experiencing multiple traumas (Finkelhor et al., 2015). Rice and Groves (2005) defined trauma as an exceptional experience in which powerful and dangerous events overwhelm a person's capacity to cope and may vary from acts of violence to life experiences such as divorce, drastic living changes, or even bullying. They contend that traumatic experiences can impact brain development and behavior inside and outside the classroom. Rosenthal (2018) has found that some students are frequently exposed to trauma whose brain functioning is impacted early. Sandstrom and Huerta (2013) have found that one's response to traumatizing events will vary depending on age, stage of development, intelligence level, family and school support.

When a child is exposed to trauma, one feels threatened, the reptilian brain takes control, shutting down other brain functions and shifting the brain and body into a reactive, fight-or-flee mode (Perry, 2014; Rosenthal, 2018). Often, students do not have the coping skills to manage traumatic events. It is estimated that each year that over one million children in the United States are diagnosed with a mental illness or disability that could be explained by prior trauma (Leahy, 2015).

The majority of educational research regarding trauma focused on supporting traumatized children in school (Cole et al., 2013; Cole et al., 2005; Tishelman et al., 2010). Youth who experience trauma are at risk of experiencing multiple academic challenges in all studies (Crosby, 2015; Hallet et al., 2018; Hernandez & Naccarato, 2010). In addition to academic challenges, trauma has been linked to a higher probability of school suspension, expulsion, and school failure (Crosby, 2015; Wolpow et al., 2009). The impact of trauma and chronic stressors on academics and other school areas results from the long-term or constant activations of the brain's stress response (Billias-Lolis et al., 2017; Perry & Daniels, 2016).

Whether studying growth mindset or trauma, researchers such as Durlak (2011) have addressed SEL as a concept that addresses students' self-awareness in their own emotions and the

ability to read and understand others' emotions exhibited in social interactions. While most SEL studies have targeted the general student population, Oliveira's (2014) research delved into the lack of social and emotional development for students who came from a non-traditional home and therefore had experienced some form of trauma. Other researchers (e.g., Boylan et al., 2018; Chao et al., 2017; Claro et al., 2016; Degol et al., 2018; Jach et al., 2018: Seaton, 2018) have focused on the efficacy of growth mindset in the general population as it pertains to academic achievement. Yet, only a handful of studies (e.g., Snipes & Tran, 2017) has focused on classroom teachers' growth mindset on at-risk populations such as students' placed at residential care facilities and their teachers' mindset regarding their ability to learn; and thus, the rationale for conduct our study on adolescents housed in a residential care facility.

Methods

We implemented an ethnographic research design to explore adolescents' growth mindsets placed in a residential care facility, and the perceptions teachers have regarding their abilities to learn. This design afforded us the ability to describe, analyze, and interpret those female students' mindsets living in a residential facility and those who teach these individuals. We followed an intrinsic case design, as characterized by a case that is unusual and has merit in and of itself (Creswell, 2012). Through this research design, we addressed six specific research questions:

1. What are the educational mindsets of high school-aged female students from the residential care facility and their behavioral and achievement accomplishments?
2. What are teachers' perceptions regarding the overall mindsets of these students placed in a residential care facility?
3. What perceptions do students from a residential care facility have about their ability to increase their academic performance?
4. What are the teachers' perceptions of these female students' ability to increase their academic performance?
5. What overall perceptions do teachers have regarding educating students from a residential care facility?

We utilized purposeful convenient sampling (Creswell, 2014) of female students and teachers living in Alabama. The guardians for 15 female students, ages 15-18, were contacted to obtain permission. As less than 10% of the students residentially-placed were males, we opted for females participants only. Additionally, 10 high school teachers at the area high school were invited to participate. Of these possible participants, four female students (and guardians) and four teachers agreed to participate, as characterized in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Study's Student and Teacher Participants

Participant	Grade Level/Subject	Gender	Race/ethnicity
Student A	Grade 12	Female	African American
Student B	Grade 10	Female	African American
Student C	Grade 9	Female	African American
Student D	Grade 9	Female	Caucasian
Teacher 1	History/Social Studies	Female	African American
Teacher 2	History/Social Studies	Male	Caucasian
Teacher 3	Mathematics	Male	Caucasian
Teacher 4	Science	Male	Caucasian

While we initially planned for in-person interviews and classroom observations, COVID necessitated the interviews be conducted virtually and precluded classroom observations. However, the interviews that were conducted allowed us to gain insight into the mindset of those in and involved with residential group homes. For student interviews, we asked semi-structured questions developed to stimulate views and opinions from the participants. Examples of student interview questions included: "What advantages did you have in this residential facility that other students may not have?" and "Describe ways in which you feel educators may have treated you differently from other students." Two examples of teacher interview questions were: "What differences in the classroom, if any, have you noticed between those students from students residentially-placed and students from a traditional home?" and "Describe any strategies/interventions you have incorporated into your lessons to help these students."

Besides interviews, we collected artifact data on the female students and participating teachers through the local school counselors' help, including attendance records, behavioral infractions, achievement reports (including grades and standardized test scores), and length of enrollment. Teacher information collected included which courses were taught and the number of students they had from the residential home. Table 2 provides an alignment between our specific research questions and the source of data collected.

Table 2

Relationship of Specific Research Question and Sources for Data Collection

Specific Research Question	Data Collection
…educational mindsets of high school-aged female students from the residential facilities, and their behavior and academic accomplishments?	SIQ 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 11; SIF Attendance; Discipline, Academics

…teacher perceptions regarding the overall mindsets of students placed in a residential facility?	TIQ 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 9. 10
...student perceptions have about their ability to increase their academic performance?	SIQ 5, 6, 9, 10, 11; SIF Academics
…teachers' perceptions of these female students' ability to increase their academic performance?	TIQ 4, 5, 7, 8, 9
…overall teachers' perceptions regarding educating students?	SIQ 2, 3, 4, 7, 8; TIQ 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 9. 10; SIF Attendance; Discipline; Academics
What gaps exist in students' and teachers' perceptions regarding the students' ability to increase their academic performance?	SIQ 5, 6, 9, 10, 11; TIQ 4, 5, 7, 8, 9; SIF Academics

Note: SIQ and TIF were interviews with students and teachers, respectively. SIF and TIF were from the data collection forms for students and teachers, respectively.

While we used document analyses to capture highlights of artifact data, all interviews were taped and transcribed. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used to analyze results. According to Peoples (2021), IPA is the most appropriate analysis for it helps the researchers make sense of an experience or phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009). IPA allowed us to move back-and-forth between participants' transcribed interviews and our understandings of what those experiences meant. During this process, researchers aimed to understand experiences and make sense of those experiences (Peoples, 2021; Braun & Clarke, 2013). We used a three-step IPA process that involved first using open coding during our exploratory analysis to acquire a general sense of the transcriptions and develop initial codes and attention to fidelity by verifying written notes matched digital transcriptions, as recommended by Creswell (2014). Secondly, we identified categories by employing axial coding by labeling and color-coding broad patterns and examining coding redundancy, as recommended by Saldaña (2009). Thirdly, we developed themes to represent a broader meaning of the findings using selective coding on the emerging categories, as Creswell (2014) further recommended.

Results

In analyzing the current length of stay, attendance for the first initial 20 days and since, results revealed that the four students have been enrolled 8-14 months and are attending high school more than 95% of the time since been placed at the residential group home. (see Table 3) None of the four students' cumulative records indicated any disciplinary infractions since arriving. Furthermore, the academic performance had improved as the four students have shown positive academic growth across core subjects as evidenced by their overall GPA increase. (see Table 4)

Table 3

Student's Length of Enrollment since Residential-placed and School Attendance

Student	Months in Enrollment	Days 1-20 Attendance	Days 20-40 Attendance	Year-to-Date Attendance %
A	11	20	20	100

B	10	20	20	97
C	8	20	20	100
D	14	20	20	88
Average	10.75	20	20	96.25

Table 4

Student Classroom Performance: Class Averages by Subject and Grade Point Average Before and During Residentially Placement

Student	LA	Math	Science	SS	ELa	ELb	ELc	GPA Before	GPA After	GPA Difference
A	6	33	49	54	84	91	100	NA	3.33	N/A
B	74	80	88	88	85	100	84	2.67	3.07	+ 0.4
C	91	84	65	60	34	97	60	3.16	NA	NA
D	78	90	100	91	70	0	55	2.75	2.96	+ 0.21

Notes. EL stood for electives. Class averages were out of 100 possible points. The cumulative GPA scores were based on a 4.0 GPA and calculated before and since enrollment. Some cumulative records were found to be incomplete. Current class averages were found to be incomplete due to pandemic-related isolation. Only final subject averages are factored in students' GPA after placement.

From the interviews, we had three students who commented on how using facility-based tutors tended to give them a perceived advantage over their peers. Additionally, students and teachers mentioned the importance of having someone at the facility hold them responsible and closely monitor their academic progression. However, limited access to personal technology was found to be a barrier that students from the group facility and teachers in their school mentioned.

In addressing the educational mindsets of high school-aged female students from the residential care facilities, we found through thematic analyses of interviews that students felt they must achieve higher levels than their peers to be seen as equal. This perception directly contrasted with teachers' perceptions. For example, one teacher specified that "we do not treat the students from the facility any differently than other students as they typically do not know which students are from the group home."

With the teacher interviews focused on overall mindset, five themes emerged. Summarized in Table 5, at least three of those interviewed identified the followings needs: (a) treating each student the same (equality), (b) having student access to personal computers (technology), (c) focusing on major tasks, (d) finishing assignments, and (e) developing relationships between teachers and students. In contrast, Table 6 depicts the themes that emerged from the student interviews regarding the educational mindset. Here, we found themes to be: (a) having higher standards, (b) accessing tutors, (c) assessing counselors, (d) being perceived as equal, and (e) having caring teachers.

Table 5
Themes Emerging from Teacher Interviews about Overall Mindset

Theme	Operational Definition	Actual Quote	N=4	%
Equality	On the same level as others	"They're no different than any other teenagers."	3	75
Technology	Internet and computer access	"Where they may not have a personal device."	2	50
Work Completion	Finishing classroom assignments	"Unwilling to complete work."	3	75
Focus	The ability to concentrate on a specific task	"Sometimes, their mind goes somewhere else."	3	75
Relationships	The connection between student and teacher	"It's been a positive experience."	4	100

Table 6
Themes Emerging from Student Interviews about Educational Mindset

Theme	Operational Definition	Actual Quote	#	%
Higher Standards	Achieve at a higher level	"Push myself [sic] more to show that my academic level is higher than my label."	2	50
Tutor	To provide additional help	"I do have extra help from my tutors here."	2	50
Counselors	A person trained to give guidance	"We have to meet with counselors."	3	75
Equal	On the same level as others academically	"I think I'm just as good as they are in class."	2	50
Care	Teachers show concern for the well-being of the students	"He told me… how I'm going to improve myself through the years, how you're going to better yourself for your future."	2	50

While we holistically provided results for our document analyses which included student and teacher characteristics and interview analyses (including overall mindset, student educational mindsets, and perceptions of abilities to increase achievement), we must tie these results back to the six specific research questions posed in this study. Table 7 displays the results integrated by showing the relationship of the six specific research questions, data sources, and the findings.

Table 7
Integrated Findings by Specific Research Question

Specific Research Question	Findings
…educational mindsets of high school-aged female students from the residential facilities, and their behavior and academic accomplishments?	The female students interviewed felt that they had the same academic capabilities as their peers. CASEL maintains self-awareness is a building block of social and emotional learning.
…teacher perceptions regarding the overall mindsets of students placed in a residential facility?	The teachers stated that they did not view the female students from residential care facilities any differently. Within CASEL, SEL instruction and classroom climate hone the five competency areas of SEL.
...student perceptions have about their ability to increase their academic performance?	The female students felt as though they could learn as well as any other student. Healthy self-awareness, social awareness, and self-management lead to increased academic performance, according to CASEL.
…teachers' perceptions of these female students' ability to increase their academic performance?	The teachers perceived the female students as equals, and many stated they did not know which female students lived at the residential facility. Within CASEL, SEL instruction and classroom climate hone the five competency areas of SEL.
…overall teachers' perceptions regarding educating students?	The teachers felt students from a facility-of-care were no different from their peers in how they are treated and perform in the classroom. CASEL maintains classroom culture, established by the teacher, builds SEL among students.
What gaps exist in students' perceptions of a residential facility and teachers have regarding the students' ability to increase their academic performance?	While both parties felt the female students were no different than their peers, the female students did feel as though the teachers did not view them as equal. Social awareness, self-awareness, and responsible decision-making are the frameworks of CASEL's SEL model.

Note: SIQ and TIF were interviews with students and teachers, respectively. SIF and TIF were from the data collection forms for students and teachers, respectively.

Discussion, Implications, and Future Avenues of Research

Our study delved into the mindsets of students who resided at a residential care facility and sought to determine what perceptions they have regarding their educational experiences. Their classroom teachers' perceptions regarding the education they received were investigated to understand if gaps exist between teacher and pupil. This study was designed and grounded based upon research themes emerging from the literature review, especially studies on social and emotional learning, in-home care facilities, trauma-informed teaching, and growth mindset.

We received consent from 4 of the 15 females students placed at one residential care facility and 4 of the 10 teachers. Through this ethnographic intrinsic case study, we were described, analyzed, and interpreted the mindsets of those female students living in a residential facility and those who teach these individuals. We used document analyses to capture highlights of artifact data and employed interpretative phenomenological analyses of transcribed interviews.

Based on the information gained through individual virtual interviews of both students and teachers and longitudinal academic achievement data and other records, four groups of stakeholders have been identified as having a vested interest in the mindsets and perceptions of female students who reside in this residential care facility: students living in the chosen facility, educational leaders and teachers at the local high school attended by the students chosen for this study, facility-employed counselors at the residential home of the students who were chosen for this study, and residential managers responsible for the well-being of the students living there.

Students who reside in the chosen facility can benefit greatly from knowing and understanding classroom teachers' thoughts and feelings who have taught multiple students from this group home over the past several years. Additionally, educational leaders and classroom teachers need to understand many of these students' misgivings and negative minds regarding how they fit in with local school cultures and populations. Educational leaders will be better positioned to assist both their teachers and counselors to help these students realize there is a difference in beliefs between classroom teachers in their building and those of students from a group home. Counselors at the high school involved in this study have the opportunity to take the disparity highlighted by the data and provide needed support and services to students from the chosen group home. Counselors employed by the facility in which these students reside, and in particular, could benefit from understanding the misgivings students have regarding their teachers' perceptions. The residential managers, house parents, and directors of this residential facility are charged with providing stress-free learning environments with minimal distractions, especially at the site where this study took place. Students interviewed for this study suggested homework proved difficult due to distractions commonly encountered while at home, which houses several students. By becoming aware of this barrier, facility managers can make changes in their environments to increase the likelihood of stress-free learning at home.

For future research avenues, a longitudinal study of students from this and other residential care facilities is recommended to benefit these students and educators. By expanding similar research to include students from other types of residential facilities, males, and students who are younger, educators and students and their social workers could provide services to include targeted strategies and interventions that move beyond this study's narrow focus. Educational leaders and others could also benefit from a study incorporating males to determine if there are similarities and differences in mindset by gender and various backgrounds.

Educators and caregivers have signed on for a moral, ethical, and professional charge to get to know and understand each of their students in preparation for providing a positive educational and personal experience for them all. Suppose students who have been uprooted from

one traumatic environment and placed in another traumatic environment, albeit for different reasons, are to find their place among the peaceful. In that case, all parties must work together to gain insight into their plight and work around the present barriers to produce a happy and well-educated adult. Intervention must happen early and often from various fronts to eliminate the damage adults initiated in the first place. This trail to redemption begins with understanding the mindsets and perceptions of students and teachers. It is the least educators can do and is expected of us both as professionals acting morally and ethically.

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To Examine Teachers' Perception of Co-teaching and Student Achievement

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Rural school leaders are faced with challenges to close the achievement gap between subgroups, mainly general and special education. Schools and school systems face several barriers to move forward with positive trends in the data provided by the Alabama State Department of Education. The purpose of this study was to examine teachers' perceptions of co-teaching and the impact it had on student achievement between general and special education subgroups. The study employed a sequential mixed method design. The questionnaire's qualitative data showed the following themes about teachers' perception of co-teaching and student achievement: collaboration, engagement, professional development and planning, and achievement. The quantitative archived data for third, fourth, and fifth graders data showed that there's no significant difference between groups in co-taught and non-co-taught classrooms based on the One-way ANOVA Post Hoc statistical test. The study's findings may assist rural area leaders with research-based strategies that will help teaching and learning to potentially close the achievement gap between subgroups.

Keywords: Achievement Gap, Co-teaching, Rural, Student Achievement, Additional Targeted Support and Improvement (ATSI).

The focus of this study was to examine teachers' perception of co-teaching and the impact co-teaching has on student achievement in general and special education subgroups. According to Riser-Kositsky (2019), 13.7% of students in the United States ranging in age (3-21) received special education services during the 2017-2018 school year. Alabama currently serves 12.2 percent of the student population with special education services. For over a decade (2007-2018), students identified as special education have increased from 6.5 million to 7 million. Statistical numbers are steadily growing due to the process to be identified if a student should receive services. Special education eligibility is bound by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), but there is no one rule to determining if a student qualifies (Riser-Kositsky, 2019). There are currently 13 types of disabilities. The disabilities are as follows: autism, deaf-blindness, developmental delay, emotional disturbance, hearing impairment, intellectual disability, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairment, other health impairment, specific learning disability, speech or language impairment, traumatic brain injury, and visual impairment (Riser-Kositsky, 2019). Therefore, more students are being identified with learning disabilities in rural and urban area schools, and the achievement gap is steadily increasing throughout the summative assessments given yearly. The study focused on examining teachers' perceptions of co-teaching and the impact that co-teaching had on student achievement in general and special education subgroups which sought to answer the question: What are the differences in the perceptions of the impact of co-teaching on student achievement between general and special education teachers?

Literature Review

This section explores related literature that starts from the history of special education to closing the achievement gap between general and special education subgroups. This review starts with an overview of the History of Special Education, progressing into No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), moving toward Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), inclusion, co-teaching, student achievement, teacher perception of students with disabilities, teachers' perception of co-teaching, theoretical framework, and summary. Research-based strategies must be identified to assist schools and overall school systems with student achievement, with an increasing number of subgroups being identified with achievement gaps.

The History of Special Education

As we know it, in today's K-12 schools, special education began with the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (Public Law 94-142) in 1975 (Wright, 2020). Programs for children with specific learning disabilities (called "brain injury," or "minimal brain dysfunction") became more common in the 1940s (Wright, 2020). The political language identifying disabilities evolved into many different forms since the beginning of programs that began serving this population of students.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

The concern remains around quality education for all children. According to the U.S. Department of Education, The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Section 504 addresses protections for students with disabilities. Section 504 is a federal law designed to protect the rights of individuals with disabilities in programs and activities that receive federal financial assistance from the government (Ennis, Blanton & Katsiyannis, (2017).

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed by President Obama on December 10, 2015. This bipartisan measure reauthorizes the 50-year-old Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the nation's national education law, and longstanding commitment to equal opportunity for all students. Fusarelli & Ayscue (2019) stated, “ESSA was intended to fix NCLB’s many flaws, particularly its narrow emphasis on using standardized tests to measure school performance and hold educators accountable for student achievement."

Alabama Literacy Act (2019)

In an effort to improve reading outcomes for students across Alabama, the Alabama Legislature passed the Alabama Literacy Act, which became law on June 10, 2019. This legislation extends comprehensive information and other guidance for educators to focus concentrated and systematic efforts to improve the reading skills of all public school students in early literacy so that every student is reading at or above grade-level by the end of third grade (Alabama Literacy Act, 2019).

Inclusion

In the inclusive school, all students are educated in general education programs. Inclusion is when a student with individual learning and behavioral needs is taught full-time in the general education program. Essentially, inclusion means that the student with special education needs is attending the general school program, enrolled in age-appropriate classes 100% of the school day (Idol, 1997). Idol (2006) examined and described how special education services were provided in four elementary schools and four secondary schools in a large metropolitan school district in a southwestern city.

Co-teaching

According to the U.S. Department of Education, (Aud et al., 2012) schools, and classrooms of the 21st century represent diverse student populations representative of our larger society. Some of that increased diversity reflects a growing number of students with disabilities who are included in general education class environments. The push for inclusive education has been the focus of many educational systems all over the world over the past decade. This push has seen a lot of students with disabilities, who were once educated in segregated settings, moved into regular education settings with their peers. This trend towards inclusive schooling escalated the need for collaboration among teachers (Chitiyo & Brinda, 2018).

Student Achievement

There have been studies done on co-teaching and student achievement. Reinhiller (1996) stated Students with LD might benefit from collaboration between general education teachers and special education that is directed at increasing the likelihood of students' success and keeping students in school. Time spent on collaboration between the teachers of general education and special education is an essential contributor to student success (Reinhiller, 1996). Saint-Laurent, Fournier, & Lessard (1993) investigated the effects of an in-class service model on the academic

achievement of students with and without disabilities and students at risk. The results show significant improvement in reading and math for the students with and without disabilities, but not the students with learning disabilities (LD) in the at-risk group.

Teacher Perception of Students with Disabilities

Children go to school academically and socially learn to become adults who are eventually productive members of society. For learners with disabilities, however, researchers and educators predominantly focus on the psychosocial influences of inclusion, and very little attention is paid to the actual academic learning that transpires when learners with disabilities attend mainstream classes. In a study of inclusion in Lesotho (Johnstone & Chapman, 2009), teachers were found to teach learners with disabilities in their classes in the few extra minutes they had 44. Moreover, the teachers admitted that their pedagogical approaches were not effective for learners with disabilities but were fine for the rest of the class (Johnstone & Chapman, 2009), indicating that ensuring learners with disabilities actually were engaged and participating in the learning process within the classroom was not a priority for some teachers.

Teachers' Perception of Co-teaching

Although the co-taught classroom should be the best possible environment for students with disabilities based on the combined talent, knowledge, and experience of the educators, this is not always the case. There are deterrents to the potential success of the co-taught classroom that are differentiated into two categories, structural and perceived (King-Sears, Brawand, Jenkins & Preston-Smith, 2017). Structural deterrents for co-teachers include those elements of the school system out of direct teacher control. A lack of time in the school day for co-planning, pairing the best possible co-teaching teams, and a lack of professional development for co-teachers are all structural issues (Cook & Friend, 1995). Although these have an undeniable impact on the co-teacher success, they have potential remedies.

Methods

The following research questions were answered: First, what are the differences in the perceptions of co-teaching on student achievement between general and special education teachers? Second, how does assessment data show the difference in student achievement in co-taught vs. non-co-taught classrooms? The research hypothesis stated that there is a difference between co-teaching on student achievement in different sub-groups in a rural education classroom.

Research Design and Rationale

Throughout the research study, a sequential mixed-method design was used. The study consisted of quasi-experiments that are conducted in field settings in which random assignment is difficult or impossible. They are often conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of treatment, such as an educational intervention. In contrast, sequential experimental designs treat the sample size as a random variable by allowing sequential interim analyses and decision making based on cumulative data and previous design decisions while maintaining appropriate control over experiment-wise errors in decision making (Salkind, 2010). The study focused on 50 general and

special education teachers in co-taught and non-co-taught classrooms in rural Black Belt area schools in West Alabama based on the qualitative study sample size calculator. A mixed-methods design incorporates quantitative and qualitative data to answer a research question in which one type of data is used to inform the other in some way (Privitera, & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2019). Quantitative research data came from archived third, fourth, and fifth-grade fall and winter performance series growth measurements, which compares two scores on a similar test given multiple times a year so student progress can be easily identified. The analysis of the data from the questionnaire and archived data provided much-needed information for rural area school systems on how to close the achievement gaps of special and general education subgroups through co-teaching. The results will also assist school districts with implementing co-teaching strategies that will benefit both teachers and students if utilized successfully to increase their academic achievement level.

Population and Sample

The setting for this study was Rural West Alabama Black Belt area schools. The study included approximately ten schools within the 18 counties of the Black Belt. The schools consisted of K-12 schools with diverse ethnic groups and students with different exceptionalities. The schools' faculty consisted of administrators, general and special education teachers. The sample consisted of 50 general and special education teachers in rural Black Belt area schools in West Alabama. The participants in the questionnaire consisted of different certified personnel. Specialty area teachers were excluded from this study due to these individuals not working in a co-teaching setting in core subject classes with general and special education students. The study focused on examining general and special education teachers' perceptions of co-teaching on student achievement in co-taught and non-co-taught classrooms. This sampling better suited the study because I examined general and special education teachers' perceptions in co-taught and non-co-taught classrooms.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to examine teachers' perceptions of co-teaching and student achievement. According to Braun and Clarke (2013), thematic analysis is flexible in that there is no specific research design; it can be utilized for case studies, phenomenology, generic qualitative, and narrative inquiry, to name a few. The open and closed-ended teacher questionnaire was administered, and the researcher will look for common themes or threads throughout the respondent's replies. Teachers' perception of co-teaching and the impact on student achievement is consistently viewed by both general and special education teachers. The themes that were coded from the questionnaire were consistent with the participants' responses to the questions on co-teaching. Professional development, planning, collaboration, and achievement were all tied together from the analysis drawn from the coding of the questionnaire. The data was transcribed by color-coding the unique identifiers utilized by all respondents. The researcher matched the color codes from the respondents to development the listed themes that grew into patterns from what the general and special education teachers perceived as necessary components to close the achievement gap between subgroups.

Paired t-test was used when the researcher is interested in the difference between two variables for the same subject. Often the two variables are separated by time. The paired sample t-test requires the sample data to be numeric and continuous, as it is based on a normal distribution. One sample t-test was used to determine whether the sample mean is statistically different from a known or hypothesized population mean. The test is a parametric test. A one-sample t-test is a hypothesis test for determining whether the mean of a population is different from some known (test) value. The researcher begins by selecting a sample of observations from the population of interest and estimates the population mean by calculating the mean of the sample (Salkind, 2010). A two-way ANOVA was used to estimate how the mean of a quantitative variable changes according to the levels of two categorical variables. Use a two-way ANOVA when you want to know how two independent variables, in combination, affect a dependent variable (Bevans, 2020). The data collected examined if student achievement is different in a co-taught versus non-co-taught classroom. ANOVA one-way repeated measures will examine the archived Scantron Performance series data. The data were compared using the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS). The test compared the differences between the groups. The test identified if the general and special education subgroup students increased or decreased from the fall to the winter assessment in a co-taught vs non-co-taught classroom.

The following quantitative analysis will answer RQ2 from the archived Scantron Performance series third, fourth, and fifth-grade fall and winter data. The data was analyzed from co-taught and non-co-taught third, fourth, and fifth-grade classrooms with comparable schools in the West Alabama Blackbelt area. The grades and classes were determined based on the rural location and comparable demographics of the school. The classes were either deemed as co-taught or non-co-taught. The total number of students both co-taught and non-co-taught was 125. Co-taught students were 61, and non-co-taught was 64. There were 75 females, and 50 males that made up the student population of third, fourth, and fifth grade classes. Out of the 125 students, 27 were classified as special education students who had an IEP.

The Scantron Performance series data were analyzed through SPSS by running a paired t-test, one t-test of two means independent, and one-way Anova. The paired t-test was used to find a difference in pre and post-scores for third, fourth, fifth, and all grades Special Education (SPE) for co-taught and non-co-taught classes. T-test of two means independent was used to determine a difference between third, fourth, fifth, and all grades SPE mean scores. One-way Anova was ran on all grades co-taught and non-co-taught was to see if co-teaching played a difference in student achievement in both classrooms on general and special education students. Teachers and students had no prior knowledge of the study. The study utilized archived data from the previous year for analysis. The researcher chose third, fourth, and fifth grades because all are accountability grades and are assessed yearly through a summative assessment. Also, more students become identified with their exceptionality and receive an Individualized Educational Plan around second grade. The statistical data in this study allowed the researcher to determine the accuracy of the hypotheses of the co-teaching model. Additionally, the researcher was able to answer RQ2 based on the findings from the data analyzed.

Summary of Findings

Analysis of the data and findings from the questionnaire and archived data revealed information about teachers' perception of co-teaching and the impact it had on student achievement

and if co-taught vs. non-co-taught classes had an impact on student achievement in special and general education subgroups.

RQ1: What are the differences in the perceptions of co-teaching on student achievement between general and special education teachers? Teachers' perception of co-teaching and the impact on student achievement was consistently viewed from both general and special education teachers. The themes that were coded from the questionnaire were consistent with the participants' responses to the questions about co-teaching. Professional development, planning, collaboration, and achievement were all tied together from the analysis drawn from the coding of the questionnaire. Findings indicated that teachers related professional development, planning, collaboration, and engagement to the alignment of the success of all students throughout co-teaching.

The quantitative findings revealed the results from analyzing the third, fourth, and fifth grade archived Scantron Performance series summative data to answer RQ2. How does assessment data show the impact of student achievement in co-taught vs, non- co-taught classrooms? The results yielded 13 hypothesis from the different test ran. The researcher ran a paired t-test for co-taught and non-co-taught classes for all grades and SPE all grades specifically, one t-test of two means independent for all grades and SPE all grades specifically, and One-way Anova for all grades to determine if there was a difference in co-taught vs. non-co-taught classrooms in rural areas schools in the Blackbelt area in West Alabama. Findings also showed that between co-taught and non-co-taught classrooms in rural area schools scores were different, but not significantly different through the co-teaching model. The data indicated that the mean score for co-taught vs. non-co-taught was greater in all grade levels. Moreover, after removing SPE for all grades, the results still showed the same for the mean being greater in co-taught vs. non-co-taught rural classrooms. However, the average mean scores for SPE was 1959 for all grades, and for general education students all grades with a mean score of 2275 which identifies a significant achievement gap between subgroups from fall to winter performance series results.

Conclusions

The research study has given the researcher an opportunity to explore an issue that has become more important yearly. Districts that choose to utilize the co-teaching model should make sure that every component is outlined before full implementation. If school districts allow input from the practitioners, there are greater chances of full implementation and closing the achievement gap. Conducting this study has allowed the researcher to explore a concern that is at the forefront of all rural school districts that have been identified by the state.

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Disparities in Judgment: A Case of Concern in Testing and Assessment

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Abstract

Without question, faculty (regardless of discipline) should be equipped with the necessary skills to assess students fairly and ethically. This study focuses on the central and prevailing importance of faculty judgment and how that judgment (or lack thereof) influences perceptions related to ethics and assessment of students. The study outlines the results from a scenario-based survey (adopted by Green, Johnson, Kim & Pope, 2007). The survey was given to in-service teachers across a K-12 school district and measures whether or not teachers either strongly agreed or strongly disagreed when requested to judge the ethics of various assessment practices presented. Findings revealed that sharp divisions exist among educators related to assessing whether something is or is not an ethical assessment practice.

Keywords: evaluation, assessment, ethical, faculty, judgment

If one is looking for a "flashpoint" in education, it is the assigning of grades and the controversy that surrounds the ethics related to the assessment of students. In large part, assessment remains the one area where, despite a basic foundation within educational preparation programs promoting summative and formative assessment, few "guidelines" are designed that focus on the principles that should guide "ethical assessment practices" (Green, Johnson, Kim & Pope, 2007, p. 999; Popham, 2017). This lack of guidance within teacher preparation programs has been attributed to unethical grading practices that can either largely go unchecked or (once surfaced) has led to community backlash and legal woes for educational entities.

Further, controversial policies like "no-zero" policies (which routinely "ban [faculty from issuing] grades of less than 50%" are raising ethical concerns as well (Fink 2018; Walker, 2016, para.1). Such controversial ethical issues surrounding grades have led to firings of teachers for refusing to comply or resignations altogether (Fink 2018; Walker, 2016,). Indeed, in 2018, an eighth-grade Social Studies teacher in St. Lucie, Florida, reached internet fame and thrusted her school district into controversy by posting her final message to students on Facebook (after being fired) that read*: "Bye Kids. Mrs. Tirado loves you and wishes you the best in life! I have been fired for refusing to give you a 50% for not handing anything in"* (Fink, 2018, para. 1). Equally important, other ethical issues have surfaced related to teachers lacking sound judgment in grading altogether. For example, a graduate student at Lehigh University in Pennsylvania (after receiving a "C" in a course that led to her dismissal from her program), sued when it surfaced that she he was given a zero for classroom discussion due to her behavior during classroom discussions (Zotter, 2019). Following years of litigation, the appellate panel stated that "While another instructor might have given a more lenient grade than zero for these infractions, we are reluctant to make a judicial determination to overturn [the] grade" (Zotter, 2019, para. 6). Despite the school's legal victory, in this case, the time and expense of such litigations are costly and can damage the reputation of the institution. Guidelines and professional development for instructors would help to avoid such "follies", improve ethical assessment practices, and prevent costly litigation.

Indeed, similar grade challenges, like the University of Texas San Antonio Student Government Association voting that its grading system was flawed, are growing (Davila, 2018; Rhor, 2012; Sloan, 2014; Zaretsky, 2014). Faced with growing grade challenges, the Texas Supreme Court, ruling on a separate case, stated that courts should only intervene in grade matters when the "school did not exercise professional judgment" (Feldman, 2019, para. 3). Hence, professional judgment is key in determining whether or not evaluation and assessment are fair and just, and educational entities are vulnerable if this is not addressed via professional training of its faculty.

Purpose and Significance

Professional judgment is key and significant in determining whether or not evaluation and assessment are fair and just. If unaddressed, education suffers, for the assessment of students has major implications and directly impacts education at its very core. Thus, its vital that faculty perceptions regarding what is or is not ethical as it relates to assessment are not only examined, but measured to determine if gaps exist. Hence, the central purpose of the study was to examine whether or not educators recognize and understand what is or is not ethical within assessment parameters and practices. Specifically, the study measures the degree in which agreement or disagreement among licensed K-12 educators is reached after examining various assessment scenarios to determine if ethics were violated. This study is significant for it is designed to

illuminate whether or not there are gaps in educators' perceptions related to ethical or unethical assessment practices, and if so, what should school districts and post-secondary entities do in order to combat such discrepancies and improve validity in assessment. Daily, K-12 teachers are faced with having to make professional judgments as it relates to assessment practices and oftentimes these professional judgments are questioned or disputed, and in some cases, result in litigation. Thereby, identify gaps in understanding of what is ethical or unethical practices in assessment, and illuminating the need for continuous professional development, is important and serves a key significant purpose in improving assessment outcomes.

Review of Literature

Efforts to guide ethical practices in assessment have been outlined in various publications to include: The Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing jointly published by the American Educational Research Association, the American Psychological Association, and the National Council on Measurement in Education (2014). Other publications include the Standards for Teacher Competence in the Educational Assessment of Students published by the American Federation (1990), and the Student Evaluation Standards outlined by the Joint Committee on Standards for Education (JCSEEE) which was published in 2003. However, despite these combined efforts, research shows that publications addressing the matter are not concrete or specific enough and do not render situational specific guidance for educators to properly vet situations and apply specific ethical standards to common scenarios (Fan, Johnson, Liu, Zhang, Liu & Zhang, 2019; Gipps, 1994; Green et al., 2007).

In addition, textbooks have also attempted to outline specific "ethical principles" that can serve to "guide ethical judgments related to assessment"; however, they do not provide essential guidance in response to how educators can make better "day-to-day judgment" altogether (Brookhart & McMillan, 2019; Fan et al., 2019; Feldman, 2018; Green et al., 2007, p. 1000; Heritage & Harrison, 2019; Popham, 2017). This deficit in the field of education, then, leads to ambiguity and lack of commonly established principles and core guidelines for educators across the spectrum to apply as judgment calls are being made. As such, K-12 school districts and post-secondary institutions rely on their own internal practices and policies to guide grading procedures. In doing so, there is no "common thread" within educational entities that serves as the "guiding North" that conjoins ethics and assessment in education. Educators are on their own, then, to figure out this connection, opposed to having standard ethical assessment practices that they can leveraged. As a result, school districts and post-secondary institutions are subject to increase lawsuits, firing and resignations related to unfair and unjust grading practices (Fink, 2018; McParland, 2020; Sloan, 2014).

Due to the lack of standardized ethical practices that should be adopted and implemented across K-12 and post-secondary education, "little research exists about the extent in which educators agree about the ethicality of student evaluation practices" altogether (Green, Johnson, Kim & Pope, 2008, p. 520). This is likely due to the fact that educators are not trained in this realm as undergraduates, and there is not generally agreed upon consensus about assessment practices and the ethics that surround them. This "lack of agreement [further] highlights the need for an overarching ethical framework from which to develop the capacity to make judgments about ethical assessment practices" (Gipps, 1994; Green et al., 2007, p.1000; Popham, 2000; Rasooli et al., 2018). And while some researchers promote the idea of establishing "ethical frameworks" that will help with "self-regulatory" guidelines for educators, to date, this has not been implemented

(Gipps, 1994; Green et al., 2007, p.1000). As such, there is no general consensus that guides educators—no litmus test—that helps to determine the ethicality of decisions reached related to assessment, yet there needs to be (Green et al., 2007).

Some researchers argue that codes should be established while others support the reliance on broader ethical principles like "Do No Harm" that Taylor and Nolen (2005) established that has been liberally applied as a guiding ethical principle, or the adage, "Treat others as you would have them to treat you". However, such principles do not always work, for in applying judgment one has to have some formal training or expertise in the subject which many educators lack (Brookhart & McMillan, 2019; Fan et al., 2019; Feldman, 2018; Green et al., 2007, p. 1001). In examining the literature, it underscores that educators are lacking the "knowledge base" and may be ill "equipped" in making ethical judgments related to assessment practices largely due to the lack of formalized training in the area of assessment (Brookhart & McMillan, 2019; Fan et al., 2019; Feldman, 2018; Green et al., 2007). This lack of training and broader tentative understanding of the ethics surrounding assessment lend itself to educators making poor judgment calls which propels ethical dilemmas in the classroom related to assessment practices. Further, there is limited research on how educators actually apply their judgment as it relates to standing principles related to ethical assessment practices. Accordingly, there appears to be a gap between the standards, codes and practices related to ethical assessment practices and whether or not these concepts are applied when educators are faced with ethical dilemmas in the classroom. Research is limited in this area.

This lack of training and application of core standards has not only created a dilemma for the educators themselves, but for education entities as well. K-12 school districts and post-secondary institutions work to offer solid curriculum that supports student learning and are equally committed to providing fair and equitable assessment practices. Indeed, the importance of fair testing (in the classroom) cannot be understated, especially given the recent shift away from standardized testing. Actually, even before the "College Admissions Scandal" shocked the world in 2019 leading to several arrests and imprisonments, high stakes testing, which used to be considered the gold standard to measure and assess student learning, was being questioned (Tierney, 2014,). In fact, for much of the "20th Century", high stakes testing was the mainstay, for it was widely accepted that standardized testing was objective, opposed to subjective (Tierney, 2014, p. 55). Yet, "[a]s the century turned, shifting social ideals, evolving ideas about the nature of knowledge, developments in understanding human learning and rapid technological advancements change the educational landscape" (Tierney, 2014, p. 55). This shift, then, moved conventional thought away from an over reliance on high stakes testing and shifted the emphasis to quality assessment and testing in the classroom (Johnson, Liu & Burgess, 2017; Pascal & Bertram, 2016; Rasooli, Zandi, & DeLuca, 2018; Stern, 2017; Widiastutu, 2018). Hence, the idea that if the shift has moved to a higher reliance on measuring student learning via assessment tools (e.g. formative, summative), and if high stakes tests like the ACT and SAT are now in question, it behooves the education community to address the reliability of its assessment tools and to better train and prepare educators on the ethics, "validity, reliability and fairness" of the assessments tools they produce (American Education Research Association [AERA], American Psychology Association [APA], and the National Council on Measurement in Education [NCME] (Tierney, 2014, p. 55).

Methodology and Approach

In order to best analyze teacher perceptions related to whether various assessment practices were ethical or not, a web-based survey (adopted and validated from a previous study that sought to investigate the same phenomena) was used (Green et al., 2007). The research design, Quantitative Analysis, was determined to be the best method and approach for this study, for the design enables the researcher to not only collect data numerically but also measure perceptions specific to various demographic variables (across the study). According to Creswell (1994), quantitative research enables the researcher to better investigate phenomena. It achieves this end by collecting quantitative data that are then analyzed using mathematically rooted statistical approaches. Specific to this study, the researcher is attempting to assess teacher perceptions about ethical or unethical behavior regarding assessment and evaluation practices (phenomena) and assess whether or not those perceptions align (agree) or do not align (disagree) over various demographic variables to include: gender, degree status, grade level taught, and years of experience. As noted, quantitative research, then, is essentially about collecting numerical data to explain a particular phenomenon. In this case, a survey was used to collect in-service teacher responses from various scenarios that centered around ethical or unethical assessment practices. The scenarios focused on specific assessment practices and asked teachers to read select scenarios and judge the outlined practices as either "ethical or unethical." The study aimed to identity how much agreement or disagreement existed among k-12 educators as it related to the determination of whether or not a practice was ethical or not.

Framework of Research and Research Question

This study "dr[ew] on both theoretical and empirical foundations in the areas of ethics and assessments" (Green at al., 2007). In review of the literature, there appears to be an underlying principle that underscores ethical behavior practices being governed by judgment. Yet, the literature also highlights the importance of assessment being fair and equitable and accurately reflect student achievement levels and overall mastery of the subject matter being tested. The researcher of this study found that the general principles that govern ethics related to assessment and testing that tend to focus on the "Do No Harm" adage, fail to address what can derail that concept—an educator's judgment or lack thereof. Thus, this study's prevailing research questions and what guided this study were as follows:

RQ1: "To what degree do educators agree or disagree as it relates to whether or not specific assessment practices are ethical or not?".

RQ2: "Are there strong disagreement gaps between educators' perceptions when judging whether or not an assessment practice is ethical or not?"

Strong agreement would indicate that educators' judgments or/and perceptions about the ethical practice (of a particular assessment practice) are aligned, and strong disagreement indicates that there are gaps in ethical judgments related to the assessment practice.

Participants

Participants for this study consisted of 159 K-12 in-service teachers from an undisclosed Alabama School District. At the time of this study, the district was comprised of roughly 8,300 students, 530 teachers and 20 schools. The district consisted of four high schools, four middle schools, and 12 elementary schools. The Ethical Assessment Practice Survey was utilized to

conduct the study (Green at al., 2007). The survey was administered to 530 teachers and was completed by 159 respondents, reflecting a 30% return rate. The researcher used a 36-question scenario-based survey to question participants views (as educators) on whether or not various evaluation practices were ethical or not. Further, for the purpose of the study, the researcher broke down participants into demographics groups to include: Gender: male (N=22) and female (N=137); Degree Award: Bachelor's degree obtained (N=44) or Masters' Degree Obtained or higher (N=115); Grade Level Taught: Kindergarten-5th (N=84), 6th-8th (N=31), 9th-12th (N=44); and Years of Service: 1-7 (N=34), (N=125).

Research Design and Instrumentation

Instrument

The Ethical Assessment Practice Survey was utilized to conduct a 2007 study examining faculty perceptions regarding assessment and perceptions related to ethical practices (Green at al.). The tool was constructed and aligned to support the "guidelines for ethical student evaluation into a framework that addresse[d] both classroom assessment and standardized testing" (Green at al., 2007, p. 1002). Prior to the 2007 study, to strengthen the validity of the instrument, a piloted survey was field-tested in 2004 with 74 participants. As a result, six questions were assessed as being confusing and were either modified or replaced altogether by the researchers (Green at al., 2007). For the purposes of this research, the survey consisted of 36 scenario-based items (related to both standardized and classroom assessment practices) and was administered in the spring of 2019. Six questions were demographic, and 30 questions were scenarios that participants had to assess whether the outlined practice (described) was ethical or not. The scenarios posed and outlined in the research were developed by researchers analyzing what is acceptable assessment practices based on the prevailing and current research (Green at al., 2007). Relevancy in developing scenarios around what were commonly held ethical or unethical practices enabled the researchers to have greater confidence in the qualitative measurements of educators' perspectives, especially if there were high disagreement levels between what is or is not ethical.

The scenario-based survey instrument had seven categories of measure. They are listed as follows: Category I: Standardized Test Preparation; Category II: Standardized Test Administration; Category III: Multiple Assessment Opportunities; Category IV: Communications about Grading; Category V: Grading Practices; Category VI: Bias, and Category VII: Confidentiality. In the development of the survey instrument, each category was aligned with specific scenarios questions that addressed the overall category and ultimately was used to measure educator's perceptions regarding whether or not the scenarios posed were ethical. For the purpose of the study, participants were asked to read each scenario under the category which specifically "related to assessment issues that arise in the classroom" and respond to the scenarios using their judgment in determining if they considered the practice to be ethical or unethical (Green et al., 2007, p. 1002). The researcher determined that the same agreement and disagreement parameters used in the 2007 study, would be duplicated in this study as well (Green at al.), especially since the instrument had been field tested and vetted. Thus, 80% agreement was determined to be the threshold for agreement because it tends to show a baseline for a "high level of agreement among respondents" (Green at al., 2007, p. 1003). Of course, the higher the percentage, the higher the level of agreement. Strong agreement levels suggest "like" judgments are being made; whereas, weak judgments suggest continued discussions surrounding application

would be beneficial (Green et al., 2007, 1003). Strong disagreement was defined as items having a percentage of disagreement between 50% and 70% because it tends to show a significant level of disagreement (Green at al., 2007). Areas ranging between 70-79% were viewed as moderate disagreement. Demographic variables were strongly considered throughout the study and assessed relative to participant responses. The researcher sought to measure responses based on the following demographic variables: gender (male vs. female); level of degree obtained (Bachelor's degree vs. Master's degree); grade level taught (Kindergarten-6th, 7th-8th, 9th-12th); and years of teaching experience (1 to 7 years vs. 8 or more years).

Data Collection

This study employed a quantitative research approach for data collection, for the researcher was interested in measuring educators' perceptions about the ethics of various assessment practices. As such, the researcher determined that a quantifiable research method be used to measure participants perceptions and/or judgments regarding whether or not select assessment practices were ethical or not. This approach to collecting the data enabled the researcher to cross-analyze the data and quantifiably determine those areas of strong agreement or strong disagreement in measurable, relatable terms. Data was collected by way of a 36-item scenario based online survey (six questions were related to demographic information and 30 questions were scenario-based questions). Participant identities to include names were not requested and participation was voluntary. The survey instrument was sent district-wide and data was collected online via a survey platform. Once all survey data was collected, it was first filtered (for analysis and measurement purposes) collectively and analyzed as a whole. Then, the data was filtered based on specific demographic variables: gender (male vs. female); level of degree earned (Bachelors vs. Masters); grade level taught (Kindergarten-6th, 7th-8th, 9th-12th); and years of teaching experience (1-7 years, 8 or more years). Once filtered by the demographics data, the researcher had to manually extract and analyze the data based on the pre-set category questions that were used to measure levels of teacher agreement or disagreement (across the scenarios posed). Data from each category was collected, sorted and analyzed across all targeted scenarios to include the following: Category I: "Standardized Test Preparation", questions: 2, 4, 5, 6, 12, and 23; Category II: "Standardized Test Administration", question items 7 and 17; Category III: "Multiple Assessment Opportunities", question items 10, 21 and 25; Category IV: "Communications about Grading" contained, questions 1, 27, 29, and 31; Category V: "Grading Practices", questions 3, 8, 11, 13, 14, 15, 19, 24, 28, 30, 32, 33 and 35; Category VI: "Bias", questions 18, 22, 26, 34, and 36. And, lastly, Category VII: "Confidentiality", questions 9, 16, and 20.

Results

As noted, 159 in-service K-12 teachers across a single school district responded to the survey. Analysis is based on those findings and the demographics therein. Results from each Category (I-VII) are discussed and analyzed separately. In-service results are addressed first (under each category) and then demographic analysis follows.

Category I: Standardized Test Preparation

Agreement levels based on in-service teacher responses to the six items under the Category I: "Standardized Test Preparation" ranged from 52% to 95.6% (see Table 1). As 80% or higher is

considered to be a high level of agreement, there were four items that scored at this level. The items were Items 5, 6, 12 and 23

Disagreement levels varied. Category I identified four of the six items had demographic variables suggesting high levels of disagreement (falling within the 50% to 70% range). (Item 2) *A teacher adds vocabulary words from a standardized, norm referenced verbal aptitude test to classroom vocabulary tests* showed high levels of disagreement among females (66% thought the teacher's practice was ethical; whereas, 34% indicated the teacher was unethical). Further, 67% of K-6 teachers indicated the teacher's practice was ethical while 33% indicated the practice as unethical.

(Item 4) *Based on his review of the district's mathematical framework, a teacher creates learning activities with specific math problems that are included in the annual achievement test* also showed high levels of disagreement in multiple demographic categories: 56% of teachers with a bachelor's degree thought the practice was ethical; whereas, 44% indicated that the practice was unethical; and 52% of teachers with a master's degree thought the practice was ethical; whereas, 48% considered the practice unethical. This trend continued with 45% of female teachers thinking the (Item 4) practice was ethical; whereas, 55% indicated it was unethical; yet 71% of males thought the practice was ethical; indicating that differing perceptions may be influenced by gender. Disagreement continued, for 46% of K-6 teachers thought the (Item 4) practice was ethical; whereas, 54% indicated it was unethical. In addition, 52% of 7-8 grade teachers thought the practice was ethical; whereas, 48% considered the practice unethical. Lastly, 64% of 9th and 12th grade teachers indicated the practice as being ethical; whereas, 36% indicated it was unethical. In assessing agreement and disagreement based on years of experience for Item 4, disagreement was still evaluated. 52% of teachers with 1 to 7 years of experience and 8 years or more of experience thought the practice was ethical; whereas, 48% considered the practice to be unethical. Items 3 and 23 also demonstrated high levels of disagreement ranging from 61% vs. 39% and 58% vs. 42% respectively.

To recap the findings, although initial findings under the Pre-service category suggested that agreement was high, when the data was analyzed demographically, strong disagreement under Category I (Item 4) was noted. Indeed 4 of the 6 items (under this specific Item number) yielded strong disagreement. And, disagreement displayed across various demographics to include degree obtainment level, gender, grade level taught and years of experience. Meaning, no demographic group that was being analyzed agreed on whether or not it was ethical for a teacher to create learning activities with specific math problems that are included on an annual achievement test. Disagreement was noted but to a smaller degree on other scenarios posed under this category. Equally important, and worth noting, under gender, a complete polar opposite response was recorded. Here the majority of males (71%) thought the instructor acted ethically, while only 45% of females did, reflecting a clear difference in attitudes and judgment.

Table 1

Percentage of in-service educators indicating the ethicality of assessment practices in standardized test preparation (across demographic descriptors)

Item#	Scenarios Standardized Test Prep	Respondent Answers N=159	Inservice Teachers %	B.A degree %	M.A degree %	Female %	Male %	K-6 teacher %	7-8 teacher %	9-12 teacher %	1-7 years %	8 or more years %

2	A teacher adds vocabulary words from a standardized, norm referenced verbal aptitude test to classroom vocabulary tests	Ethical Unethical	76.9 23.1	78.6 21.4	79 21	65.8 34.2	100 0	67 33	84 16	91 9	91 9	73 27
4	Based on his review of the district's mathematical framework, a teacher creates learning activities with specific math problems that are included in the annual achievement test.	Ethical Unethical	52.2 47.8	55.8 44.2	51.7 48.3	45 55	71 29	46.3 53.7	52 48	64 36	52 48	52 48
5	A teacher spends a class period to train his students in test-taking skills (e.g., not spending too much time on one problem, eliminating impossible answers, guessing).	Ethical Unethical	95.6 4.4	93.2 6.9	96.7 3.2	95.1 4.9	90 10	94 6	94 6	100 0	94 6	96 4
6	A teacher administers a parallel form of a norm-referenced achievement test to her students in preparation for the state testing. The parallel form is another version of the state test that assesses the same content; however, the items on the parallel form are not the same ones as on the state form of the achievement test.	Ethical Unethical	82.9 17.1	75 25	97 3	86.6 13.4	90 10	87 13	61 39	91 9	88 12	81 19
12	A teacher uses scoring high on the MAT, a commercially available publication with the same format and skills as the Metropolitan Achievement Test (but not the same items), in preparation for state testing.	Ethical Unethical	85.3 14.7	77.3 23.7	80 20	84 16	90 10	84.3 15.7	84 16	88 12	82 18	86 14
23	An elementary teacher quizzes students in the lunch line about the number of pints in a quart because students had missed the item on previous administrations of the state standardized test.	Ethical Unethical	78.7 21.3	74.4 25.6	92 8	82 18	76 24	82.5 17.5	58 42	86 14	75 25	80 20

Category II: Standardized Test Administration

Agreement levels based on in-service teacher responses to the two items under Category II "Test Administration" are as follows: There was one item that scored at a high level of agreement (80% or higher level)-(Item 7) *While administering a standardized test, a teacher notices that a child has missed a problem that the student obviously knows. The teacher stands by the child's desk, taps her finger by the incorrect problem, shakes her head, and walks on to the next desk* (see Table II): For this item, 93.4% of in-service teachers considered the practice to be unethical. On the other hand, (Item 17) *While administering a standardized test, a teacher notices that a child has skipped a problem and is now recording all his answers out of sequence on the answer form. The teacher stops at the child's desk and shows the student where to record the answer he is working on and instructs him to put the answers to each question with the same number on the answer sheet* scored at a high level of disagreement. 55% of in-service teachers indicated the practice was ethical; whereas, 45% of teachers found the practice to be unethical. Meaning consensus was not reached among survey respondents. In fact, it was nearly split evenly with some faculty asserting that the actions taken by the faculty member (within the scenario) were ethical and others scoring it as unethical.

Disagreement was also noted under Category II. In examining demographic results, one of the two items had demographic variables suggesting high levels of disagreement (falling within the 50% to 70% range). (Item 17) *While administering a standardized test, a teacher notices that a child has skipped a problem and is now recording all his answers out of sequence on the answer form. The teacher stops at the child's desk and shows the student where to record the answer he is working on and instructs him to put the answers to each question with the same number on the answer sheet* showed high levels of disagreement among in-service teachers in the following demographic areas: by degree type, gender (female), grade level taught, and years of experience.

Indeed, 44% of teachers holding a bachelor's degree indicated that they thought the practice (highlighted in Item 17) was ethical; whereas, 56% indicated the practice was unethical; while 57% of teachers holding a master's degree deemed the practice ethical; whereas, 43% deemed the practice unethical. Further, under Item 17, 52.5% of female teachers deemed the practice ethical; whereas, 47.5% deemed the practice to be unethical; and 50% of male teachers deemed the practice ethical; whereas, 50% of males deemed the practice to be unethical. Disagreement on Item 17 continued. This pattern of disagreement continued across all other demographic variables to include grade level taught, years of teaching experience (See Table 2).

Category II (Item 17) disagreement appears to cross demographic variables (as was previously noted under Item 4 in Category 1) to include degree type, gender, grades taught and years of service. And, although disagreement was noted across all variables, the highest level of disagreement fell under gender (with both males and females split on whether the instructor acted ethically or not) and by grade level assignments (K-6 and 7th -8th grade instructors) also split on the topic. Hence, again, no consensus was reached for Item 17.

Table 2

Percentage of in-service educators indicating the ethicality of assessment practices in standardized test administration (across demographic descriptors)

Item#	Scenarios Standardized Test Prep	Respondent Answers N=159	Inservice Teachers %	B.A degree %	M.A degree %	Female %	Male %	K-6 teacher %	7-8 teacher %	9-12 teacher %	1-7 years %	8 or more years %
7	While administering a standardized test, a teacher notices that a child has missed a problem that the student obviously knows. The teacher stands by the child's desk, taps her finger by the incorrect problem, shakes her head, and walks on to the next desk.	Ethical	0.6	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	1
		Unethical	93	100	100	100	100	100	97	100	100	99
17	While administering a standardized test, a teacher notices that a child has skipped a problem and is now recording all his answers out of sequence on the answer form. The teacher stops at the child's desk and shows the student where to record the answer he is working on and instructs him to put the answers to each question with the same number on the answer sheet.	Ethical	55	44.2	57.7	52.5	50	52	52	64	42	58
		Unethical	44	55.8	43.3	47.5	50	48	48	36	56	42

Category III: Multiple Assessment Opportunities

Agreement levels based on in-service teacher responses to the three items under Category III: "Multiple Assessment Opportunities" ranged from 76% to 100% (see Table 3). As 80% or higher is considered to be a high level of agreement, there were two items that scored at this level. The two items were: (Item 21) *A teacher assesses student knowledge by using many types of assessments: multiple-choice tests, essays, projects, portfolios* (scoring at 100% agreement); and (Item 25) *A second-grade teacher uses observations as the sole method to access what students have learned* (86.6% agreement*).* The third item (Item 10) *A high school social studies teacher bases students' final semester grade on 2 multiple-choice tests* had an agreement level of 76%.

Disagreement was also noted under Category III. In fact, one of the three items had demographic variables suggesting high levels of disagreement (falling within the 50% to 70% range). (Item 10) *A high school social studies teacher bases students' final semester grade on 2 multiple-choice tests* showed somewhat high levels of disagreement among in-service teachers teaching in grades 9-12. Only 70% of grade 9-12 teachers deemed the practice unethical; whereas, 78% of k-6 and 77% of 7-8 grade teachers viewed the practice as unethical. Thereby, Category III (Item 10), which dealt with multiple assessment opportunities, had more agreement than non-agreement. And, even where there was disagreement, the scores were in the 70 or higher percentile. Meaning, while in disagreement, the disagreement was not as stark or split as noted among other variables tested.

Table 3

Percentage of pre-service and in-service teachers indicating the ethicality of evaluation practices using multiple assessment practices (across demographic descriptors)

Item#	Scenarios Standardized Test Prep	Respondent Answers N=159	Inservice Teachers %	B.A degree %	M.A degree %	Female %	Male %	K-6 teacher %	7-8 teacher %	9-12 teacher %	1-7 years %	8 or more years %
10	A high school social studies teacher bases students' final semester grade on 2 multiple-choice tests.	Ethical	24	18.6	27.2	22.2	24	22	23	30	18	26
		Unethical	76	81.4	72.8	77.8	76	78	77	70	82	74
21	A teacher assesses student knowledge by using many types of assessments: multiple-choice tests, essays, projects, portfolios.	Ethical	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
		Unethical	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
25	A second-grade teacher uses observations as the sole method to access what students have learned	Ethical	13.4	11.9	16.3	11.25	14.3	11	3	25	6	15
		Unethical	86.6	88.1	83.7	88.75	85.7	89	97	75	94	85

Category IV: Communication about Grading

Agreement levels based on in-service teacher responses to the four items under the Category IV: "Communications about Grading" ranged from 62.9% to 99.4% (See Table 4). As 80% or higher is considered to be a high level of agreement, there were three out of four items that scored at this level. They were: (Item 1) *A teacher states how she will grade a task when she assigns it;* (Item 27) *A teacher tells students what materials are important to learn in preparing for a class test;* and (Item 31) *A middle school principal directs teachers to give students a written policy that explains how report card grades are calculated in their classes.* In contrast, (Item 29) *For the final exam, a teacher always uses a few surprise items about topics that were not on the*

study guide scored at a high level of disagreement (falling within the 50% to 70% range). In fact, 37% of in-service teachers indicated the practice was ethical, whereas, 63% of teachers found the practice to be unethical.

Disagreement, although limited, was noted under Category IV. One of the four items (Item 29) showed a high level of disagreement (falling within the 50% to 70% range). (Item 29) *For the final exam, a teacher always uses a few surprise items about topics that were not on the study guide* showed a high level of disagreement in eight of the nine demographic variables (among in-service teachers, degree type, gender, grade level taught (K-6 and 9-12), and years of experience). In review, 32% of teachers with a bachelor's degree deemed the practice ethical compared to 68% deeming the practice unethical. In comparison, 39% of teachers holding a master's degree found the practice to be ethical; whereas, 61% found the practice to be unethical. In addition, under the same item number, 29, 37% of female teachers indicated the practice as being ethical; whereas, 63% indicated the practice as being unethical. For males, 38% of male teachers considered the practice to be ethical; whereas, 62% of male teachers considered the practice to be unethical. Disagreement continued as it related to grade levels taught and years of experience (See Table IV). Indeed, Item 29, like similar items, had strong disagreement across all demographic variables. In each case, consensus of agreement was not reached. The greatest disagreement was found to be within the 9th and 12th grade demographic, for it was nearly split (45—ethical / 55 unethical), so again, no consensus could be reached under the scenario posed.

Table 4

Percentage of pre-service and in-service teachers indicating the ethicality of assessment practices related to communication about grading (across demographic descriptors)

Item#	Scenarios Standardized Test Prep	Respondent Answers N=159	Inservice Teachers %	B.A degree %	M.A degree %	Female %	Male %	K-6 teacher %	7-8 teacher %	9-12 teacher %	1-7 years %	8+ years %
1	A teacher states how she will grade a task when she assigns it.	Ethical	98.7	100	99	100	100	100	94	100	100	98
		Unethical	1.3	0	1	0	0	0	6	0	0	2
27	A teacher tells students what materials are important to learn in preparing for a class test.	Ethical	95.6	90.7	96.7	95	100	95	90	100	94	96
		Unethical	4.4	9.3	3.3	5	0	5	10	0	6	4
29	For the final exam, a teacher always uses a few surprise items about topics that were not on the study guide	Ethical	37.1	31.8	39	36.6	38.1	36	29	45	40	44
		Unethical	62.9	68.2	61	63.4	61.9	64	71	55	60	56
31	A middle school principal directs teachers to give students a written policy that explains how report card grades are calculated in their classes.	Ethical	99.4	97.7	100	98.8	100	98	100	100	100	99
		Unethical	0.6	2.3	0	1.2	0	2	0	0	0	1

Category V: Grading Practices

Agreement levels based on in-service teacher responses to the thirteen items under the Category V: "Grading Practices" ranged from 72.9% to 92% (See Table 5). As 80% or higher is considered to be a high level of agreement, there were four out of thirteen items that scored at this level. The four items were (Item 3) *For a group project, a teacher bases each student's grade on the group's product and a heavily weighted individual component* which had a 92% agreement rating. (Item 14) *To minimize guessing, a teacher announces she will deduct more points for a*

wrong answer than for leaving the answer blank, which had an 82.9% approval rating; (Item 15) *To encourage lively discussion in English III, a teacher counts class participation as 30% of the final grade,* which had an 83.2% agreement rating and (Item 35) *A teacher lowers report card grades for disruptive behavior* which had a 90.3 approval rating.

Strong levels of disagreement were noted under Category V. In fact, eight of the thirteen items had demographic variables suggesting high levels of disagreement (falling within the 50% to 70% range). What is important about the results under Category V is the level of disagreement across the majority of item numbers and across the spectrum of demographic variables analyzed. Indeed of the thirteen scenarios presented to participating in-service respondents, results indicated that only 4 of the 13 items had strong agreement; and only 5 out of 13 items (scenarios posed in assessing demographic variables) resulted in a level of 80% agreement. Demographic variables included: degree type, gender, grade levels taught, and years of experience.

The highest in-service disagreements levels noted under Category V were Items 32 and 33. Item 32 dealt with the ethics of weighting homework heavily in determining final grades, and Item 33 dealt with the assigning of grades based on student growth. In-service respondents were nearly split on both items yielding a non-consensus outcome. In assessing demographic disagreements similar disagreements were noted. In fact, the strongest disagreements occurred under Items: 8, 11, 19, 32 and 33. Disagreement among these items ranged from 43% to 57% respectively, with Item 33 yielding the highest disagreement index in the category. In fact, in assessing demographic data to include: degree type, gender and grade level taught, it demonstrates that these factors attributed to the disagreement index to strengthen disagreement even further, with results for all three being 49/51 splits, indicating no agreement was reached at all. What this data demonstrates is respondents are relying on personal judgments that can be influenced by degree type, gender, grade level taught, years of experience and other factors (not evaluated under this study), opposed to common ethical principles related to evaluation being utilized to judge the scenarios. As a result, instead of strong agreement being reached (most the time), strong disagreement is being reached (50% of the time) throughout the study.

(Item 32) *A teacher weighs homework heavily in determining report card grades* showed a high level of disagreement in all nine demographic areas. Results were as follows: 38% of bachelor's degree respondents viewed the action as ethical versus 62% who viewed the action as unethical. For master's prepared respondents, 50% of respondents felt that teachers action were ethical and the other half (50%) viewed the behavior as unethical. Females and males disagreed as well where 35% classified the behavior as ethical, versus 65% unethical. Interesting, the reverse was true for male respondents where 62% of males felt the teacher's actions were ethical versus 38% deeming the actions as unethical. Regarding K-6 teachers, 35% viewed the actions as ethical, versus 65% of K-6 teachers who did not. 7th and 8th grade teachers were equally divided—with 42% deeming the behavior as ethical versus 58% deeming it unethical. High school teachers (9-12) were a little more even, but still divided, for 68% of the 9th and 12th grade teachers coded this action as ethical versus 32% who coded it as unethical. Lastly, those faculty with 1 to 7 years of experience and those with 8 or more years both indicated high levels of disagreement. 48% of teachers with less than 8 years of experience coded the behavior as ethical versus 52% who coded the behavior as unethical. For those faculty with 8 or more years, the trend continued, for 44% of respondents reported the action as ethical versus 56% who disagreed and felt the action was unethical.

(Item 33) *A teacher considers a student's growth in assigning grades* showed a high level of disagreement in seven demographic areas: for bachelor's degree, 49% of respondents stated that

the action was ethical while 51% reported it as unethical; for Master's degree, 58% of respondent coded the action as ethical versus 42% coding it as unethical. 51% of female respondents deemed the behavior as ethical versus 49% that deemed it as unethical. And, for males, 67% viewed the behavior as ethical versus 33% who viewed it as unethical. This disagreement in responses continued among K-6 teachers, for 51% of K-6 teachers found the action ethical versus 49% who viewed the action as unethical. And, among 7 to 8 grade teachers, 48% deemed the action ethical versus 52% who deemed it unethical. Lastly, teachers with 1 to 7 years of experience also disagreed, with 42% flagging the action as ethical versus 58% unethical.

Table 5

Percentage of pre-service and in-service teachers indicating the ethicality of assessment practices related to grading practices (across demographic descriptors)

Item#	Scenarios Standardized Test Prep	Respondent Answers N=159	Inservice Teachers %	B.A degree %	M.A degree %	Female %	Male %	K-6 teacher %	7-8 teacher %	9-12 teacher %	1-7 years %	8 or more years %
3	For a group project, a teacher bases each student's grade on the group's product and a heavily weighted individual component.	Ethical	92	90.5	92.4	91.25	95.2	90	94	93	91	93
		Unethical	8	9.5	7.6	8.75	4.8	10	6	7	9	7
8	A physical education teacher gives a student a zero as a homework grade for not returning a form requiring a parent's signature.	Ethical	39.7	45.2	38.5	27.85	47.6	27	45	60	58	34
		Unethical	60.3	54.8	61.5	72.15	53.4	73	55	40	42	66
11	An accounting teacher gives a student an F for the course because the student missed the final exam.	Ethical	30	18.6	33	27.50	42.9	28	23	39	27	31
		Unethical	70	81.4	67	72.50	57.1	72	77	61	73	69
13	As a teacher finalizes grades, she changes one student's course grade from a B+ to an A because tests and papers showed the student had mastered the course objectives even though he had not completed some of his homework assignments.	Ethical	31.9	21.4	35.9	34.6	19	35	33	25	19	35
		Unethical	68.1	78.6	64.1	65.4	81	65	67	75	81	65
14	To minimize guessing, a teacher announces she will deduct more points for a wrong answer than for leaving the answer blank.	Ethical	16.8	14.6	16.5	16.5	10	16	17	18	0	21
		Unethical	83.2	85.4	83.5	83.5	90	84	83	82	100	79
15	To encourage lively discussion in English III, a teacher counts class participation as 30% of the final grade.	Ethical	82.9	81.4	83.7	87.7	81	88	71	82	88	81
		Unethical	17.1	16.6	16.3	12.3	19	12	29	18	12	19
19	A middle school history teacher offers extra credit opportunities to all his classes except the advanced class.	Ethical	26.1	16.7	34.8	16.25	28.6	17	26	43	27	26
		Unethical	73.9	83.3	65.2	83.75	71.4	83	74	57	73	74
24	A teacher lowers grades for late work by one letter grade for each day.	Ethical	60.5	53.5	67	46.25	85.7	48	61	84	64	59
		Unethical	39.5	46.5	33	53.75	14.3	52	39	16	36	41
28	A teacher uses student peer ratings as 40% of the grade on an oral report.	Ethical	21.7	19	25	18.75	28.6	18	19	30	21	21
		Unethical	78.3	81	75	81.25	71.4	82	81	70	79	79
30	A teacher considers student effort when determining grades.	Ethical	69.6	65.1	68.5	64.2	66.7	64	77	75	61	72
		Unethical	30.4	34.9	31.5	35.8	33.3	36	23	25	39	28
32	A teacher weighs homework heavily in determining report card grades.	Ethical	45.5	38.1	49.5	35.4	62	35	42	68	48	44
		Unethical	54.5	61.9	50.5	64.6	38	65	58	32	52	56

33	A teacher considers a student's growth in assigning grades.	Ethical	56.3	48.8	57.6	50.6	66.7	51	48	73	42	59
		Unethical	43.7	51.2	42.4	49.4	33.3	49	52	27	58	41
35	A teacher lowers report card grades for disruptive behavior.	Ethical	9.7	4.8	12.1	5	28.6	5	10	18	15	8
		Unethical	90.3	95.2	87.9	95	71.4	95	90	82	85	92

Category VI: Bias

Agreement levels based on in-service teacher responses to the five items under Category VI: "Bias" ranged from 73% to 95% (See Table 6). As 80% or higher is considered to be a high level of agreement, there were four items that scored at this level. The four items were (Item 34) *A teacher allows a student with a learning disability in the language arts to use a tape recorder when the student answers the essay questions on social studies tests* which reached 95% agreement that the teacher's action was ethical; (Item 26*), A teacher always knows the identity of the student whose essay test she is grading* which reached 75% agreement that the action was ethical; (Item 18), *A teacher who knows a student had a bad week because of problems at home bumps the student's participation grade up a few points to compensate for his bad score on a quiz* 83% of in-service teachers felt the action was unethical). And lastly, for (Item 22), *Two teachers teach different sections of the same course. Because of his belief that students' work is rarely perfect, one teacher gives very few grades of "A"* (84% of in-service teachers deemed the behavior unethical).

Disagreement was noted under one item under Category VI. One of the five items (Item 36) had demographic variables suggesting high levels of disagreement (falling within the 50% to 70% range). (Item 36) *To enhance self-esteem, an elementary teacher addresses only students' strengths when writing narrative report cards* showed a high level of disagreement in all demographic areas: For bachelor's prepared teachers, 60% found the action of the teacher to be ethical, but 40% found it to be unethical. And, for master's prepared teachers, 56% found the action ethical versus 44% found the action unethical. Disagreement between females and males was also noted with 49% of females finding the action of the teacher to be ethical versus 51% noting it was unethical. For males, 43% of males viewed the teacher's actions as ethical versus 51% viewing the actions as unethical. K-6 teachers were also in disagreement with 43% deeming the teacher's actions as ethical and 57% deeming the practice as unethical. In addition, both 7th and 8th grade teachers and those teachers with more than 8 years of teaching experience had divided viewpoints related to ethical judgment; for under both categories, 48% felt the teacher's behavior was ethical, yet 52% felt it was unethical. Disagreement was also evidenced among 9th and 12th grade teachers (57% vs. 43%) and for those instructors with 1 to 7 years of experience (47% vs. 53%) who felt the practice was ethical.

Unlike the previous Category (V) which yield high disagreement, Category VI, which required respondents to judge bias in grading, respondents strongly agreed on the ethics questions posed, opposed to disagreed. The only area of strong disagreement was noted under a single item—Item 36. Again, what is noteworthy is that in assessing demographic data, all variables (degree type, gender, grade taught, and years of experience) demonstrated strong disagreement, so consensus was not reached.

Table 6

Percentage of pre-service and in-service teachers indicating the ethicality of assessment practices related to bias (across demographic descriptors)

Item#	Scenarios Standardized Test Prep	Respondent Answers N=159	Inservice Teachers %	B.A degree %	M.A degree %	Female %	Male %	K-6 teacher %	7-8 teacher %	9-12 teacher %	1-7 years %	8 or more years %
18	A teacher who knows a student had a bad week because of problems at home bumps the student's participation grade up a few points to compensate for his bad score on a quiz.	Ethical	16.3	28.6	27.5	27	23.8	27	23	28	27	26
		Unethical	83.3	71.4	75.5	73	76.2	73	77	72	72	74
22	Two teachers teach different sections of the same course. Because of his belief that students' work is rarely perfect, one teacher gives very few grades of "A".	Ethical	16.2	19.5	13.3	18	5	18	17	12	25	14
		Unethical	83.8	80.5	86.7	82	95	82	83	88	75	86
26	A teacher always knows the identity of the student whose essay test she is grading.	Ethical	75.3	83	71	76	76.2	80	71	70	84	73
		Unethical	24.7	17	29	24	23.8	20	29	30	16	27
34	A teacher allows a student with a learning disability in the language arts to use a tape recorder when the student answers the essay questions on social studies tests.	Ethical	95	97.6	96	95	95.2	93	97	98	94	95
		Unethical	5	2.4	4	5	4.8	7	3	2	6	5
36	To enhance self-esteem, an elementary teacher addresses only students' strengths when writing narrative report cards.	Ethical	47.7	59.6	43.8	49	43	43	48	57	47	47.5
		Unethical	52.3	40.4	56.2	51	57	57	52	43	53	52.5

Category VII: Confidentiality in Testing

Agreement levels based on In-service teacher responses to the three items under the Category VII: "Confidentiality" ranged from 77% to 87%. As 80% or higher is considered to be a high level of agreement, there was one item that scored at this level--(Item 16). For Item 16, *A second-grade teacher uses observations as the sole method to assess what students have learned,* 13% of respondents deemed the practice ethical versus 87% deemed it unethical. For (Item 9), *A teacher adds vocabulary words from a standardized, norm-referenced verbal aptitude test to classroom vocabulary tests* it nearly met agreement, but not fully. Results indicated that 77% of respondents stated the practice was ethical versus 23% deeming it unethical, a little shy of the 80% agreement threshold.

Overall results indicate that under Category VII which looked at confidentiality in testing, there was more agreement (amongst the variables) than disagreement. However, the one item (Item 20) that examined final exam practices, had strong disagreement across a spectrum of demographic variables to include degree type, gender, grade level taught and years of experience. The one demographic group that demonstrated the highest disagreement was 9th and 12 grade instructors. For 9th through 12 grade teachers, 45% viewed the actions as ethical versus 55% unethical. And, in terms of years of experience, 39% of those instructors with 1 to 7 years of experience determined that the behavior was ethical versus 61% unethical, and for those instructors with 8 or more years of experience, 36% viewed the practice as ethical versus 64% who classified the behavior as unethical.

Table 7

Percentage of pre-service and in-service teachers indicating the ethicality of assessment practices related to confidentiality in testing (across demographic descriptors)

Item#	Scenarios Standardized Test Prep	Respondent Answers N=159	Inservice Teachers %	B.A degree %	M.A degree %	Female %	Male %	K-6 teacher %	7-8 teacher %	9-12 teacher %	1-7 years %	8+ years %
9	A teacher adds vocabulary words from a standardized, norm-referenced verbal aptitude test to classroom vocabulary tests	Ethical	77	79	79.1	73	100	67	84	91	91	73
		Unethical	23	21	20.9	27	0	33	16	9	9	27
20	For the final exam, a teacher always uses a few surprise items about topics that were not on the study guide	Ethical	37	31.8	39.1	37	38	36	29	45	39	36
		Unethical	63	68.1	60.9	63	62	64	71	55	61	64
16	A second-grade teacher uses observations as the sole method to assess what students have learned.	Ethical	13	11.9	16.3	13	14	11	3	25	6	15
		Unethical	87	88.1	83.7	87	86	89	97	75	94	85

Limitations

There were several notable limitations to the study. One limitation is that respondents, when responding to the various scenarios within the survey, could only select whether the behavior described in the scenario was "ethical" or "unethical". There was no other option available to respondents, like "neither". In addition, given this was a quantitative research study, survey respondents could not explain the basis for how they reached their decisions related to evaluating scenarios as "ethical" or "unethical". Another limitation is that the survey instrument does not explore what type of professional development training respondents had related to the subject explored—judgment of ethical assessment practices.

Conclusion

Results of this study revealed that regardless of the level of degree type of the respondents (bachelors or masters); or the gender of the respondents (male or female); or the grade level taught of the respondent (K-6, 7-8, 9-12), or even years of experience of the respondents, there is strong disagreement among K-12 educators as it relates to identifying if specific evaluation and assessment practices (as identified in the various survey scenarios) were either "ethical" or "unethical.

Despite all other variables, judgment appears to be the key influence in decision-making. Indeed, respondents assessed 36 different scenarios (throughout this study) ranging in scope from whether or not it was ethical for "A teacher [to] add vocabulary words from a standardized, norm-referenced verbal aptitude test to classroom vocabulary tests" (Item 9) to assessing whether or not it was "either or "unethical" if "A teacher lower[ed] grades for late work by one letter grade for each day" (Item 24). In total, of the 36 scenarios posed to all participating respondents, only 18 out of 36 (50%) reached the 80% threshold indicating strong agreement on whether or not a specific practice was ethical or not. Conversely, that also indicates that there were 18 scenarios (50%) where educators disagreed or strongly disagreed (as seen in similar studies) (Green et al., 2007, Fan et al., 2019). Disagreement was seen throughout all demographic variables, without the indication of a pattern. Meaning, the disagreement appears to be random or based on sheer judgment being applied at the time of questioning. However, Category V, which dealt with grading

practices did have the highest level of disagreement with only 4 out of 13 scenarios being agreed upon. This would clearly indicate that there is not an acceptable or prevalent understanding of what is or is not consider ethical assessment practices that educators understand and apply. Rather, respondents responded and reacted based on their "gut" their own "know how", and judgment, but if the judgment is ill-informed, it can lead to unethical assessment issues to follow.

Recommendations

Thus, it is highly recommended that post-secondary institutions and school districts (nationally and internationally) prioritize and train educators on better identifying and understanding what are ethical and unethical assessment practices. Faculty need to have a better and more rooted understanding of what ethical assessment looks like and what pitfalls they ought to avoid as it relates to the assessment and evaluation of students. Pre-service preparation and In-Service professional development should provide educators with a complete and thorough understanding of the definition of ethics in assessment and should be designed around the educators ability to improve their judgment about ethical decision-making related to evaluation of students. Educational entities, then, should be encouraged to use scenario-based training approaches to help faculty to gain a more informed and practical understanding of what constitutions ethical behavior in evaluation and assessment methods and what does not. Providing laundry list of "do's and don'ts" is not sufficient, for a list cannot possibly cover every "day to day" situation a faculty member will face. Thus, targeting judgment and focusing on improving faculty understanding of ethical assessment practices versus unethical practices will be beneficial. In that way, the focus shifts to improving judgment and overall understanding so educators can more readily identify and apply generally accepted and recognized assessment practices that are deemed as ethical throughout the training platform. It is important, then, for educational organizations to establish ethical assessment practices that are commonly accepted and recognized within a university, college or school district.

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