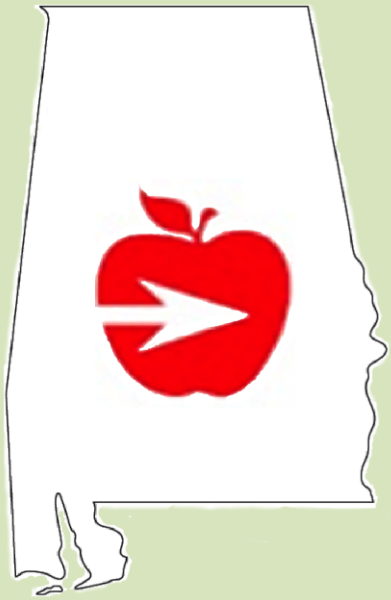
The Alabama Journal of Educational Leadership



Alabama Association of Professors of Educational Leadership

Volume 7 – August 2020
ISSN 2473-8115

Alabama Association of Professors of
Educational Leadership

The Alabama Journal of Educational Leadership

Volume 7, August 2020

An ICPEL State Affiliate Journal

Published by ICPEL Publications, the publications arm of the International Council of Professors of Educational Leadership (ICPEL) http://www.icpel.org

ISSN 2473-8115

Printed in United States of America.

Cover Design by Brad E. Bizzell

How to order a Print Copy of this Journal:

The Alabama Journal of Educational Leadership (AJEL) is offered as a Print-on-Demand paperback. Print copy books are prepared in Perfect Bound binding and delivery is 3-5 business days. Ordering is available at: http://www.icpel.org

The Alabama Journal of Educational Leadership has been peer reviewed by AAPEL, accepted and endorsed by the International Council of Professors of Educational Leadership as a significant contribution to the preparation and practice of school administration.

Table of Contents

ALABAMA ASSOCIATION OF PROFESSORS OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

AAPEL

advancing . advocating . preparing . educational . leaders

The **Alabama Association of Professors of Educational Leadership (AAPEL)** is a non-profit professional society organized for the purpose of establishing and maintaining a collegial and collaborative organization in the State of Alabama. In addition, this organization exists for the purpose of:

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,

4. Establishing informational and professional linkages with the State Department of Education and the Alabama Commission on Higher Education; and

5. Perpetuating a positive vision for Alabama Schools and other educational institutions

For more information, please visit us at
https://sites.google.com/site/aapelorg/home

Member Institutions

Alabama A&M University

Alabama State University

Auburn University

Auburn University Montgomery

Jacksonville State University

Samford University

Troy University

University of Alabama

University of Alabama Birmingham

University of Montevallo

University of North Alabama

University of South Alabama

University of West Alabama

2019-2020 Executive Board

Dr. Felecia Harris, Executive Director

Dr. Jeff Cornelius, Past President

Dr. Derrick Davis, President

Dr. Stacey Gill, Vice-President

Dr. Amy Dagley, Secretary

Dr. Lydia Davenport, Treasurer

Dr. Gwendolyn King, Member-at-large

Dr. Keith Gurley, Member-at-large

Dr. Trellys Riley, Member-at-large

Dr. Jana' Sparks, Member-at-large

Dr. Rasheda Bell, Member-at-large

Dr. Kim Warfield, Advisory Council Leader

Notes from the Editor

Welcome to Volume VII 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 VII focus on several topics stemming from the main theme of *Using Theory to Imform Practice*: visionary leadership, mentoring, and equality and justice.

Morton and Upton begin the section with a literature review which explores traditional and current roles and expectations of school leaders and school counselors through the lens of collaboration toward expanding notions of school leadership, followed by Bennett, Turnham, and Lemoine's case study investigating leadership practices of one school district during the COVID-19 pandemic to sustain learning and effectively educate students. An ethnographic field study by Parham, Adair, and Reames conclude this section with an exploration and comparison of the cultural use of decision-making tools of a school district to the cultural use of decision-making tools of a U.S. Army Military unit.

The second section focus on mentoring with a qualitative study by Sparks investigating standard practices used by mentors participating in a new teacher mentoring program. Brewster and Ashley's quantitative research examined self-efficacy, student engagement, mentoring, and student retention of African American male students at Predominantly White Institutions.

The third section discusses ledership from an equity and justice perspective. A historical descriptive analysis by Pendiola begins this section with an examination of how districts in Alabama altered spending during the Great Recession to understand the ways district leaders can prioritize spending to ensure an adequate and equitable education for all students. Bryant's historical case study investigates one school system's effort to develop a Freedom of Choice initiative to desegregate the schools and focuses on the perceived factors that hindered the process. Samuels and Samuels explores a qualitative study on educators' perceptions of racism in P-12 schools to examine how educator preparation can navigate complex terrain to better prepare candidates to employ equitable, and socially just practices informed by critical race theory and foster racial literacy. Finally, McCarthy, LaChenaye, Gurley, and Wilkinson's qualitative case study documents perceived barriers to involvement and identifies gaps in understanding between two groups of stakeholders – school leadership and personnel and parents and caregivers in a lower SES, minority, urban school district.

As we move forward, the continuation of various manuscripts for publication consideration is requested. We encourage submissions from novice and experienced faculty as well as students. The Alabama Journal of Educational Leadership is a refereed journal using a triple-blind review process. Please visit the ICPEL state affiliate website at https://www.icpel.org/state-affiliate-journals.html to review all volumes of AJEL.

I want to acknowledge the many people supporting the continuation of AJEL. First, thank you to all of the authors for submitting manuscripts. Also, an enormous thanks to the, AAPEL Editorial, Executive, and Advisory boards. The journal would not be a sucess without your support.

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!

Yvette P. Bynum,
The Univeristy of Alabama

Collaborative Preparation: Educational Leaders and School Counselors Building Bridges for Effective Schools

Benterah C. Morton, & Amy W. Upton
University of South Alabama

Abstract

This research informed conceptual article explores traditional and current roles and expectations of school leaders and school counselors through the lens of collaboration toward expanding notions of school leadership. The work defines collaboration in the context of K-12 schools with a focus on the roles of school leaders and school counselors toward highlighting the necessity of teaching collaboration across the respective preparation programs. Further, showcasing practices that actively promote cooperation between school counselors and educational leaders it provides recommendations for the early advent of collaboration between school leaders and counselors across their training programs.

Keywords: Leadership, Collaboration, School Counseling, Preparation

The ever-changing student demographics and the advent of standardized testing and accountability have forced school leaders and school personnel to rethink how they function, including their conceptualization of the appropriate use of personnel (Glickman, Gordon & Ross-Gordon, 2018). At present, primary campus leadership teams in K-12 schools across the country consist of a principal and an assistant or associate principal. In many cases, especially in smaller elementary school settings, the leadership team consists solely of the campus principal. Unfortunately, these examples do not maximize the human resources (Seifert & Vornberg, 2002) available to facilitate meaningful opportunities for students, faculty, staff, and the surrounding community to experience success continually. Fortunately, redistributing staff with a more succinct understanding of the transformed role of school counselors to include role expectations around leadership, collaboration, and systemic change can aid in increasing student achievement (American School Counselor Association, 2012). Additionally, understanding the benefits of collaborative principal-counselor relationships on school culture and student success may serve to reinforce the rationale for the development of these relationships (Rock, Remley, & Range, 2017).

Many school principals still view school counselors through a traditional leadership lens relegating them to ancillary roles (e.g., testing, discipline, etc.). Leadership's lack of understanding of the training and capacity of school counselors in a building directly impacts the roles and functions to which they are assigned (Lowery, Quick, Boyland, Geesa, & Mayes,2018; Wingfield Reese, West-Olatunji, 2010). Before the induction of the Transforming School Counseling Initiative and the American School Counseling Association (ASCA) National Model, school counselor functions were more reactive and less embedded into the mission of the school (ASCA, 2012, 2019). Although this transition occurred in 2003, leadership training programs have been slow to integrate the multiple roles of the school counselor, including leadership, into their curriculum. As a result, many principals are unaware of ways to utilize school counselors in a way that maximizes their potential (Bore & Bore, 2009; Desimone & Roberts, 2016) to actively support student success. Leadership training programs would benefit from the inclusion of curriculum around the training and increased capacity of school counselors to better prepare school leaders to utilize these resources in their buildings responsibly.

This research informed conceptual article follows a non-traditional format to explore traditional and current roles and expectations of campus leaders and school counselors through the lens of collaboration toward expanding notions of school leadership. Further, the authors work to define collaboration in the context of K-12 schools with a focus on the roles of school leaders and school counselors toward highlighting the necessity of teaching collaboration in leadership and school counselor preparation programs. Next they showcase practices of a regional research university to actively promote cooperation between school counselors and educational leaders while in training. Early results provide a glance into the findings and briefly summarize the process. Finally, recommendations and conclusions illuminate practical suggestions for other universities to promote collaboration between school leaders and school counselors throughout their training programs.

Rationale

Traditional Roles

The School Leader

The role of the campus leader is ever changing. Traditional leaders were expected to teach classes for a portion of the day and address administrative duties, manage discipline, transport students, and clean up the building during the other portions of the day. Many of these leaders were beholden to a time of authoritative leadership that demanded respect and obedience solely through positional power (Seifert & Vornberg, 2002) and a strong-willed disposition. School leaders of this type were then, and continue to be, more adept at managing the duties of the campus than they were at attending to the specific curricular needs of students and faculty. By contrast, the role of the ideal leader, a term synonymous with the instructional leader (Lashley & Stickl, 2016), depicts a person who negotiates power through a variety of methods depending on the situation and needs of those involved at each phase of the decision-making process. The instructional leader, unlike traditional leaders, is apt for managing the duties of the campus. Yet, the complexity of his/her abilities also prepares them to champion complex challenges arising from the selection of vertically aligned curriculum through the implementation of sound equity-centered instructional practices. Traditional and instructional leaders are not seen as equal in this context. The instructional leader (also educational leader) exemplifies the abilities of the traditional leader to *run* a school while at the same time directly impacting student achievement by engaging faculty in meaningful professional experiences that result in lasting changes in self-efficacy and collective efficacy (DeWitt, 2018; Hattie, 2009, 2012). Comparing the roles of the traditional leader and the instructional leader provides a foundation to explore the perceived impact that each set of roles has on student achievement. While there are stark differences between these two leader types, the characterizations provided are not absolute, and leaders often fall somewhere along a continuum between the two.

The School Counselor

School counseling, like school leadership, has had a long history of evolution as societal demands have driven the roles and functions that a school counselor performs (Wingfield et al., 2010). Emerging from the vocational movement of the early 20th century, the profession of school counseling developed out of an add-on responsibility of teachers to assist students in determining their future vocation. From the early 1920s into the 1940s, the advent of school counseling foci evolved to include mental health and the personal, social needs of students. As the mid part of the century unfolded the need arose for school counselors to lead the charge toward the identification of students with very specialized abilities to keep the workforce competitive with other countries (Stone & Dahir, 2016). From the 1960s through the 1990s, counselors became more involved with the school's mission, supporting dropout prevention and the development of comprehensive school counseling programs. These new roles and functions became additions to the responsibilities of school counselors. Although there was a movement to tie the role of school counselors to the mission of the school, school counseling through much of the twentieth century was still seen as an ancillary student support service, and school counselors functioned with no clear direction or purpose (Dahir, Burnham, & Stone, 2010).

Leadership Roles in Collaborative Schools

The School Leader

As state and federal school accountability measures have increased, so have the demands of the campus leader. The increasing focus on accountability appears to be one of the catalysts that necessitated the evolution of school leaders from traditional to more collaborative instructional leaders. The collaborative instructional leader sees leadership as an experience to be shared and therefore develops a leadership team that incorporates representation from a cross-section of the school's faculty, staff, and community. The diversity of the team provides a place for the leader to test ideas, pose questions, and monitor the climate of the campus (Love, Stiles, Mundry, & DiRanna, 2008). The members of the team are framed as leaders regardless of their level of certification or campus roles, thus providing opportunities for the team to engage in ongoing dialogues that include input from a larger sample of the school population.

Collaborative instructional leaders create an environment that encourages collaboration, risk-taking, and continued learning. The leader's approach to academic and curricular challenges involves input from the team, increasing the opportunity for others to feel included in the decision-making process and experience-increased feelings of ownership in the learning process. This type of leadership often lends itself to leadership styles such as transformational (Gunderson, Hellesøy, & Raeder, 2012; Quin, Deris, Bischoff, & Johnson, 2015), servant (Cerit, 2009), and blended (Collinson & Collinson, 2009, p. 376).

The School Counselor

The advent of the American School Counseling Association (ASCA) National Model redefined the roles and functions of school counselors to better align with integral parts of the school's mission (Stone & Dahir, 2016). The ASCA National Model also espouses role expectations where school counselors serve as advocates, leaders, collaborators, and systemic change agents (2012, 2019). As a result of these changes, school counselors are expected to know: what they believe, the mission of the counseling program within the school's mission, a future vision of their program, students, and school, and a plan to reach these goals (Young, Millard, & Miller-Kneale, 2013). School counselors are expected to be data-driven practitioners who serve to connect the home and community with the school, teachers, school leaders, and the students (Lashley & Stickl, 2016). Additionally, serving in a leadership role within the school has become more imperative as school counselors are trained in multicultural issues, advocacy, collaboration, and in identifying achievement and opportunity gaps through the use of data analysis (Dahir et al., 2010). They provide distinct perspectives that directly impact student outcomes by engaging in advocacy efforts for students, and programs that are intentionally designed to address challenges that impede student success. Under the umbrella of these new roles as leaders, advocates, collaborators, and systemic change agents, school counselors are expected to address the academic, social-emotional, and college and career needs of all students. Serving in the capacity of these revised roles, school counselors build and implement comprehensive school counseling programs through the four components of the ASCA National Model: Define, Manage, Deliver, and Assess (ASCA, 2019).

Collaboration

Over the past decade, there has been a resurgence in publications examining collaborative leadership, and the importance of the principal-counselor relationship for student success (Anrig, 2015; Bore & Bore, 2009; Froeschle & Nix, 2009), school counseling program implementation (DeSimone & Roberts, 2016; Mason, 2011), school culture (Edwards, 2007; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Lowery et al., 2018) as well as the need for training programs to help facilitate these relationships (DeSimone & Roberts, 2016; Lowery et al., 2018). Finkelstein (2009) conducted a study on behalf of The College Board, the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), and ASCA examining principals' and counselors' perceptions of the importance of this relationship and identified the most valued components of the relationship: a shared vision or goal (Lashley & Stickl, 2016; Reavie, 2015), communication, collaboration, trust, and respect (Dahir et al., 2010; DeSimone & Roberts, 2016; Odegard-Koester & Watkins, 2016). Subsequently, a successful collaborative principal-counselor relationship has been found to have a positive effect on student success and school culture (Edwards, 2007; Hattie, 2009, 2012; Lowery et al., 2018).

Additionally, there have been several recommendations for developing productive and fruitful collaborations between the principal and school counselors. What emerged as the key is the creation of a culture of communication between the principal and counselor who meet to discuss student and school-wide needs through a strength-based lens continually identifying the leadership roles each can play (Dahir et al., 2010). School counselors are charged to take the lead on this, informing principals and stakeholders of their training, roles, professional best practices, and providing data-driven suggestions through accountability meetings (Froeschle & Nix, 2009).

The redesign of training programs is also a common theme in the literature (DeSimone & Roberts, 2016; Lowery et al., 2018; Wingfield et al., 2010) suggesting that school counseling and education leadership programs and faculty need to develop a curriculum that allows for cross-discipline training (Lowery et al., 2018). These pre-service collaborations can prepare both principals and school counselors to move into the profession with a clear understanding of what they can expect of one another, the strengths each role brings to the leadership team, and how to collaborate toward improving student outcomes (DeSimone & Roberts, 2016). Finally, Lashley and Stickl (2016) suggest that training programs also provide hands-on experiences in developing principal-counselor collaborations.

Methodology

Changes in the role of school counselors and school counseling programs through the ASCA National Model has created the need for a paradigm shift for the educational leader, teachers, and other stakeholders. Unfortunately, these stakeholders have not been exposed to the necessary training and practice to build capacity for understanding these newly created roles (Froeschle & Nix, 2009; Lowery et al., 2018). The literature suggests that educational leadership programs have not adjusted to address the transformed roles of school counselors, forcing administrators to rely on their experience and in many cases, traditional training models, to inform their decisions to hire and allocate the resources of school counselors (DeSimone & Roberts, 2016). This section builds on the suggestion to create pre-service collaborations between school counseling programs and educational leadership programs to assist students in deepening their understanding of the roles and training across both fields (Dahir et al., 2010; Lowery et al., 2018).

Following the guides of Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) and ASCA toward collaboration, professors from a Southern university have begun to intentionally design learning opportunities that model and encourage ongoing collaboration between future school leaders and school counselors. To this end, the researchers hosted a crossover class that included students from both programs and a representative from the state department of education. The class plan afforded students the opportunity to work together in groups toward the objective of foraging lasting collaborative relationships.

The class was structured to share information on the roles, professional standards, and training of both leaders and school counselors. Additionally, suggestions regarding supervisory relationships and collaboration opportunities were shared. Following the didactic portion of the class, the students were broken out into small groups pairing leadership students with school counseling students. Within these groups, ASCA Administrative conferences were conducted, prompting transformative discussions centered on the importance of collaboration between these roles. This classroom experience provided an opportunity to increase knowledge and to model collaboration between university faculty, the university and the state department of education, and finally educational leadership and school counseling students.

Early Results

Pre-class and post-class surveys were offered toward gaining an understanding of the knowledge and attitudes each group held about the other. Additionally, reflective forum posts were assigned after the class to assess student perceptions of the experience. Although this data was collected to inform pedagogy and not as research, it was apparent from pre-surveys that both sides had gaps in understanding the other's roles. The post-surveys indicated that there was an increase in each groups' knowledge as well as an increase in awareness that there is more to be learned. The post-tests and post-class reflections both reflected the students' desire to have more collaborative learning experiences like this throughout their programs.

Recommendations and Conclusions

Suggestions for Teaching Collaboration

School leaders must employ the entirety of styles and philosophies from which to access resources and illuminate ideas. These ideas are made richer and more inclusive when collaborative efforts are facilitated in environments and on teams that intentionally include diverse perspectives (Love et al., 2008). Collaboration between school leadership faculty and school counseling faculty in providing crossover experiences for their students is a necessity. These opportunities should include activities that allow students to learn from and about the other's roles and training, and engage in activities that will enable them to practice collaboration through role-play of real-life scenarios. Additionally, the modeling of collaboration by faculty provides pre-service leaders and school counselors a vision of how such partnerships might work.

Connecting crossover opportunities to the ASCA National Model and PSEL is key to justifying these collaborations. In school leadership, connections to PSEL standards one, two, and seven are almost seamless. Standard one identifies that effective leaders are expected to work in collaboration with members of the school community to plan a vision that promotes student success. Standard two outlines collaboration as a professional norm to be employed by leaders

alongside integrity, fairness, transparency, and trust. Standard seven addresses the professional community for teachers and staff. In this context, collaboration is an integral part of the professional culture of engagement that includes collaborative examinations of practice, feedback, and learning (PSEL, 2015). Similarly, key standards for school counselors address the leadership, advocacy, and collaboration training needed for school counselors to best serve the needs of their students (ASCA, 2018). These training standards reflect the transformed role that school counselors are expected to play in the school community. Combined, these standards point to specific strategies of how to build leadership teams from a strengths-based perspective.

Projections for Best Practices

As noted earlier, effective collaborations between school counselors and school leaders have direct positive impacts on student achievement. With such clear benefits, additional research must be conducted toward exploring the necessity and specific areas of added values these collaborations have. To begin, mixed methods studies are needed to inquire what is currently being done in these programs to introduce and foster collaborative environments and habits. Additionally, research and program evaluation studies can be undertaken to aid in the development of pedagogical best practices around the training of school leadership teams.

Conclusions

The literature supports the shift from a more traditional leadership model to a more collaborative model of school leadership that utilizes a team of leaders who bring their experiences and perspectives to the decision-making process. The school counselor, trained in data-driven decision making and comprehensive school counseling programs, has been identified as a valuable member of such a team. Currently, there appears to be a gap in understanding regarding the training and appropriate roles of school counselors. Pre-service experiences in collaboration may provide a foundation to bridge this gap, enhance future professional relationships, and impact student outcomes. This article, highlighting the creation of such experiences, illuminates the need for examining the status quo of identified best practices and suggests intentionally tethering collaborative practices throughout curricular experiences.

References

American School Counselor Association. (2012). *The ASCA national model: A framework for school counseling programs (3rd Ed.).* Alexandria, VA: Author.

American School Counselor Association (2018). *ASCA Standards for School Counselor Preparation Programs.* Alexandria, VA: Author

American School Counselor Association. (2019). *The ASCA national model: A framework for school counseling programs (4th Ed.).* Alexandria, VA: Author.

Anrig, G. (2015). How we know collaboration works. *Educational Leadership, (72)*5, 30-35. http://www.ascd:publications/educational-leadership/feb15/vol72/num05/How-We-Know-Collaboration-Works.aspx

Bore, S., & Bore, J. (2009). School accountability and leadership: Principal-counselor collaboration. *John Ben Shepperd Journal of Practical Leadership*,*4*, 128-135.

Cerit, Y. (2009). The effects of servant leadership behaviours of school principals on teachers' job satisfaction. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 37*(5), 600-623. doi:10.1177/1741143209339650

Collinson, D., & Collinson, M. (2009). 'Blended leadership': Employee perspectives on effective leadership in the UK further education sector. *Leadership, 5*(3), 365-380. doi:10.1177/1742715009337766

Dahir, C.A., Burnham, J.J., & Stone, C. (2010). Principals as partners: Counselors as collaborators. *NASSP Bulletin*, *94*(4), 286-305. doi:10.1177/0192636511399899

DeSimone, J. R., & Roberts, L. A. (2016). Fostering collaboration between preservice educational leadership and school counseling graduate candidates. *Journal of Counselor Preparation & Supervision*, *8*(2), 12-27. doi:10.7729/82.1081

DeWitt, P. M. (2018). *What is collaborative leadership?* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Edwards, L. (2007). Communicating professional school counselor roles to principals. *Georgia School Counselors Association Journal*, *14*56-58.

Finkelstein, D. (2009). *A closer look at the principal-counselor relationship: A survey of principals and school counselors*. Washington, DC: College Board. Retrieved from http://professionals.collegeboard.com/profdownload/ a-closer-look.pdf

Froeschle, J. G., & Nix, S. (2009). A Solution-Focused Leadership Model: Examining Perceptions of Effective Counselor Leadership. *Journal of School Counseling*, *7*(5), 1-21. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ886116

Glickman, C. D., Gordon, S. P., & Ross-Gordon, J. M. (2018). *Supervision and instructional leadership* (10th ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Gunderson, G., Hellesøy, B. T., & Raeder, S. (2012). Leadership international project teams: The effectiveness of transformational leadership in dynamic work environments *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies, 19*(1), 46-57. doi:10.1177/1548051811429573

Hallinger, P. & Heck, R. H. (2010). Collaborative leadership and school improvement: understanding the impact on school capacity and student learning. *School Leadership and Management, 30*(2), 95-110. doi:10.1080/13632431003663214

Hattie, J. (2012). *Visible learning for teachers: Maximizing impact on learning.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Hattie, J. (2009). *Visible learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Lashley, C. A. & Stickl, J. (2016). Counselors and principals: Collaborating to improve instructional equity. *Journal of Organizational & Educational Leadership. 2*(1) Article 6. http://digitalcommons.gardner-webb.edu/joel/vol2/iss1/6

Love, N., Stiles, K., Mundry, S., and DiRanna, K. (2008). *The Data Coach's Guide to Improving Learning for All Students: The Power of Collective Inquiry*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Lowery, K., Quick, M., Boyland, L., Geesa, R. L., and Mayes, R. D. (2018) It wasn't mentioned and should have been: Principals' preparation to support comprehensive school counseling, *Journal of Organizational & Educational Leadership. 3*(2) Article 3. https://digitalcommons.gardner-webb.edu/joel/vol3/iss2/3

Mason, E. (2011). Leadership practices of school counselors and counseling program implementation. *National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) Bulletin, 94*, 274-285, doi:10.1177/0192636510395012

Odegard-Koester, M. A., & Watkins, P. (2016). Collaborative relationships between principals and school counselors: Facilitating a model for developing a working alliance. *Journal of School Counseling*, *14*(9), 1-38. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1119083

Professional Standards for Educational Leaders. (2015). Retrieved from Reston, VA: http://www.npbea.org.

Quin, J., Deris, A., Bischoff, G., & Johnson, J. T. (2015). Comparison of transformational leadership practices: Implications for school districts and principal preparation. *Journal of Leadership Education*, *14*(3), 71-85. doi:10.12806/V14/I3/R5

Reavie, M.S. (2015) Establishing best practices in school counseling via collaborative leadership in the counsellor-school administrator dyad. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, Issue # 174, https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1086880.pdf

Rock, W. D., Remley, T. P., & Range, L.M., (2017). Principal-counselor collaboration and school climate., *NAASP Bulletin, 101*(1), 23-35. doi:10.1177/0192636517698037

Seifert, E. H., & Vornberg, J. A. (2002). *The New School Leader for the 21st Century: The Principal*. Scarecrow Press, Lanham, MD.

Stone, C. B., & Dahir, C. A. (2016). *The transformed school counselor*. Boston, MA : Cengage Learning.

Wingfield, R. J., Reese, R. F., & West-Olatunji, C. A. (2010). Counselors as leaders in schools. *Florida Journal of Educational Administration & Policy*, *4*(1), 114-130. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ911435

Young, A., Millard, T., & Miller-Kneale, M. (2013). Enhancing school counselor instructional leadership through collaborative teaming: Implications for principals. *NASSP Bulletin*, *97*, 253-269. doi:10.1177/0192636513483356

Doing Schools Differently: Visionary Leadership in an Alabama School District

Dee Dupree Bennett, Rachel S. Turnham, and Pamela A. Lemoine
Troy University

Abstract

This case study describes how one school district in Alabama was able to sustain learning and effectively educate students using technology during the COVID-19 pandemic. Investigation of leadership practices found several established procedures that facilitated the education process differently and adapted to change abruptly. The case study findings identify five practices exhibited by the school district leader and how intertwining the practices resulted in educational stability during the pandemic. The leadership practices are: tools and training; technology readiness; emphasis of standards; forward-thinking habits; two-way communication. The conclusions from the case study outline applicable practices and technology integration for educational leaders.

Keywords: leadership, technology, distance learning, forward-thinking, educational planning

American's education system has been tested as traditional education teaching processes changed interaction with students during the current COVID-19 pandemic. Schools are being conducted differently, students are learning differently, teachers are supporting students indifferently; therefore, school administrators need to lead differently. With an abrupt shift to virtual learning and technology embedded instruction, some districts were prepared for the transition. Other districts not as well equipped to integrate instruction through the use of technology, have struggled to determine how to change instructional methods, distribute learning devices, and execute distance learning.

This paper describes how one school district leader's foresight facilitated the integration of technological instruction methods, which allowed educators to conduct school differently and rapidly adapt to change. Due to the technology processes already established by the school district leader, the school administrators, teachers, students, and parents continued educational processes. Five practices were identified to understand better technology applications and the broader scope of multimedia adoption by all stakeholders: (1) tools and training; (2) technology readiness; (3) emphasis of standards; (4) forward-thinking habits; (5) two-way communication. Intertwining the specific practices supported the success of the school district's educational methods during the pandemic and state of emergency.

Literature Review

The concept of online learning has continued to grow because of technology changes, globalization, availability of the internet, personalized learning priorities, and concerns about traditional schools (Cavanaugh, 2004). Virtual schools, in the form of fully online or blended instruction, have the potential to dramatically expand the educational opportunities of American students, largely overcoming the geographic and demographic restrictions, with the promise to improve the quality of education (Lips, 2010).

The United States displayed steady growth in virtual schooling, as documented by the International Association for K-12 Online Learning, known as iNACOL (2011). It grew to serve a broader range of purposes, including early engagement in higher education, increased student choice of courses, credit recovery, and flexibility in student schedules (Davis, 2011; Miron, G., Shank, C. & Davidson, 2018). Watson, Murrin, Vashaw, Gemin, and Rapp (2014) indicated that online education enrollment grew significantly in several decades and the number continued to increase each year. The Evergreen Education Group (2014) reported a total of 45 states and the District of Columbia had a virtual state school through an online initiative, full-time online schools, or both. Many states even mandated the creation of a hybrid or online learning program in every district in their state (Cowan, 2011). The support for virtual schooling increased rather quickly, and the nature of what was offered became more comprehensive (Cavanaugh, 2004; Cavanaugh & DiPietro, 2011).

As virtual schools continued to grow, Rice (2006) emphasized the importance of modifying instructional strategies to incorporate more technology-based learner-centered practices. Educational programs need committed leaders who understood the new types of instruction and were prepared to improve educational outcomes for students (Darling-Hammon, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr, 2007). School leaders were vital to sustainable education reform and could be the

change agents to move schools from what worked in the past to what was needed in the future (Mercer, 2016).

Researchers documented the importance of school leaders to have viable practices such as having vision with a plan and strategy of direction, managing the learning program, understanding and developing relationships, and lastly, creating conducive working conditions for growth in student performance (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008; Szczesiul & Huizenga, 2014). While studying virtual school leadership, Goodvin and Gibson (2008) found that virtual school administrators needed more preparation for the technology-rich environments they were embracing and required to possess some level of skills to accomplish tasks through technology. According to iNACOL (2011), the critical aspects of virtual leadership included: effective communication, being mission-driven, establishing relationships, being a risk-taker, and advocating for program needs. Additional leadership research by authors Wagner (2012) and Fullan (2002) indicate specific skills, such as adjusting to change and understanding adaptability, were critical in leading in a new workforce in the digital age.

Research completed by Davis and Robyler (2005) indicated that there was a need for school personnel who understood the unique benefits of the digital age and were prepared to meet its obligations and requirements. School leaders were one of the essential elements affecting change in a school and implementing strategies to help the process to improve the school community (Coryn, Schroter, & McCown, 2014). Cavanagh (2004) explained in an early work, *Development and Management of Virtual Schools,* that the implementation of virtual learning at elementary and secondary levels had unique aspects that warranted more focus to adequately prepare those assuming the leadership roles within a new educational environment.

By identifying the critical practices for virtual school management and technology-based instruction, school leaders could be better prepared as they advance in education. Furthermore, school leaders could better understand the progressions of extensive technology integration and the phenomenon of virtual school administration. With the global COVID-19 pandemic and a rush to lead schools virtually, the topic deserved further investigation.

Methodology

The study was conducted to explore the use of crucial competencies perceived as ideal when leading a school or district comprised of extensive technology-based instruction. Case study methodology enabled educational researchers to examine school processes to identify factors that influence school functioning (Merriam, 1988). Case study research typically uses several data collection techniques, including interviews, observations, and document analysis. For this study, the researchers used interview and observation data to investigate and define the leader competencies perceived as essential to lead online education during a state of crisis successfully.

According to Coryn, Schroter, and McCown, (2014), one of the most critical lessons that emerged from research on effective schooling was the importance of the school leader. The conceptual framework used in case study research illustrated the connection between virtual learning programs and the leadership practices needed by school district leaders in the COVID-19 pandemic. The merging of two phenomena, virtual learning and administrative practices, invited exploration to determine the leadership strands deemed necessary for school leaders in providing educational formats to meet student needs. Given the abrupt need to transfer from traditional education paradigms to distance learning in K-12 schools, technology was perceived by national

and state leaders as essential to the learning process; thus, it became crucial to explore what abilities school leaders needed to lead the process to reshape online and virtual education.

The public-school district was selected due to its location in a rapidly growing Alabama community and because of the compliments the school district received from its stakeholders related to the smooth transition to distance learning. The gender and race demographics of the student population reflected 51.26% male and 48.74% female with 54.84% African American, 9.25% American Indian, 1.36% Asian, 32.53% Caucasian, 12.5% Hispanic, and 1.64% Other. Over 67% of the students was eligible for free or reduced lunch reflecting a low socioeconomic population within the district. The data for the case study were collected over three months from February to April 2020. All the data were qualitative and were collected to provide insight into a successful transfer from traditional school education to virtual and distance learning.

The researchers used convenience sampling to include participants accessible based on the researchers' professional network of colleagues during a period when public quarantines are taking place, schools are not in session due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and face-to-face access for interviews are not appropriate. Convenience sampling, a form of purposeful sampling, permitted access to participants through virtual meetings, which are strategic to ascertaining leadership practices within the school district. The participants were all educators who had knowledge of the topic under study and were current educators in the district. The participants included the superintendent, technology director, board member, 4 teachers, 2 building administrators, 1 gifted specialist, 20 parents, 2 public works employees, and an elected city official.

The interviews were conducted in an open-ended question format. Interviews were expected to be "a conversation between two people in which one person tries to direct the conversation to obtain information for a specific purpose" (Gordan, 1992, p. 2). Questions guided the interview to keep the discussion directed and on topic essential to identifying the practices perceived important during the transition to distance learning. The conversation focused on specific points of information to be collected and allowed the participants to expand on each question. Following the interviews, the notes were transcribed to prepare for data analysis. The use of the interview transcripts for coding allowed the researcher to summarize and condense the data (Saldana, 2009).

The findings resulted in the identification of the five leadership practices central to the school district leader's progress with the implementation of distance learning and the sustained educational process for the teachers, students, and parents. The practices included (1) tools and training; (2) technology readiness; (3) emphasis of standards; (4) forward-thinking habits; (5) two-way communication with all stakeholders.

School Leadership Practices

Tools and Training

School leaders understand hundreds of educational tools are available for instructing online, and the purposes are endless (Google Classroom, Class Dojo, Edmodo, Scholastic Learn, IXL, Kahoot, etc.) Some tools are designed for student autonomy, others for teacher planning, and even some are simply for progress monitoring. For this school district, the leader outlined specific methods for selecting the online tools designed to provide collaboration between the teacher and the student. Only a few digital tools were chosen to use within the district for simplicity and structured implementation (Bates, 2019). The intent was purposeful to facilitate teacher access and

familiarity of use to maximize instruction and promote student performance, rather than allowing too many tools to be used, which might have inhibited understanding and application. Tools selected included:

- Google Classroom: a platform where teachers can easily create, grade, and provide feedback on assignments.
- Class Dojo: a free application that provides an open line of communication to parents as a whole or individually. This provided a second line of communication aside from the telephone.
- Scholastic Learn at Home: a fun and engaging article with suggested games, projects, or activities.
- IXL: math, science, or English/Grammar lessons for all grade levels K-12. The lessons are directly linked and divided into standards.

The district leader emphasized how the faculty remained the most influential part of online education and were essential in applying the technology to their instruction. The district leader committed resources and time to provide professional development for teachers and school leaders to use digital tools as well as to integrate technology into teaching.

The district leader established expectations for district professionals (teachers, instructional support, and administrators) to both model and use the instructional technology tools. While resources were implemented, tracking of use and effectiveness was calculated (Grant & Zachariah, 2017; Hew & Lo, 2018). One participant explained, "When the administrators also go through the technology training, it delivers a message that we are in this together." There was an emphasis on professional development to promote technology skillsets, crucial to ensuring school personnel were prepared to use virtual 21st-century technologies for teaching and learning.

Technology Readiness

The term *technology readiness* refers to the beliefs related to the willingness to adopt new technologies to work effectively and reach set goals. Parasuraman (2000) defines technology readiness as one's willingness to leverage new technologies in performing tasks. To promote a virtual school model, school leaders needed to understand technology infrastructure planning and development, define the integration of technology and curriculum, and anticipate changes in operational and education needs precipitated by technological innovations. The district leader expected transformation of learning to include technology use across multiple stakeholders (Taylor, Grant, Hamdy, Marei, & Venkatramana, 2020).

School leaders who received technology training and personally used technology were better at encouraging and incorporating technology use in their schools (Brown & Jacobson, 2016). The International Association for K-12 Online Learning, iNACOL, (2011) outlined how administrators played a pivotal role in determining how well technology was used in schools and emphasized how virtual school leaders should support a digital age learning culture, excellence in professional practice, systemic improvements, and digital citizenship. Goodvin's and Gibson's (2008) study on preparing school leaders for technology-rich environments highlighted the need for school-based leaders to possess some level of skill in accomplishing technology tasks. Study participants stated, "Leaders have to model to show teachers that it [is]okay to try new things" demonstrating as K12 leaders that they are competent technology users.

When schools were closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic in April 2020, the state required each local education agency to establish a continuous learning plan, which defined the strategies and processes to provide district learning. The case study district leader was able to report the use of technology applications swiftly since these practices and technology readiness had been embedded within existing school plans.

The district leader's expectations and requirements had previously been established for all school administrators to complete Google training and remain knowledgeable of the products teachers and students were expected to use. This development allowed a quick transition to meet students' learning needs. Established district practices made conversations easier when communicating state expectations regarding implementation practices and technical challenges. School leaders were able to serve as additional technical support for teachers and students during the transition from traditional educational teaching to distance learning.

Emphasis of Standards

Case study findings reflected district stakeholders reporting that virtual learning was not a new concept for their local education agency. The district leader initiated a vision for technology use in 2015 when each local education agency was prompted by the state to create a Virtual School Plan (U.S. Office of Educational Technology, 2017; Birnbaum, Weiler & Westbrook, 2020). The guidelines and framework for virtual learning expanded with the state's adoption of the International Society of Technology Education, ISTE, Standards in 2016. Once the State Department task force recommended new learning objectives in 2017, districts were encouraged to incorporate digital learner standards for grades K-12 in the 2018-2019 school years. The ISTE Standards defined minimum requirements; in interviews, stakeholders in the case study reported district-wide implementation went beyond minimum requirements and served to keep them focused on what was important.

Teachers working in the case study district were expected to use Google Suite in all K-12 classrooms to implement suggested state technology standards with students. Students were gradually granted access to more types of technology as they advanced throughout their school careers. The goals were designed to expose students to the proper use of technology slowly and to produce proficiency when using Google Suite products. With the systematic approach to incorporate the standards, Google Suite, and the devices, the administrators, teachers, students and parents were technologically prepared to navigate online classes. Additionally, teachers in the case study district were Google certified by 2018, thus making the transition to distance learning less stressful and seamless.

In the case study district, due to the prescience and preparedness of administrators, teachers, and parents, the students in all grades were less anxious about moving to distance learning because they did not have to learn how to use devices or programs (Grant, 2015). Students were familiar with technology since it had been in use daily in instruction and school assignments. Teachers reported that parents acknowledged how grateful they were that the students were able to maneuver through the coursework with little assistance or guidance.

Teachers and school leaders reported that students embraced the virtual format quickly and showed high levels of technology engagement. As far as academic instruction, one participant explained, "We are consistently reminded to incorporate the technology standards in our lesson

plans and assess the progress annually to prepare for the next year. I do not feel pressured with this idea since I have been educated on the importance of the standards."

Forward-Thinking Habits

In the 2017 report from the U.S. Office of Educational Technology, *Reimagining the Role of Technology in Education: the 2017 National Educational Technology Plan*, the editors reported the need to:

> Develop clear communities of practice for education leaders at all levels that act as a hub for setting a vision, understanding research, and sharing practices. Building on the model of the education innovation clusters, state, district, university, and community organization leaders should establish cohesive communities of practice—in person and online—to create virtuous cycles for sharing the most recent research and effective practices in the use of educational technology (p. 53)

The school district leader worked with stakeholders to develop a detailed technology plan in 2015 with strategic steps to enhance the district's technology by the year 2020. "A successful leader should be looking at what is coming next, has to be visionary, and determine how to make things happen. We are very fortunate that we were prepared for this change," one participant explained.

A participant suggested the importance of the leader's ability to "help all of us see the end goal, and for many of our students, their end goal was just to graduate, but our district leader understood that students must earn a diploma before they can do anything else." Even during a time of crisis, teachers were appreciative of how the district leader continued encouraging the stakeholders to keep moving forward and to remain focused on the vision. According to the U.S. Office of Educational Technology (2017), "Taking full advantage of technology to transform learning requires strong leadership capable of creating a shared vision of which all members of the community feel a part." (p. 42).

Kouzes and Posner (2007) described leadership as gazing onto the horizon, communicating what is seen, and taking note of what is around the corner. Virtual education was over the horizon and needed leadership to promote educating students through many forms, formats, and formulas. Education leaders were to serve as facilitators for the implementation of strategies and the process for change (Coryn et al., 2014).

Two-Way Communication with All Stakeholders

Canavaugh (2004) emphasized how communication, especially in a state of crisis, was key to keeping teachers, parents, and students connected and crucial to student success. Because of the distance between school leaders and the staff in a virtual setting, communication was critically important and the ability to communicate with school administrators, teachers, and stakeholders was needed internally and externally (DeRosa, 2010, Edmonson, 2020). Communication tools (email, instant messaging, group conversation tools, management systems, and the telephone) were used by the district leader to connect with stakeholders. They were essential to the productivity of all educational participants (Robbins & Judge, 2018). Operative communication strategies, programs, and devices offered an avenue for the district leader in conveying thoughts, ideas, and plans. Because of the various means of communication accessible during the transition, stress was

reduced, rumors were eliminated, and the focus of leadership remained on the educational needs within the district.

Communication was vital and certainly expected during times of uncertainty. The case study district leader continued to give detailed directions, offer explanations, eliminate fears, and address concerns. He was also willing to listen to the interests of teachers, parents, students, and community members to further serve their needs. Although the U.S. Department of Education encouraged parents, educators, and administrators to collaborate creatively to continue to meet the needs of students during the pandemic (2020), the use of technology was a customary practice in the district. Established collaboration and communication practices made it possible for the information to be published through social media and news outlets related to food distribution, community resources, academic support, and even the installation of complimentary internet for 60 days. Communicating and working together with all stakeholders, community officials, and school building leaders made education more accessible for the students in the district.

Implications for School Leaders

The case study was concurrent with the review of literature and was supported by previous research associated with distance learning. While investigating best approaches for distance learning administrators, Morgan (2020) defined guidelines parallel to the five practices of the case study district leader. The research-based strategies developed from data analysis at MIT established three specific recommendations for effective distance learning leadership and were common practices for the case study district (Reich, 2020). Findings from the case study and previous research reflected the following implications for school leaders regarding visionary leadership for distance learning and serving in a time of abrupt change:

i. School leaders need to establish specific technology tools, devices, and training to be used in the district and explain the purpose of the selections.
ii. School leaders should model technology readiness to engage in the use of devices and software actively.
iii. School leaders need to stay current in adopting and applying the standards while emphasizing the importance of the standards to teachers, students, parents, and stakeholders.
iv. School leaders should develop forward-thinking habits to ensure progress and innovation in planning for the future of the district.
v. School leaders need to understand the benefits of practicing two-way communication through various devices to ensure information is delivered but new ideas are shared.

Conclusion

Participants in the case study described the district leader as ambitious for the success of students as well as connected to the needs of the teachers to meet the needs of students. They explained how he was committed to the mission and vision of the district, set long-term goals, and supported learning for all students, even before the pandemic. The case study findings revealed the district leader's emphasis on the five practices (tools and training; technology readiness; emphasis of standards; forward-thinking habits; and two-way communication with all stakeholders)

contributed to a seamless transition to distance learning and continued education even in a time of crisis.

School leaders need to understand that technology requires leaders at all levels to look forward with a willingness to try new things with vision and a sense of direction. Technology in schools may have been a struggle for some and a hindrance for others, but digital tools allowed students in this district to continue learning.

Virtual, distance school programs became an educational requirement during the pandemic. Examining practices of visionary leaders warranted investigation into the constructs that were demonstrated by a district leader. With the expansion of the virtual school and online learning programs throughout the world, the demand for prescient school leaders was needed. Insight for school leadership candidates needs to include foresight about the non-traditional education paradigms. With close to 800,000 students in Alabama being taught online during the pandemic, embracing distance learning and reviewing leadership success is essential. School leaders need to work together to evaluate the critical aspects of success, examine the education possibilities, envision the district's approach to learning, and execute a plan for the new normal.

References

Bates, A. W. (2019) *Teaching in a Digital Age. Guidelines for designing teaching and learning.* Mountain View, CA: Creative Commons.

Birnbaum, M., Weiler, S., & Westbrook, P. (2020). The leaders' dilemma: P-20 response to the threat of a pandemic. *University of Toronto Press Journals.* Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.3138/JEHR-2019-0019.

Brown, B. & Jacobson, M. (2016). Principals' technology leadership. *Journal of School Leadership, 26*(5), 811-836.

Cavanaugh, C. (2004). *Development and Management of Virtual Schools.* Hershey, PA: Information Science Publishing.

Cavanaugh, C., & DiPietro, M. (2011). An introduction and overview of K–12 virtual schooling. In R. E. Ferdig. & C. Cavanaugh, (Eds.) Lessons learned from virtual schools: Experiences and recommendations from the field (pp. 1–10). Vienna, VA: International Association for K–12 Online Learning (iNACOL).

Coryn, C.L.S., Schroter, D.C., & McCown, R. H. (2014). A mixed-methods study of some of the factors associated with successful school strategies for Native Hawaiian students in the state of Hawaii. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research, 8(4),* 377-395.

Cowan, K. (2011). *Learning across distance*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Darling-Hammon, L., LaPointe, M., Meyerson, D., & Orr, M. (2007). *Preparing school leaders for a changing world: Executive summary*. Stanford, CA: Stanford Educational Leadership Institute.

Davis, N. E. (2011). Online and blended learning rolling into New Zealand schools. *Computers in New Zealand Schools, 23*(1)*,* 101-107. Retrieved from http://education2x.otago.ac.nz/cinzs/mod/resource/view.php?id=139.

Davis, N. E., & Robyler, M. D. (2005). Preparing teachers for the "schools that technology built": Evaluation of a program to train teachers of virtual schooling. *Journal of Research on Technology in Education. 37*(4), 399-409.

DeRosa, D. (2010) *Virtual Team Success.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.

Evergreen Education Group. (2014). *Keeping Pace with K-12 Online Learning*. Retrieved from http://kpk12.com.

Fullan, M. (2001). *Leading in a culture of change.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Fullan, M. (2002). The change. *Educational Leadership, 58*(8)*,* 16-20.

Goodvin, S., & Gibson, I. (2008). Leaders learning to change (L2C): Preparing school leaders for diverse, technology-rich, global learning environments. *Proceedings of World Conference on Educational Multimedia, Hypermedia and Telecommunications*. 3379-3387.

Gordan, R. L. (1992). *Basic interview skills.* Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press.

Grant, J. (2015). *Distance learning in medical education.* New Delhi: Elsevier.

Grant, J. & Zachariah, A. (2017). *A Practical Guide for Medical Teachers: Distance education.* New Delhi: Elsevier.

Hew, K. F. & Lo, C. K. (2018). Flipped classroom improves student learning in health professions education: a met-analysis. *BMC medical education,* 18(1), 38.

International Association for K-12 Online Learning (iNACOL). (2011). *The online learning definitions project.* Retrieved from https://www.inacol.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/iNACOL_DefinitionsProject.pdf.

International Society for Technology Education, ISTE, (2016). Standards for students, educators, and leaders. Retrieved from https://www.iste.org/standards

Kouzes, J. & Posner, B. (2007). *The leadership challenge*. (4th ed). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Leithwood, K., Harris, A., & Hopkins, D. (2008). Seven strong claims about successful school leadership. *School leadership and management*, 28(1), 27-42.

Lips, D. (2010). How online learning is revolutionizing K-12 education and benefiting students. *The Heritage Report. January,* Retrieved from: http://www.heritage.org/technology/ report/how-online-learning-revolutionizing-k-12-education-and-benefiting-students.

Merriam, S. B. (1988). *Case study research in education: A qualitative approach*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Mercer, D. (2016). Who is the building leader? Commentary on educational leadership preparation programs for the future. *Educational Considerations. 43*(4), 6-10.

Miron, G., Shank, C. & Davidson, C. (2018). *Full-time virtual and blended schools: enrollment, student characteristics, and performance.* Boulder, CO: National Education Policy Center. Retrieved from http://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/virtual-schoolsannual-2018.

Morgan, H. (2020). Best practices for implementing remote learning during a pandemic. *The Clearing House* 93 (3), 134-140.

Parasuraman, A. (2000) Technology readiness index (TRI): A multiple-item scale to measure readiness to embrace new technologies. *Journal of Service Research* 2 (4), 307-320.

Reich, J. (2020). Remote Learning Guidance from State Education Agencies during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A First Look. Retrieved from osf.io/k6zxy/.

Rice, K. (2006). A comprehensive look at distance education in the K-12 context. *Journal of Research on Technology in Education, 38*(4), *427-449.*

Robbins, S. P. & Judge, T. A. (2018). *Essentials of organizational behavior.* New York, NY: Pearson.

Saldana, J. (2009). *The coding manual of qualitative researchers.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Szczesiul, S., & Huizenga. (2014). The burden of leadership: Exploring the principal's role in teacher collaboration. *Improving Schools*, *17*(2), 176-191.

Taylor, D., Grant, J., Hamdy, H., Marei, H., & Venkatramana, M. (2020). Transformation to learning from a distance. *Med Ed Publish.* Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.15694/mep.2020.000076.1.

U.S. Department of Education. (2020). Supplemental facts sheet addressing the risk of Covid-19 in serving children with disabilities. Retrieved from www.ed.gov/ocr.

U.S. Office of Educational Technology. (2017) *Reimagining the Role of Technology in Education: the 2017 National Educational Technology Plan*,

Wagner, T. (2012). *Creating innovators: the making of young people who will change the world.* New York, NY: Scriver.

Watson, J. (2015). *Evergreen education group's: keeping pace with K-12 online learning-a review of policy and practices.* Retrieved from http://kpk12.com.

Data Driven Decision-Making Tools for School Leaders: Developing Tools that Enculturate Distributive Leadership and Shared Decision-Making

Alfred Parham, Angela C. Adair, and Ellen H. Reames
Phenix City Intermediate School and Auburn University

Abstract

Many school leaders who sought to enculturate distributive leadership and shared decision-making within their schools/school districts may not have adequate data tools that would encourage teachers and educational leaders to actively participate during times of decision-making. School organizations may struggle in this area and could benefit from the decision-making practices of other learning organizations (Adler-Greene, 2019; Azeska et al., 2017; Darrow, 2016; Flowers & Carpenter, 2009). One such learning organization that has experience in the data decision-making cycle is the U.S. Army (Greer et al., 2018; Hernandez et al., 2017; Parham; 2015; U.S Army Doctrinal Publication, The Operations Process No. 5.0, 2019). This field study explored and compared the cultural use of decision-making tools of a U.S. school district located in the Southeastern region of the United States of America to the cultural use of decision-making tools of a U.S. Army Military unit located in the Southeastern region of the United States of America. The results suggests that U.S. Army decision-making tools may be more sophisticated in solving complex problems than current education decision-making tools used by school principals and enculturates practices of distributive leadership and shared decision-making (Greer et al., 2018; Hernandez et al., 2017; Parham, 2015; U.S Army Doctrinal Publication, The Operations Process No. 5.0, 2019; U.S. Army Field Manual, Commander and Staff Organization and Operations No. 6-0, 2015).

Keywords: Decision-Making Tools, Distributive Leadership, Shared Decision-Making, Data-Driven Decision-Making, Decision-Making Process.

The Republican and Democratic accountability-driven educational policies of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), Race To The Top RTTT, and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) are influencing how school data is utilized for decision-making and may require educators to explore other cultural paradigms to change how educators practice decision-making (Adler-Greene, 2019; Azeska et al., 2017; Darrow, 2016; Marino, 2007). Despite the recent political influences and accountability policies for data-driven decision-making, very little empirical research exists to describe or interpret the decision-making processes and tools of school leaders or to provide school leaders with descriptions and interpretations as to how other learning organizations, such as the U.S. Army, conduct decision-making processes. Data-driven decision-making is the comprehensive process to make decisions based on data derived from sources such as school demographics, student learning, stakeholder perceptions, and school process data (Datnow et al., 2017; McREL, 2003; Park & Datnow, 2009).

This much-needed research may inform school leaders on how they might construct or improve upon current decision-making tools, such as data walls and decision-making models for use in facilitating continuous school improvement (Datnow et al., 2017; McREL, 2003; Parham, 2015; Park & Datnow, 2009; U.S. Army Doctrinal Publication, The Operations Process No. 5.0, 2019; U.S. Army Field Manual, Commander and Staff Organization and Operations No. 6-0, 2015).

Review of Literature

School Data Room or Data Wall

A school data room or data wall can be a useful tool for displaying and presenting information; moreover, an established data room with a data coordinator to analyze, present, and update the data can stimulate the collaborative use and analysis of school data in the decision-making process (Harris et al., 2020; Goss & Hunter, 2015). DeLisio (2009) used the term *data room* and made physical comparisons of the school data room to a military war room.

The U.S Army war room/data room is referred by its occupants as a Tactical Command Post (Tac-CP) or Tactical Operations Center (TOC) because of its primary focus on fighting land battles (U.S Army Doctrinal Publication, The Operations Process No. 5.0, 2019; U.S. Army Field Manual, Commander and Staff Organization and Operations No. 6-0, 2015). The significance of the TOC in its historical and present-day function is to serve as a forum for military staff to focus on the analysis of data and sharing of data and to create knowledge that drives collaborative and data-driven decision-making (Hernandez et al., 2017; U.S Army Doctrinal Publication, The Operations Process No. 5.0, 2019; U.S. Army Field Manual, Commander and Staff Organization and Operations No. 6-0, 2015).

Both organizations have cultures worth exploring improvement in decision-making processes; however, the research literature suggests that educators should explore paradigms different from the current decision-making models available to them. Therefore, the researcher selected the U.S. Army (Marino, 2007).

Comparing the tools used for decision making

The purpose of this ethnographic field study was to explore and compare the cultural practices of data-driven decision-making within two paradigmatically different learning organizations. To

guide the study, the researcher asked *what decision-making tools exist at the two comparative sites?* The researcher studied a K-12 public school system in the Southeastern United States of America and a U.S. Army unit in the Southeastern United States of America (Fetterman, 2019; LeCompte & Schensul, 2010; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014; Parham, 2015). Observations of the participants' actual cultural practices enabled the researcher to construct thick cultural descriptions and interpretations of how and why these two different culture-sharing groups behave the way they do in their natural settings (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014; Fetterman, 2019).

A data room/wall is not to be a static display of year-end standardized test scores, discipline reporting statistics, or attendance rates. A data room/wall is to be an ever-changing display of school data that is composed of records of school process data, perception data, and school demographic data. The update periods could range from weekly in the classroom, to monthly in the school, to mid-term and semester at the district level. A primary function of data walls is to increase collaboration between educators by providing a visual representation of student data. The increase in collaboration amongst educators could lead to better decision making regarding instructional practices and student progress monitoring (Adie et al., 2020; Harris et al., 2020; Parham, 2015). Current literature, however, lacks thick descriptions and interpretations of how an organization or culture actually transforms the data on a data wall or in a data room into knowledge for their decision-making processes based on their decision-making tools (Fetterman, 2019; LeCompte & Schensul, 2010; Sallee & Flood; 2012).

Current Decision-Making Tools in Education

Educational leaders may sustain effective data-driven decision-making by adopting or developing decision-making tools that provide visual frames that facilitate distributive leadership and share decision-making powers. The research literature suggested the following three decision-making models developed by Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL), The Research and Development Corporation (RAND) and Flowers & Carpenter for educational leaders as decision-making frameworks to help drive a decision-making process (DuFour & Reeves, 2016; Flowers & Carpenter, 2009; Lange et al., 2012).

The data-driven decision-making framework developed by McREL (2003) calls for educators to develop strategies for collaboration concerning the use of data and calls for the establishment of a school leadership team and data team to facilitate "a respectful, trusting culture in which data can be collected, analyzed, and used constructively to increase student achievement" (p. 3). It provides a sustainability framework for what an effective school data-driven decision-making process should look like through the lens of five processes.

The RAND study offers a conceptual framework that addresses the need for educators to seek multiple types of data, such as: *input* data, that shows school expenditures or the demographics of the student population; *process* data, displaying data on financial operations or the quality of instruction; *outcome* data, depicting dropout rates or student test scores; and *satisfaction* data from the opinions of teachers, students, parents, or the community (pp. 2-3). Flowers and Carpenter(2009), found that many educators lack the statistical skills to properly identify and analyze data for data-driven decision-making and offered a five-step process to help guide educators in identifying and analyzing school data: 1) Review your school improvement plan to identify goals and your primary focus, 2) Determine how the data will be used, 3) Reduce your total amount of data by identifying only the relevant data to support your school improvement

plan, 4) Objectively examine and discuss the data with teachers, staff, and other stakeholders, and 5) Set goals, evaluate the progress of your decision-making and return to step three for continuous improvement (p. 65).

U.S. Army Military Decision Making Process

The U.S. Army Military Decision Making Process (MDMP) is a proven iterative planning methodology that is driven by a seven step decision-making tool known as the Military Decision Making Model (MDMM) (Hernandez et al., 2017; Parham, 2015; U.S Army Doctrinal Publication, The Operations Process No. 5.0, 2019; U.S. Army Field Manual, Commander and Staff Organization and Operations No. 6-0, 2015): 1) Receipt of mission. The leader and followers acknowledge and discuss the impending mission given to them by a higher authority or leader, 2) Mission analysis. This step empowers subordinate leaders to systemically analyze the mission given to them, so that they may better understand their purposes and roles in accomplishing the mission, 3) Course of action development. Next the subordinate leaders and staff collaboratively design two or three solutions to the problem; to include how the organization needs to be restructured to accomplish the mission known as *task organization*, 4) Course of action analysis: In this step the courses of action are analyzed by the staff using a list of priorities (rubrics) provided by their leaders and/or higher authorities, 5) Course of action comparison. Collaboratively, subordinate leaders and staff wargame (compare/contrast each course of action), 6) Course of action approval. Throughout this step, the subordinate leaders and staff present to the leader the best course of action to accomplish the mission. The leader is now asked to accept their solution, reject their solution, or offer a different course of action, 7) Orders production, dissemination, and transition. Lastly, the approved course of action is published and disseminated to subordinate units (U.S Army Doctrinal Publication, The Operations Process No. 5.0, 2019; U.S. Army Field Manual, Commander and Staff Organization and Operations No. 6-0, 2015).

Although, the research literature presents three distinct decision making models designed to inform the decision-making practices of educational leaders, the models do not adequately provide a structured framework that suggests they are capable of assisting educational leaders in designing solutions for crisis situations or complex problems. However, the U.S. Army Military Decision-Making Process provides an iterative planning methodology with defined steps and participant roles from which educational leaders may consult to design more effective decision-making tools similar to the Military Decision-Making Process (MDMP) and the Military Decision Making Model (MDMM) (Greer et al., 2018; Hernandez et al., 2017; Lange et al., 2012 Parham; 2015; U.S Army Doctrinal Publication, The Operations Process No. 5.0, 2019).

Methods

Ethnographic descriptions and interpretations of the Study Site Participants' cultural practices during decision-making were made to see if what happens during their decision-making process is consistent with what each group espouses as to how they practice decision-making. Data was collected in the forms of participant observation, interviews, material culture, and field notes. The preceding data collection methods were employed by the researcher because these methods enabled the researcher to better code data and to construct thick cultural descriptions and interpretations of how and why these two different culture-sharing groups behave the way they do

in their natural settings (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014; Fetterman, 2019).

Sampling Strategies and Participant Selection

Following LeCompte and Schensul (2010) the "criterion-based sampling" strategy of "theoretical case selection" guided the researcher to select two distinct cases or communities that are each separately bounded by common cultural traits and cultural characteristics because a field study approach seeks to explore, describe, and interpret the cultural life of a community

The researcher selected three U.S. Army participants that were commissioned officers at the rank of Major/O4 or on the promotion list for the rank of Major/O4. Moreover, commissioned officers at the rank of Major/O4 should have extensive experience in using the Military Decision-Making Process (MDMP). The researcher selected three U.S. K-12 public school principals as study participants because school principals should have extensive experience in making decisions and conducting school meetings. The principals were selected from an elementary school, a high school and from a grades 9-12 college magnet academy in which the attending students could earn up to two years of college credit upon graduation. School principals and U.S. Army Majors should have both the experience in their jobs and longevity in their cultural communities to provide data that are characteristic of the cultures that exist in U.S. public schools and the U.S. Army, respectively.

Data Collection Procedure and Analysis

Upon exiting the field sites, a review all of the data was conducted by hand to facilitate the researcher establishing a general feel of the data while simultaneously reflecting on the methodology, data collection methods, and research questions that framed the study (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010; Fetterman, 2019).

During stage one of a two stage data collection and analysis process, a folder filing system was used to manage the files and hand-code large sections of data using an initial list of codes that were derived from the research literature, the research questions, and the researcher's professional experience. Correspondingly, during stage one of the coding process the researcher managed the data analysis and codebook development by creating files for the transcribed data and codes using Microsoft Word. The researcher audio-recorded and transcribed every interview verbatim with consent from the participants. The transcribed interviews, observation notes, analysis of material culture, field notes, and initial codes were later computer-coded, managed, and analyzed with the assistance of Atlas.ti7. Atlas.ti7 is a type of Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Soft-Ware (CAQDAS).

During Stage two of the data analysis, the researcher utilized Atlas.ti7 to assist in the process of transforming the Microsoft Word files into Primary Documents, the coding of data segments, the development of analytic memos to construct emergent themes, network views to visualize data patterns, hyper-links to connect data patterns, and the development of a codebook (Friese, 2019; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014; Fetterman, 2019). The development of the codebook was computer-assisted with Atlas.ti7 CAQDAS. By using Atlas.ti7, the researcher was able to create more of a coding system that prints out a codebook with code names, code definitions, and code comments.

The researcher established authority for this study using the verification strategies of triangulation, thick description, prolonged engagement in the field, member-checking within each cultural-sharing group, researcher reflexivity, discussions for bias, and addressing ethical considerations for anonymity (Friese, 2019; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014; Fetterman, 2019).

Results

To guide this field study, the researcher asked *what decision-making tools exist at the two comparative sites?* The researcher's efforts in exploring and comparing the existence of decision-making tools yielded evidence that the two culture sharing groups bear a stark contrast in the existence and use of decision-making tools. The participants at the School study site had no organizational decision-making model and only two of the three principals established a data wall or data room. The U.S. Army Study site participants made use of various organizationally developed decision-making tools, to include the Military Decision-Making Model and Process. The patterns of information that emerged from the researcher's computer assisted coding and analysis of the data resulted in finding the following three themes.

Theme 1

Decision-making models do not exist at the School study site to frame an individual or team decision-making process. However, all three participating U.S. Army units utilized the Military Decision-Making Process and Model for decision-making.

The culture-sharing group of educators observed by the researcher at the School study site did not have a decision-making model. Conversely, the culture-sharing group of U.S. Army participants at the Military study site consistently used an organizationally developed decision-making model. The U.S. Army decision-making tool for team decision-making is the Military Decision-Making Model (MDMM), and when army leaders conduct decision-making, it is called the Military Decision-Making Process (MDMP).The participating principals made the following statements in support of this theme.

One principal said: "Well, currently we do not have a decision-making model, we just try to do what is best for the kids." A different participant principal reinforced the previous principal's quote by saying:

> I would say there is not a formal decision-making model. I try very hard to go to our School Improvement Leadership Team. It is something you know that is extremely important to the whole school. But, most of, the majority of the stuff that happens, you just do it on the fly. But if it has to do with the whole school, I try very hard to incorporate the leadership team. There is not a fast and furious way we do it, you know. We don't have one.

During an interview separate from the previous interview, a third principal stated:

> There is no formal model that I use. Um, nothing that we have been trained on that is consistent throughout the school district. Um, so any decision-making model is just basically my preference as to how I choose to make decisions.

The participating U.S. Army leaders made the following statements in support of this theme:

A captain said:

> The biggest model that we use is the Military Decision-Making Process (MDMP). It is done at battalion level or higher level, um, there is also a Decision-Making process that you have to use at the company level called the Troop Leading Procedures (TLP). One model is the Military Decision-Making Process and in order to conduct that you normally have a bigger problem set that you are trying to solve and you need a lot of manpower. If you are trying to solve a problem on your own, we refer to the troop leading procedures, which is really the foundation of all our problem-solving, the troop leading procedures.

A participating British officer at the rank of major on assignment to the U.S. Army, reinforced the comments from the captain by saying:

> Well. There are two models which we teach here for planning and decision-making. The first one is the Troup Leading Procedure, known as the TLP, which we use at the company level and below for groups of 150 people and less, then teach another planning process for battalion level and above so for groups of 150 people plus really and uh that's called the Military Decision Making Process.

A U.S. Army major continued to inform this theme by saying:

> We use the Military Decision-Making Model throughout every branch of the service. Militarily, the Army and the Marine Corps are much better at it in the junior grades because we use it so much, and we teach it to our young captains, uh, so that they are able to take command of companies and then they get assignments as a staff officer at brigade and battalion levels.

Theme 2

Data rooms or Data walls are not present in all the participating schools at the School study site. However, a Tactical Operation Center to facilitate decision-making exists in all three participating U.S. Army units.

Each research study site made use of rooms that served as decision-making tools to post or analyze data for organizational planning and decision-making. At the School study site, this type of decision-making tool was a Data Room/Data Wall; similarly, at the Military study site this type of decision-making tool was the Tactical Operations Center (TOC). However, the similarities between the school Data Room and the U.S. Army TOC end with the structures optimally having four walls. Whereas the school data rooms regularly post summative school data such as the end of year test scores, the U.S. Army research study site TOC had wall postings of formative data that provided detailed information concerning current individual soldier and unit proficiency testing results in first aide training.

Two principals stated that they had a data room or were in the process of developing a data room. The third participating principal had not established a data room. Each principal knew what a data room was, but there were some differences as to how the data room was to function for collaborative data analysis. During an interview, one principal stated that there was not any set protocol or standard operating procedure for his data room. He added, "Currently, it is basically

used to store and post information. There is no set protocol or procedure to post data weekly or for teachers to come in and look at data weekly, but we are moving in that direction."

All three participating Army units established a Tactical Operations Center to conduct the Military Decision-Making Process (MDMP). A member check conducted with a Captain verified the structure and contents of a military Tactical Operations Center (TOC). The captain made it clear that the function of a TOC was more important than its form. He continued to be specific by saying: "The structure and contents of a TOC may differ from unit to unit; however, the function of a TOC is quite similar from unit to unit, especially those of a similar size, with similar purposes or missions." The captain also stated that each TOC should have a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP), which prescribes how a TOC is to function, including the task, the particular purpose of the TOC, and the roles of the staff assigned to work in the TOC. The point here is that whereas school leaders are concerned with the form and structure of the data room, the Army leaders are related with the function of the TOC, the Running Estimates/Protocols, and the responsibilities of the staff that uses it for collaborative data analysis and data-driven decision-making.

Theme 3

The principals at the School study site did not use any organizationally developed decision-making tools such as decision-making protocols or templates to inform their decision-making process. However, the Participants at the Military study site consistently used organizationally developed decision-making tools such as decision-making protocols and Running (Staff) Estimates/Templates to share and verify information/data.

The cultural behaviors of the U.S. educational participants at the School study site during decision-making varied widely among the different schools studied. The various practices were a result of the vague to nonexistent staff relationships at the different schools and the organizational climates created by the school principals. Conversely, the cultural behaviors of the U.S. Army participants at the Military study site during decision-making were common among the participating units being studied and driven by a formal decision-making process. The Military Decision-Making Model and supporting data tools helped to cultivate the observed U.S. Army participant behaviors of being transparent, collegial, collaborative, trustworthy, and adaptive.

During an interview, a principal asked for an explanation of the findings at the Military Study site. Upon hearing of the researcher's conclusions, the principal made the following reply:

> Yeah! Cause, the thing is, um, to have a formal model, well, what I would think of it as a template on how to approach good decision-making usually brings more consistency to the decision-making process. Um, more than likely, without knowing exactly how the military does, it seems as though they get a lot of input what we call "buy-in." Creating "buy-in" with the teachers and it is a process that yeah, I think if people know what the decision-making process is, uh, they will feel more comfortable that the best decisions are being made with the best available information. Uh, you know we try to establish that, but there is not a set of, -- I do not have any set guidelines, so yeah, I think it would be very useful.

The previous principal utilized the term "template" to create a mental model of what he understood the military models to represent. Although the MDMP, TLP, and Running/Staff Estimates are more than just templates, the word template would serve as an excellent

interpretation to help fellow educators comprehend the basic format of the various military decision-making tools found by the researcher at the Military study site.

Table 1, below, summarizes the themes presented and discussed in this section.

Table 1

Resulting Themes

School Study Site	Military Study Site
Data Rooms or Data Walls were not consistently used at the participating school study site.	Tactical Operations Centers (TOC) were consistently used at the participating military study site.
No use of any formal decision-making process like those found in the research literature or organizationally developed decision-making process to frame *DDDM was found at the school study site.	The Military Decision-Making Process and supporting tools to frame *DDDM were used by all participants at the military study site.
No organizational decision-making tools such as Templates, Protocols, or operationalized terms to Drive *DDDM was found at the school study site.	Organizationally developed data tools such as Running Estimates (Templates/Protocols), operationalized terms, Standard Operating Procedures (SOP's) for decision-making, and anchor charts to inform *DDDM was incorporated into every observed Military Decision Making Process and displayed along facility walls.

* Data-Driven Decision Making (DDDM)

Limitations of the Study

This Field Study had the following six limitations:

1. Access to the School study site participants was initially limited to non-contract time by School District Officials. The participants later agreed, however, to meet during their contract time if the researcher would not interfere with routine school operations.
2. Access to the U.S. Army study site participants was limited to Officers at or near promotion to the rank of major/O4 because they would have the minimal level of military knowledge, training, and experience concerning the use of U.S. Army decision-making tools.
3. At least two of the three military study participants had to be at the rank of major or a foreign officer of equivalent rank on assignment to the U.S. Army to assist the researcher's efforts towards the triangulation of data and member-checking to better inform the researcher's interpretations of the findings.
4. Each military participant needed to have at least one year of duty remaining at the Army study site so that they would be available to complete this study.

5. Each school participant needed to be a school principal with at least one year of experience and expecting to remain employed within the study site for at least one year to remain part of the research study.
6. One principal had to be an elementary school principal, one principal had to be a high school principal and the third principal had to be from a middle school or Magnet program to assist the researcher's efforts towards the triangulation of data and member-checking to better inform the researcher's interpretations of the findings.

Recommendations for Practice and Research

The participants from the School study site did not use any type of organizationally developed decision-making models nor any of the decision-making tools discussed in the researcher's review of the literature (Flowers & Carpenter 2009; Marsh, Pane, & Hamilton, 2006; McREL, 2003). According to McREL (2003), schools should avoid making the mistake of collecting data and having no explanatory model to interpret the data in terms of how the data should provide the school with information that positively influences learning. The absence of educational decision-making tools like the U.S. Army Running/Staff Estimates and Military Decision-Making Process makes it difficult for school leaders to cultivate leadership and staff relationships that create the "buy-in" the participating principals said they desired for school improvement planning (Azeska et al., 2017; McREL, 2003). Additionally, the development of better decision-making tools for educational leaders could stimulate vertical and horizontal interdependent staff relationships leading to an increase in collegial conversations, team learning, systems thinking, improved accountability, and shared visions (Azeska et al., 2017; Darrow, 2016; Lange et al., 2012; Park & Datnow, 2009).

The researcher offers the five following recommendations resultant from the findings of this field study. The first recommendation is for school leaders to immediately study and use the extant decision-making models for educators within the current research literature beginning with the models found and discussed by the researcher in this study. The second recommendation is for school leaders to adopt or create an organizational decision-making model that closely reflects the defined participant roles, iterative nature, and step-by-step process situated within in the Military Decision-Making Process. The third recommendation is that educational leaders focus more on defining the roles of school staff for decision-making sessions and less on the physical appearance of data tools, such as overly colorful data walls that obscure information meant to be extracted for the purposes of monitoring student progress and achievement. The fourth recommendation is for school leaders to collaboratively operationalize the meaning of data and data terms used during the conduct of decision-making to promote data literacy and competency within their respective schools and school districts.

The final recommendation is for educational leaders to display the operationalized school data terms and definitions used for organizational decision making in the data room or along the data wall. A well understood decision-making vocabulary that is commonly known and spoken amongst school colleagues could promote the transparency, trust, and "buy-in" that was desired and stated by the principals at the School study site as a need. The simple displaying of decision-making terms along a data wall or within a data room would be similar to how teachers frequently display instructional terms as anchor-charts along classroom walls to support their instruction.

Summary

In this article, the researcher explored and compared how a U.S. Army military unit conducts decision-making and uses decision-making tools to how a U.S. k-12 public school district conducts its decision-making and uses decision-making tools. The researcher sought to gather empirical data that could provide information to educators that contribute to the development of decision-making models and decision-making tools for educational leaders. Additionally, information was asked that could help cultivate a culture of decision-making within the field of education where data analysis is collaborative, leadership is shared, and decision-making is data-driven. This research suggests that the U.S. Army Military Decision-Making Model and Process as decision-making tools are different from any educational decision-making models described in the researcher's review of the literature addressing educational decision-making models. It is the researcher's intent that the empirical data and interpretations provided from this field study contribute to the development of better decision-making tools for school leaders that enculturates the distribution of leadership and informs a shared decision-making process that is data-driven.

References

Adie, L., Harris, L., & Wyatt-Smith, C. (2020). Examining research into the use of data walls for teaching and learning: How are they being implemented within data use cycles? *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *89*, 103012.

Adler-Greene, Laura. (2019). Every Student Succeeds Act: Are Schools Making Sure Every Student Succeeds? *Touro Law Review*: Vol. 35: No. 1, Article 4.

Azeska, A., Starc, J., & Kevereski, L. (2017). Styles of decision making and management and dimensions of personality of school principals. *International Journal of Cognitive Research in Science, Engineering and Education*, *5*(2), 47.

Darrow, A.A. (2016). The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA): What It Means for Students With Disabilities and Music Educators. *General Music Today*: Vol. 30(1), 41–44.

Datnow, A., Greene, J. C., & Gannon-Slater, N. (2017). Data use for equity: Implications for teaching, leadership, and policy. *Journal of Educational Administration*.

Datnow, A., & Park, V. (2015). Five (good) ways to talk about data. *Educational Leadership*, *73*(3), 10-15.

DeLisio, E. R. (2009, July 23). Using data rooms to map your way to success. *Education World,* Retrieved from http://www.educationworld.com/a_admin/admin/admin392.shtml

DuFour, R., & Reeves, D. (2016). The futility of PLC lite. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *97*(6), 69-71.

Fetterman, D. M. (2019). *Ethnography: Step-by-step* (Vol. 17). SAGE Publications, Incorporated.

Flowers, N., & Carpenter, D. (2009). You don't have to be a statistician to use data: A process for data-based decision-making in schools. *Kappan, 91*(2), 64-67.

Friese, S. (2019). *Qualitative data analysis with ATLAS. ti*. SAGE Publications Limited.

Goss, P., & Hunter, J. (2015). *Targeted teaching: How better use of data can improve student learning*. Grattan Institute.

Greer, J., Banach, S., Karrasch, A., Sackett, A., & Griffin, M. (2018). *An Integrated Planning System: Commander and Staff Handbook*. ALIS, Inc Arlington United States.

Harris, L., Wyatt-Smith, C., & Adie, L. (2020). Using data walls to display assessment results: a review of their affective impacts on teachers and students. *Teachers and Teaching*, *26*(1), 50-66.

Hernandez, A. S., Karimova, T., Nelson, D. H., Ng, E., Nepal, B., & Schott, E. (2017, October). Mission engineering and analysis: innovations in the military decision making process. In *Proceedings of the American Society for Engineering Management (ASEM) 2017 International Annual Conference: Reimagining Systems Engineering and Management* (pp. 521-530).

Lange, C., Range, B., &Welsh, K. (2012). Conditions for Effective Data Use to Improve Schools: Recommendations for School Leaders. *International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation 7*(3), 1-11.

Learning Point Associates. (2004). Guide to using data in school improvement efforts: A compilation of knowledge from data retreats and data use at learning point associates. Retrieved from http://www.learningpt.org/pdfs/datause/guidebook.pdf

LeCompte, M. D., & Schensul, J. J. (2010). *Designing & conducting ethnographic research* (2nd ed.) Lanham, Maryland: AltaMira Press.

Marino, J. J. (2007). New paradigm for organizational change: Involving customers and stakeholders in the improvement process. *The Journal for Quality & Participation*, *30*(1) 180 10-12.

Marsh, J. A., Pane, J. F., & Hamilton, L. (2006). Making sense of data-driven decision making in education. *RAND Corporation, Education Occasional Paper*, 1-15. www.rand.org

McREL. (2003). Sustaining school improvement: Data-driven decision making. *Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning.* Retrieved from http://www.mcrel.org/PDF/LeadershipOrganizationDevelopment/5031TG_data folio.pdf

Miles, M. B., Huberman. M. A. & Saldana, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc.

Parham, A. (2015). *Data Driven Decision Making for School Improvement Planning: Toward a Model and Process for Distributive Leadership and Shared Decision Making* (Doctoral dissertation).

Park, V., & Datnow, A. (2009). Co-constructing distributed leadership: district and school connections in data-driven decision-making. *School Leadership and Management*, *29*(5), 477-494.

Sallee, M.W. & Flood, J.T. (2012). Using qualitative research to bridge research, policy, and practice. *Theory into Practice, 51*(2), 137-144.

U.S Army Doctrinal Publication, The Operations Process No. 5-0, 2019.

U.S. Army Field Manual, Commander and Staff Organization and Operations No. 6-0, 2015.

An Investigation of New Teacher Mentorship

Jana' Sparks
Auburn University at Montgomery

Abstract

This study investigated standard practices used by mentors participating in a new teacher mentoring program that encourages identified teachers to remain in the teaching profession. School districts nationwide spend time, money, and human resources addressing the significant turnover rate and the recruitment of highly qualified teachers. This study provides valuable insight into how mentors view their relationship with their mentees, and how they see the mentoring program. The study demonstrates that even though new teacher mentors work with limited resources and are constrained by rigid policies, they provide a particular type of expertise to beginning teachers.

Keywords: novice teacher, teacher attrition, teacher retention, common mentoring practices, a culture of collaboration

Literature Review

Background

The United States is facing a national teacher shortage that is projected to grow substantially in the coming years, as school systems are faced with the challenge of maintaining a high-quality teacher workforce for all students (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond & Carver-Thomas, 2016). Beginning teachers are susceptible to end of the year release or leaving the teaching profession because they are more likely than their veteran colleagues to struggle with classroom management, lack of professional support, or they are assigned to low performing students (Anthony & Kritsonis, 2006; Campbell, 2017). Kini and Podolsky (2016) stated that both teacher inexperience and rates of turnover negatively impact student learning, which means that students attending schools with high turnover and few experienced teachers are at an educational disadvantage. When teachers do not feel supported, "more than one-third of teachers leave the profession within the first five years" (Callahan, 2016, p. 6).

The number of first-year teachers who leave the classroom to pursue other careers has consistently risen each year (Jonson, 2002; Kelchtermans, 2017). Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) reported national teacher attrition rate of about 8% annually, and research shows that the number of teachers leaving each year accounts for close to 90% of annual teacher demand. Bartell (2005) suggested that an effective mentoring program could reduce high attrition rates among beginning teachers. Mentoring has been used for centuries as a means of handing down tradition and support (Moberg & Velasquez, 2004). In education, mentoring is described as a relationship in which mentors provide new teachers with "structure and support during a new teacher's transition to the demands of the classroom and school environment" (Gagen & Bowie, 2005, p. 42). "Mentoring is a common strategy for transformative professional, professional, personal, and organizational development. By creating a supportive culture, mentoring can provide the environment for transformative learning to occur" (Campbell, 2017).

In the early days of mentoring, specialized training was not required because it was believed that an effective teacher would make an effective mentor (Cullingford, 2006). However, the form of mentoring has progressively evolved and become more complex (Bartell, 2005; Hudson, 2012; Ingersoll, 2004). The need for mentoring programs is well documented in the literature (Callahan, 2016: Grossman & Davis, 2012; Ingersoll, 2001; Solis, 2004) and, approximately 33 states mandate a form of mentoring support for new teachers (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Will (2017) reported that in the United States 86% of new teachers supported by a mentor teacher in the first years of their career will remain in the classroom, while 71% of those without mentors leave the profession. A mentoring program is one of the most essential things a district could do to hold on to good teachers and groom them to be even better (Dillon, 2008; Izadinia, 2015). An effective and quality mentoring program "can help novice teachers survive their stressful beginning and emerge as confident and successful team players" (Mauer & Zimmerman, 2000, p. 4).

Teacher Attrition

Teacher attrition is problematic and refers to the need to prevent good teachers from leaving the profession (Kelchtermans, 2017). Teacher attrition and retention are among the most significant education challenges across the nation and have been the focus of many researchers (Dove, 2004;

Jonson, 2002; Kelchtermans, 2017; Phillips, 2015). Reeves and Lowenhaupt (2016) indicated that teacher attrition remains one of the most elusive problems in the education system. In this age of high accountability in schools, the problem of high teacher turnover is even more damaging to the education system. Research has shown that attrition has a significant and negative effect on student achievement (Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017).

As noted by Özoglu (2015), teacher attrition has direct adverse effects on student achievement, the commitment and performance of the teachers who stay, curriculum and related planning, the administrative process, and the general atmosphere in the school. Henry and Redding (2018) calculated the loss of teaching days when a teacher leaves to be approximately 32 to 72 teaching days, which has a direct adverse effect on student achievement. Towers and Maguire (2017) cited that a low sense of belonging, dissatisfaction, lack of efficacy, and limited opportunities for professional development correlates with teacher attrition.

In the past decade, a growing gap between the supply and demand of teachers has been brought to the forefront of educational conversation, due to the impact of teacher shortage on student achievement (Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017). There is a need for a high-quality caliber of teachers who can withstand the rigors of standardized testing, stricter accountability, curriculum issues, and budget cuts (Strong, 2006). As teachers are faced with so many responsibilities in the classroom, they start to rethink their career choice. New teachers starting their first year of teaching have a vision of being successful; however, when unexpected situations occur throughout the school year, they become frustrated and leave the profession (Hewitt, 2009). The outcome of teacher attrition often leads to increased workloads among teachers as well as reduces teacher morale within the school (Gallant & Riley, 2017; Towers & Maguire, 2017). Dove (2004) stated, "Teacher attrition is the largest single factor determining the shortage of qualified teachers in the United States and developed and less developed countries throughout the world" (p. 8). Moir (2009) indicated that the loss of new teachers takes an enormous toll on the educational system. According to Nielson, Barry, and Addison (2006), research suggests that mentoring programs can achieve high retention of beginning teachers if the mentoring program is structured, focused on professional development, and collaboration is present.

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to identify standard practices used by mentors participating in new teacher mentoring programs that encourage identified teachers to remain in the teaching profession. This qualitative study investigated participants' experiences of the mentoring program and used qualitative data collection methods. The following research questions guided the research:

RQ1: What are the common practices used by mentors participating in new teacher mentoring programs?
RQ2: Which common practices used by mentors participating in new teacher mentoring programs are more common?

Data collected from the mentor teachers allowed insight into the personal experiences that may contribute to improving teacher retention. The participants in this study were able to reflect on their experiences through interviews and documents. Interviews allow the focus to be placed on individuals and their perspectives on a specific phenomenon (Ritchie & Lewis, 2008).

This study was conducted in a mid-sized school system, located in east Alabama with a purposeful sampling of six elementary mentor teachers. The county in which the school district is located, is in east Alabama along the west bank of the Chattahoochee River, which forms the boundary between the states of Alabama and Georgia (Encyclopedia of Alabama, 2018). As of 2018, there were approximately 36,435 people with a racial/ethnic composition of Caucasian 49.4%, African American 43.7%, Hispanic or Latino 5.9%, and Asian 0.7%. Eighty-three percent of the population are high school graduates with 19.7% holding a bachelor's degree or higher (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). The school district is comprised of seven elementary schools, one intermediate school, one middle school, one high school, one alternative school, and two pre-kindergarten early learning centers. Patton (2002) described purposeful sampling as "selecting information rich cases strategically and purposefully" (p. 243).

The first criterion used to choose the participants for this study was that all of the participants had to come from the selected school system. All of the participants were from the selected school district and participated in the official mentoring program developed by the state and school district. Elementary teachers were chosen over middle or high school teachers as they are the first teacher that a child encounter. Elementary school teachers play a crucial role in the development of children, as what students learn in their early years can affect and shape how they view themselves and the world. The final criterion used was that all of the mentors had to have a minimum of three years of teaching experience.

Within this study, three sources of data collection were used, which included individual interviews, mentor/mentee observations, and review of the school district's mentoring policies. Interviews were specifically designed to explore the perceptions of beginning teachers, as the role of the researcher does not discover this meaning; instead the researcher interprets and presents the findings (Merriam, 2002). In this study, a life story interview was used as the method of collecting data from participants through semi-structured interviews that included in-depth and open-ended interview questions. The goal was to understand the meaning of the participant's experiences throughout the mentoring program (Kvale, 1996). The topics discussed during the interviews included: the perceived challenges they are faced with while beginning their teaching career, the perceived impact of the mentoring program, and clarifications of the related documents and professional development that was conducted.

The mentoring logs, policies, and program documents were examined for this study. The mentoring logs gave a perspective on how the mentors and mentees interacted with each other during the school year. The mentoring policies provided a better understanding of what is expected of the mentors and mentees while they are a part of the district's mentoring program. Other documents reviewed were the end of the year surveys and mentoring meeting agendas to collect a snapshot of the mentoring program and confirm or refute the interview data collected. Cross analysis was utilized for the interview and included a constant comparative method to generate codes, categories, and themes from the data (Merriam, 1998). Interview transcripts were analyzed through audiotapes, copies of documents, narrative descriptions and to compare responses of each participant. Coding the transcripts allowed the researcher opportunity to look for themes among the participants and check the data according to similarities, and differences. Birkeland and Johnson (2002) stated that new teachers look to their more experienced colleagues for advice and ideas.

Results

This study investigated six participants' experiences of the mentoring program and used qualitative data collection methods to add to available literature. Data was collected through the use of three individual interviews per participant, mentor/mentee observations, and review of the school districts mentoring policies. This technique allowed for constant comparative method to take place throughout the study to develop themes. The participants' names and specific information were either changed or omitted and replaced with a pseudonym. Table 1 is a profile summary of the mentor teachers used in this study.

Table 1

Participants Demographic Profile

Pseudonym	Current Assignment	Experience	Initial or Second Career	Education
Kathy	1st grade teacher	9 years	Initial	Masters
Vanessa	2nd grade teacher	9 years	Second	Masters
Madelyn	3rd grade teacher	11 years	Initial	Bachelors
Moriah	Kindergarten teacher	17 years	Initial	Bachelors
Theresa	1st grade teacher	6 years	Second	Bachelors
Mecena	6th grade teacher	15 years	Initial	Specialist

The data analysis from the six veteran teachers revealed three major themes: positive relationships, assistance and support, and avoiding isolation in the classroom. Out of the three major themes, the most prevalent theme that emerged from the data was the positive relationships that developed through the mentoring programs. Hall and Hord (2006) described a positive relationship as a meaningful relationship that is established between a mentor and novice teacher from the beginning of their relationship. All of the participants mentioned the importance of establishing a positive relationship with their mentees. Several researchers have supported this notion that teachers who are provided encouragement and emotional support are more likely to remain in the profession (Ingersoll & Kralik, 2004; Wong, 2004). Data gathered indicated that the mentoring program promoted positive culture and climate within the school district. All participants indicated that a meaningful and positive relationship was developed through their mentoring experience. The documents reviewed from the district mentoring program included several activities that addressed building positive interactions and climate and culture within the school district.

The second theme was the benefit of assistance and support that the mentee received from the mentor during their first year of teaching. Billingsley (2003) found that successful induction programs provided not only guidance and curriculum, but also encouragement and strong support. The mentors indicated the ability to help their mentee with day-to-day tasks such as grading papers, lesson planning, record keeping, classroom management, gathering resources and implementing new ideas. Ingersoll and Smith (2004) added that ongoing feedback, guidance and orientation are contributing factors to new teachers' success in the classroom.

The third theme reflected the benefit of having time between the mentor and mentee. Whitaker (2000) and Ingersoll (2004) expressed that when beginning teachers collaborate on a

weekly basis with their mentor, it is beneficial to them. The respondents reported that consistent contact reduced the feeling of isolation during their first year. The mentor discussed that it was a challenge for them to meet with their mentees throughout the day. Many of the mentors were creative with their schedules to help support the new teachers and be accessible. The data indicated that the mentors found benefit in communicating, collaborating and exchanging ideas with their mentee while establishing a relationship between them.

Conclusion

This study provides valuable insight on how mentors view their relationship with their mentees, the connection with their colleagues, and how they view the mentoring program. Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005) indicated that the teacher mentoring program has many layers; school districts must continue to look for ways to prepare better and support new teachers. The need to retain new teachers has forced school districts to implement induction programs for beginning teachers. Participants of this study revealed assistance and avoiding isolation in the school are critical practices in the mentoring program. Mentor teachers agreed that the structured mentoring program enforced a measure of accountability for the mentees. Fresko and Nasser-Abu Alhija (2015) stated that the relationship between a mentor and mentee is strengthened when emotional support is provided in a non-threatening environment. These findings are supported by Johnson and Birkeland (2003), who contended, "When veterans and novices work together in a nurturing relationship, each gets something of real value from the other; veterans gain energy and novices gain inspiration" (p. 587). If mentoring programs are going to have a positive impact on beginning teachers, then the program must meet the needs of the mentee and mentor.

Based on the research literature for this study, there is a secure connection between teacher success and the mentor and mentee relationship. Positive relationships are critical in fostering successful mentoring partnerships. Experiences of mentors in this study may provide new insights to inform the current practice of mentoring programs. Respondents in this study revealed positive relationships, assistance and support, and time investment were identified as standard practices that are used by mentors that encourage identified teachers to remain in the teaching profession. This research highlighted the need for a supportive mentoring program during their first year in the teaching profession. The development of a mentoring program is critical to the well-being of a new teacher. The teacher mentoring program is just one facet of the induction process that may assist and encourage a new teacher into the education profession.

References

Anthony, T., & Kritsonis, W. (2006). National implications: An analysis of e-mentoring induction year programs for novice alternatively certified teachers. *National Journal for Publishing and Mentoring Doctoral Student Research*, *3*(1), 1-6.

Bartell, C. (2005). *Cultivating high quality teaching through induction and mentoring.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Billingsley, S. (2003). Special education teacher retention and attrition: A critical analysis of the research literature. *Journal of Special Education*, *38*(1), 39-55.

Birkeland, S., & Johnson, S. (2002). What keeps new teachers in the swim? *Journal of Staff Development, 23*(4), 18-21.

Callahan, J. (2016). Encouraging retention of new teachers through mentoring strategies. Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin, *83*(1), 6–11.

Campbell, S. (2017). *A comparative case study analysis: Effects of mentor practices on new teacher retention*. https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12090/333

Carver-Thomas, D. & Darling-Hammond, L. (2017). *Teacher turnover: Why it matters and what we can do about it.* Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute.

Cullingford, C. (2006). *Mentoring in education: An international perspective.* Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Limited.

Darling-Hammond, L., & Bransford, J. (2005). *Preparing teachers for a changing world: What teachers should learn and be able to do.* San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Dillon, N. (2008). Pay attention to retention. *American School Board Journal*, *196*(9), 26- 29.

Dove, M. (2004). Teacher attrition: A critical American and international education issue. *Delta Kappa Gamma Bull*, *71*(1), 8-30.

Encyclopedia of Alabama (2018). https://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-2133

Feiman-Nemser, S. (2001). From preparation to practice: Designing a continuum to strengthen and sustain teaching. *Teachers College Record*, *103*(6), 1013-1055.

Fresko, B. & Nasser-Abu Alhija, F. (2015). Induction seminars as professional learning communities for beginning teachers. Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education. 43. 36-48. https://doi.org/10.1080/1359866X.2014.928267.

Gagen, L., & Bowie, S. (2005). Effective mentoring: A case for training mentors for novice teachers. *The Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance 76*(7), 40-46.

Gallant, A., & Riley, P. (2017). Early career teacher attrition in Australia: Inconvenient truths about new public management. Teachers and Teaching. https://doi:10.1080/13540602.2017.135870

Grossman, P., & Davis, E. (2012). Mentoring that fits. *Educational Leadership*, *69*(8), 54-57.

Hall, G., & Hord, S. (2006). *Implementing change: Patterns, principles and potholes.* Boston: Pearson Education.

Henry, G., & Redding, C. (2018). The consequences of leaving school early: The effects of within-year and end-of-year teacher turnover. American Educational Research Journal *56*(1): 204–236. https://doi.org/10.3102%2F0002831218790542

Hewitt, P. (2009). Hold on to your teachers. *Leadership*. *38*(5), 12-14.

Hudson, P. (2012). How can schools support beginning teachers? A call for timely induction and mentoring for effective teaching. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 37*(7*), 70-84.

Ingersoll, R. (2001). Teacher turnover and teacher shortages: An organizational analysis.

American Educational Research Journal, 38, 499-534. https://doi:10.3102/00028312038003499

Ingersoll, R. (2004). *Why do high-poverty schools have difficulty staffing their classrooms with qualified teachers?* Washington, DC: Center for American Progress.

Ingersoll, R., & Kralik, J. (2004). The impact of mentoring on teachers' retention: What the research says. *Education Commission of the States,* 1-25.

Ingersoll, R., & Smith, T. (2004). What are the effects of induction on beginning teacher turnover? *American Education Research Journal*, *41*, 681-714. https://doi10.3102/00028312041003681

Izadinia, M. (2015). A closer look at the role of mentor teachers in shaping preservice teachers' professional identity. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *52*, 1-10. https://www.deepdyve.com/lp/elsevier/a-closer-look-at-the-roleof-mentor-teachers-in-shaping-preservice-t2TX9P4NkX

Johnson, S., & Birkeland, S. (2003). Pursuing a "sense of success": New teachers explain their career choices. *American Education Research Journal*, *40*, 581-617.

Jonson, K. (2002). *Being an effective mentor: How to help beginning teachers succeed.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Kelchtermans, G. (2017). Should I stay or should I go? Unpacking teacher attrition/retention as an educational issue. *Teachers and Teaching. 23*(8), 961–977. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2017.1379793

Kini, T., & Podolsky, A. (2016). *Does teaching experience increase teacher effectiveness? A review of the research.* Palo Alto: Learning Policy Institute.

Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Lambert, L. (2006). Half of teachers quit in five years: Working conditions, salaries cited. *Washington Post*.

Mauer, E., & Zimmerman, E. (2000). Mentoring new teachers. *Principal, 79*(3), 26-28.

McGrath, D., & Princiotta, D. (2005). *Private school teacher turnover and teacher perceptions of school organizational characteristics* (Issue Brief No. NCES 2005- 061). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education Institute of Educational Sciences.

Merriam, S. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Merriam, S., & Associates. (2002). *Qualitative research in practice examples for discussion and analysis.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Moberg, D., & Velasquez, M. (2004). The ethics of mentoring. *Business Ethics Quarterly, 14*(1)*,* 95-122.

Moir, E. (2009). Accelerating teacher effectiveness: Lessons learned from two decades of new teacher induction. *Phi Delta Kappan, 90*(2) 14-21.

Nielson, D., Barry, A., & Addison, A. (2006). A model of a new-teacher induction program and teacher perceptions of beneficial components. *Action in Teacher Education, 28*(4), 14-24.

Özoglu, M. (2015). Mobility-related teacher turnover and the unequal distribution of experienced teachers in Turkey. Educational Sciences: Theory and Practice, *15*(4), 891-909. https://doi:10.12738/estp.2015.4.261

Patton, M. (2002). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods. Third edition.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Reeves, T. D., & Lowenhaupt, R. J. (2016). Teachers as leaders: Pre-service teachers' aspirations and motivations. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *57*(2016), 176–187. https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2016.03.011

Ritchie, J., & Lewis, J. (2008). *Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students and researchers.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Ronfeldt, M., & McQueen, K. (2017). Does new teacher induction really improve retention? Journal of Teacher Education, *68*(4), 394–410.

Solis, A. (2004). *The role of mentoring in teacher quality and retention.* Intercultural Development Research Association*,* San Antonio, TX. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED484937

Strong, M. (2006). Does new teacher support affect student achievement, *New Teacher Center at the University of California*, *06*(01), 1-4.

Sutcher, L., Darling-Hammond, L., & Carver-Thomas, D. (2016). A coming crisis in teaching? Teacher supply, demand, and shortages in the U.S. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute.

Towers, E., & Maguire, M. (2017). Leaving or staying in teaching: A 'vignette' of an experienced urban teacher 'leaver' of a London primary school. Teachers and Teaching, *23*(8), 946-960. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2017.1358703

United States Census Bureau. (2018). https://www.census.gov

United States Department of Education. (2011). *Facts about teaching the teaching profession for a national conversation about teaching.* https://www2.ed.gov/documents/respect/teaching-profession-facts.doc

Whitaker, S. (2000). Mentoring Beginning Special Education Teachers and the Relationship to Attrition. Journal of Staff Development, 21(4). https://doi.org/10.1177/001440290006600407

Will, M. (2017). Mentors for new teachers found to boost student achievement-by a lot. *Education Week*. https://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/teaching_now/2017/06/new_teacher_center_mentor_study.html

Wong, H. (2004). Induction programs that keep new teachers teaching and improving. *NASSP Bulletin, 88*(638), 48. https://doi.10.1177/019263650408863804

African American Male Students' Perceptions of Self-Efficacy, Student Engagement, and Mentoring and Student Retention

Derrick Brewster & Kecia Ashley
Alabama State University

Abstract

There is limited quantitative research on self-efficacy, student engagement, mentoring, and student retention of African American male (AAM) students at Predominantly White Institutions (PWI). The purpose of this study is to fill the gap by sharing findings from a web-based survey on perceptions of self-efficacy, engagement, mentoring, and retention in a PWI. According to the results, a positive correlation exists between GPA and student groups, classification and engagement affect academic performance, and classification and interest in faculty mentor. Mentoring minority students is vital to consider, given the impact on student retention and success. The study provides recommendations for mentoring and future research to higher education leadership.

Keywords: African American, mentoring, retention, self-efficacy, student engagement

Higher education administrators continue to face increased pressure to account for higher rates of student retention (Britt, 2013). One group of at-risk students to whom much research has focused on is African American males (AAM). Research suggests that graduation rates for AAM continue to drop yearly (Harper, 2013). Success for AAM is a heavily contested and researched topic as there are factors such as engagement, academic achievement, and lack of motivation that impact their ability to persist (Booker & Brevard, 2017). As African American (AA) student enrollment at Predominantly White Institution (PWI) increases, universities struggle with attrition, retention, student engagement, self-efficacy, and mentoring (Brooms, 2018). Therefore, more attention must be given to provide the proper resources to improve the negative experiences within the social and academic lives of AAM who attend PWI (Harper, 2013). Academic achievement, student engagement, mentoring, and self-efficacy have a positive effect on retention and graduation for AAM (Harper & Quaye, 2009). Yet to date, much of the attention related to academic achievement and student engagement has been directed towards the student body at large, rather than AAM at PWI. As such, these institutions lack effective programs designed to increase the probability of retention, student engagement, self-efficacy, and mentoring of AAM (Hall, 2017). The role of student engagement, self-efficacy, and mentoring are directly related to issues of attrition and retention of students, especially at PWI (Regis, 2019). This study aims to fill a gap by adding research to the current body of literature on the relationship between self-efficacy, student engagement, mentoring, and retention of undergraduate AAM at a PWI.

The purpose of this study had three main objectives. The first objective was to understand better how students perceive the measures that are used to determine the likelihood of student retention among more at-risk student populations. Second, another aim was to establish the relationship between students who perceived student engagement, self-efficacy, and mentoring as important and their performance at college as a measure of retention. The third and final objective was to offer recommendations for minority students, faculty, and institutions of higher education to enhance the student experience, engagement, and retention for all students and AAM specifically.

Literature Review

Predominantly White Institutions have a history of exclusion rather than the inclusion of AAM (Harris, 2018). Colleges in the south openly opposed integration and fought against AAM attending their respective institutions (Harper, 2013). Harris (2018), indicated that this history created a sense of hesitancy among AAM and prevented them from feeling truly wanted or accepted even decades later after the initial integration movement. Retention for AAM students attending a PWI can be detrimental due to a lack of inclusion (McClain & Perry, 2017). AAM represent 13 % of undergraduate enrollment in 2017 (Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2020) and 91 % of these students attend a PWI (Carter, 2018).

Mentoring within higher education is a critical tool for student engagement, retention, and success. Successful mentoring is a way of teaching and guiding a person who is less experienced with how to become a positive role model (Brooks, Jones, & Burt, 2013). Higher education research continues to explore student success for AAM (Tinto, 2017). Yet, data suggests that more and more AAM are beginning to leave postsecondary institutions before graduating (Brown, 2019). Approximately 39% of AAM graduate as compared to a 60% graduation rate among their white male counterparts at the same institutions of higher education (Britt, 2013). The disparity in the graduation rates among AAM is alarming, since attaining a college education is critical to the

success of AAM, and PWI are not sufficiently and systematically addressing the problem (Sinanan, 2016). According to Brooms (2016) AAM fair better at Historically Black Colleges and Universities due to environments that foster self-efficacy.

Relationship between Mentoring and Retention

Mentoring is key to AAM students in higher education settings (Booker & Brevard, 2017). AAM represent the highest attrition rate among any population and require a stable and supportive environment to establish a cultural identity (Sinanan, 2016). Mentoring by involvement outside of the classroom with a faculty member, there is an enormous endeavor for academic success (Britt, 2013). An institutional effort to enhance student retention is predicated on student engagement, mainly student and faculty engagement within the classroom, which can foster a significant relationship to create a mentoring opportunity (Tinto, 2017).

A mentoring relationship with faculty members can aid in retention for AAM (McClain & Perry, 2017). Booker and Brevard (2017) found that mentoring opportunities for AAM students assisted with their integration into an educational and social system within higher education settings. Students' participation in mentoring programs promotes academic success, persistence, and improves retention rates for college students (Sinanan, 2016).

Higher education researchers have shown a vast correlation between retention, student engagement, and academic achievement (Wood, Newman & Harris, 2015). The problem of keeping students enrolled has caused some administrators of universities to focus keenly on student retention (Brit, 2013). Research suggests 46% of AAM depart from public institutions and 57% from private institutions before graduation, which is much higher than their white counterparts (Brown, 2019). The retention of college students, namely AAM is an issue at most colleges and universities (Brooms, 2016). Furthermore, this problem is intensified when considering freshman AAM. Brooms (2016), propose that increasing the student retention rate is a challenging but important goal in many institutions of higher education.

Tolliver and Miller (2018) refer to the impact of critical strategies for American men to complete college. Connolly, Flynn, Jemmott, and Oestreicher (2017), explored the implementation of a First-Year Experience program aimed towards the first-semester at-risk college students who would help to increase retention from semester to semester. The results of the study yielded promoted improved academic achievement and enhanced GPAs. Mentoring opportunities for AAM students enhance a students' ability to interact with faculty members and staff members, which results in having academic and social supports (Tinto, 2017). According to Tinto (2017), providing an opportunity to establish meaningful faculty relationships are crucial in assisting students in matriculating into the educational systems of the university. Increased emphasis on mentoring was a significant component for creating a supportive environment (Brooks, Jones & Burt, 2013).

Importance of African American Faculty and Staff Mentors

African American male students tend to experience greater satisfaction and persistence when connections with the faculty and other students are perceived as needed (Britt, 2013). According to Sinanan (2016), mentoring for AAM in a college setting promotes a sense of satisfaction, well-being and increases the state of belonging. The involvement of faculty and staff members with their AAM students in the classroom and outside the class creates a positive relationship for AAM

in college (Hall, 2017). With a productive mentoring project, AA staff and faculty members can share educational experiences that can prove to be beneficial for AAM (McClain & Perry, 2017). Brooks, Jones, and Burt (2013) suggest that increased visibility of AA faculty and staff members, as well as the implementation of productive retention programs, can positively impact the retention rate for AAM. For a college degree to be a reality for AAM, they must be adequately prepared and supported by mentors that have already been through the same processes and similar experiences (Sinanan, 2016).

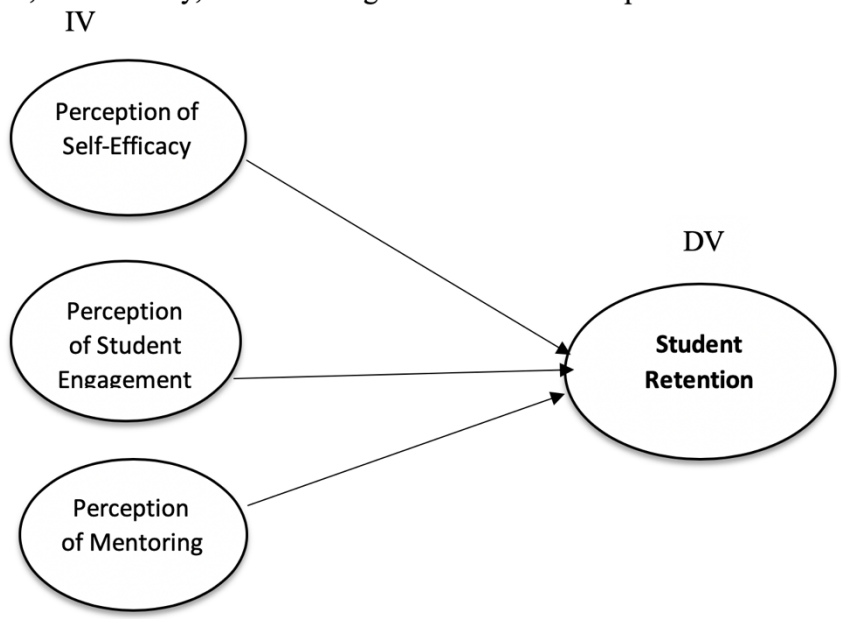
African American male students are more likely to choose mentors of the same race when seeking advice or counsel (Goings, 2015). Often an AA faculty or staff may be more likely to mentor AAM students because they can see themselves in the students (Sinanan, 2016). Brooks, Jones, and Burt (2013) contended that having a relationship with a role model on campus impacted AAM desire to graduate. Eakins and Eakins (2017) elaborated that a mentorship program in particular for AAM fosters a positive relationship that impacts student engagement on campus.

While mentoring programs have been proven effective by numerous studies, many institutions still do not have programs implemented in a formal setting (Sinanan 2016). Predominantly White Institutions can foster supportive environments by addressing the needs of their students, particularly AAM by way of mentoring opportunities (Sinanan, 2016). Kelly, Gayles and Williams (2017) recommended that PWI recruit and retain AA faculty and staff members. AAM students require adult mentors that they can easily relate to
improving academic achievement, self-efficacy, and student engagement (Booker & Brevard, 2017).

Methods

To begin analyzing the perceptions of factors essential to increasing AAM retention at PWI, a web-based survey was designed to gather data through Qualtrics. Survey methodology was an appropriate choice for this study since quantitative analysis allows the researcher to retrieve data numerically to measure perceptions of a specific population (Neuman, 2019). Survey participants were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with various programs that were available to them in and outside of the classroom experience with peers, faculty, and staff members. This study sought to determine if a relationship existed between three independent variables: self-efficacy, student engagement, and mentoring. The DV was retention.

Figure 1. The Relationship between Perceptions of African American Male Students on Student Engagement, Self-Efficacy, and Mentoring and Retention Conceptual Model



Measures

The following questions (Q) and hypotheses (H) guided the research:
Q.1. How do African American male students' perceive self-efficacy, student engagement, and mentoring factors?

Q.2. What is the relationship between African American male students' perceptions of self-efficacy, student engagement, and mentoring and retention?

> H_1: There is a positive relationship between African American males' who agree with the measures of self-efficacy and retention.
> H_0:1 There is no relationship between African American males' who agree with the measures of self-efficacy and their retention.
> H_2: There is a positive and significant relationship between the engagement of African American students and their retention.
> H_0:2. The relationship between engagement by African American students and their retention is neither positive nor significant.
> H_3: African American males' perceptions of mentoring will be positively and significantly related to their classification and GPA levels.
> H_0:3 There is no relationship between African American males' perceptions of mentoring and their classification and GPA scores.

The survey instrument consisted of 31 questions arranged across five criteria: demographics, self-efficacy, student engagement, mentoring, and general attitudes about college. Responses unique to mentoring is the focus of this paper. The survey consisted of open and close-ended questions that included multi-item measures based on a Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to

strongly agree. The survey consisted of a question focused on participants' perceptions, which required the participant to either answer yes or no. Lastly, students were asked an open-ended question that required them to give their definition of a mentor.

The DV, retention, was operationally defined as a second semester AAM freshman from Spring 2018 who had enrolled for the fall 2019 semester, and all AAM sophomores, juniors, and seniors who were enrolled for at least one course for the fall 2019 semester. The DV was measured by two questions, *what is your classification* and *what is your GPA.* Demographic variables, age, major, living arrangement, student-athlete, honor society, first-generation college student, and highest education level for parents were assessed in the study using categorical and yes or no responses.

Population and Sample

Seven hundred and seventy (n=770) AAM undergraduate students enrolled at an urban southeastern United States public PWI between the age of 18 and 22 were identified to participate in the study. The survey participants were selected from a combination of sampling techniques to include stratified sampling and simple random sampling. Ten percent of undergraduate students at the university were represented in the survey. minimum sample size of 270 comprised of 71 freshmen, 65 sophomores, 67 juniors, and 67 seniors. Since participation was voluntary, only those willing to participate were included in the final sample, in which the ultimate selection of 99 survey participants was utilized, representing 13% of the total number of AAM enrolled at the institution. Table 1 provides the demographic characteristics of the students who participated in the study. Overall, sophomores were the largest classification group in the sample (36.2%); students age 18-21 comprised 80.9% of participants, primarily living off-campus (70.2%). Within the sample, 46% of participants' GPA ranged from 2.5-2.99. The majority of participants were not athletes (84%), not a member of an honor society (79.8%) and were not first-generation students (80%).

Table 1

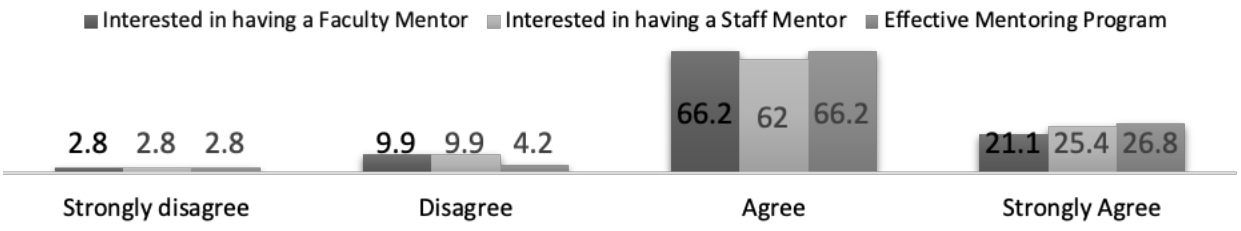
Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Demographic	Percentage	Demographic	Percentage
Classification		**Athlete**	
Freshman	3.2	No	84.0
Sophomore	36.2		
Junior	28.7	**Honor Student**	
Senior	31.9	No	79.8
Age		**First Generation Student**	
18-21	80.9	No	80.0
22-25	18.1		
26-29	1.1	**GPA**	
30 and older	-	Below 2.0	10.6
		2.0 – 2.49	10.6
Living Arrangements		2.5 – 2.99	46.8
Off Campus	70.2	> 3.50	11.7

Analysis

Responses to each of the sets of questions are conveyed using descriptive statistical analysis. According to Figure 2, the majority of participants (66.2%, 62%) respectively agreed that they were interested in having an on-campus faculty mentor and a staff mentor. Sixty-six percent of participants believe the academic success of AAM could be addressed with an effective mentoring program.

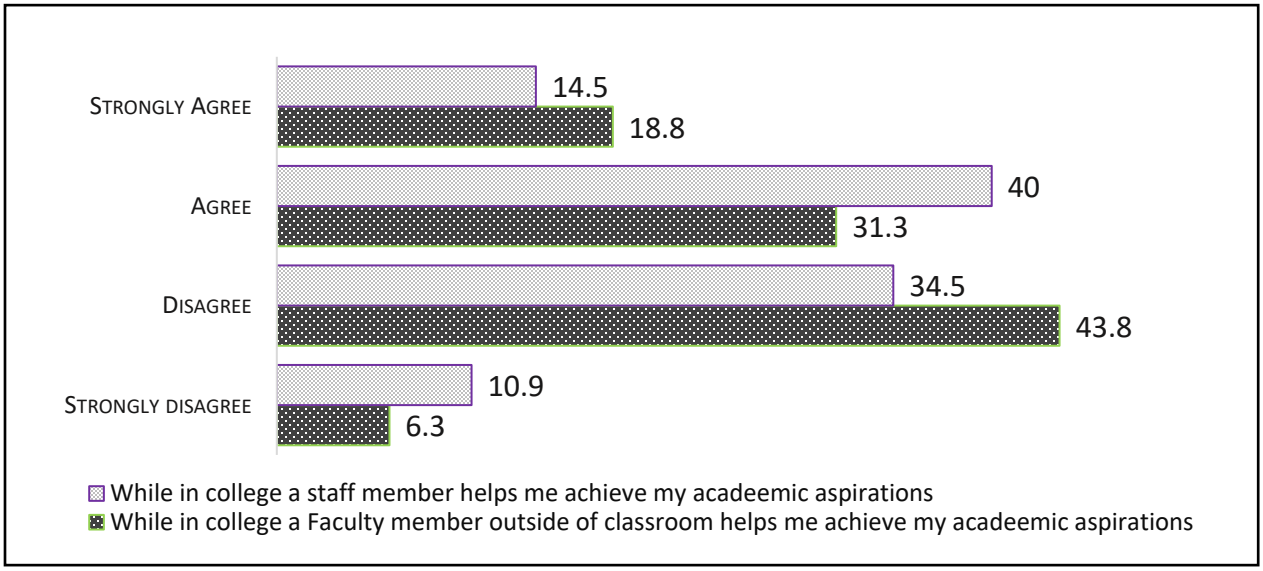
Figure 2. Descriptive Statistics. Perspectives of Mentoring



Interestingly, when asked about whether while in college, a faculty member outside of the classroom helped them receive their academic aspirations, only 31.3% agreed that they had a faculty member help outside of the classroom. Consequently, 40% of participants perceived staff members as helping more than faculty. Overall, less than 20% of the participants strongly perceived faculty and staff supported them to achieve their academic aspirations.

Concerning faculty and staff mentoring, when strongly agree and agree were combined, 87.3% and 87.4% of the participants respectively reported that faculty and staff mentors were important. When asked about their perceptions of a mentoring program, the data reveal that when strongly agreed and agreed were combined, 93% of the participants perceived a mentoring program to be something they needed. Despite this perceived need by the participants, they also indicated their needs were not being catered to.

Figure 3. Descriptive Statistics: Perspectives of Mentoring



The DV for this study was retention. The DV was measured by two variables, classification, and GPA. Table 1 shows that just over one third (36.2%) of the sample were sophomores. Seniors (31.9%) were the next largest group to complete the study. Freshmen were the least number of participants in the study. When the distribution for GPA was examined, slightly more than half of the participants (57.4%) had at least a GPA between 2.0 and 2.99. For those who had at a B average to A the data showed that these comprised 39.4% of the sample. Overall, most of the Participants could be described as "retained" as they were all passing.

To address the second research question, three hypotheses were tested. Hypothesis 3 was unique to mentoring and posited, *African American males' perceptions of mentoring will be positively and significantly related to their classification and GPA levels.* A Spearman's correlation was run to determine the directional relationship between interest in having a faculty mentor, interest in having a staff mentor, an effective mentoring program for AAM outside classroom help from faculty, outside classroom help from staff, a campus mentor, and GPA (Table 2). Of the six factors tested, there was no significant correlation found between interest in having faculty mentor, interest in having a staff mentor, an effective mentoring program for AAM, outside classroom help from faculty, outside classroom help from staff, campus mentor, and GPA.

Table 2

Correlations Between GPA, Faculty Mentor, Staff Mentor, Mentoring Program, Faculty Help, Staff Help, and Campus Mentor

Variables	Coefficient
Faculty Mentor	.079
Staff Mentor	.059
Mentoring Program	-.070
Outside Help (Faculty)	-.128
Outside Help (Staff)	-.110
Campus Mentor	.082

Note. **Correlation is significant at the .01 level. *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level.

Summary and Discussion of Findings

Data analysis was conducted to detect if student engagement, self-efficacy, and mentoring impacted retention for AAM attending a PWI. The data showed student engagement, mentoring, and self-efficacy positively impacts student retention. For AAM students in this study, the respondents on average are highly engaged within student involvement through attending events and belonging to student groups. Interestingly, many of the participants indicated that they were highly engaged during class, and their level of confidence was very high as compared to their peers. The support received from professors was reported extremely high by those surveyed. Over 54% of student participants agreed that student engagement affects academic performance. Mentoring results explained the importance of mentoring and demonstrated a need and desire of AAM participants. The impact of student engagement, mentoring, and self- efficacy is very prevalent in college retention literature as well as within this study. The data also showed that GPA and classification are positive indicators of retention. There exists a positive correlation between GPA and student groups, classification and engagement affect academic performance, and classification and interest in faculty mentor. Results of descriptive statistics indicated that student engagement, self-efficacy, and mentoring are significant engagement factors for AAM. Consequently, AAM who are engaged on campus, who have a high degree of self-efficacy and who are mentored on campus are more likely to be retained than those who do not. As retention is one of the most critical aspects of college, a high positive correlation between self-efficacy, student engagement, and mentoring may not be surprising.

Conclusion

Colleges and universities rely on the financial benefit of student enrollment. Equally important is garnering the input of these students as their college experience shapes their narratives. As such, college administrators have to engage with students and understand how their experiences validate the proper strategies needed to assist with retention and academic achievement (Tinto, 2017). African American male students are at risk for attrition; therefore, mentoring opportunities are necessary to increase the retention of AAM. To make this a reality, a systematic approach is warranted to encourage staff and faculty members to make a conscious effort to establish relationships with these young men inside and outside of the classroom. Having a deliberate understanding of the AAM experience, particularly as it relates to self-efficacy, student engagement, and mentoring can assist campus leaders in educating and aiding in the development of success for university students, campus leaders, and career aspiration beyond college.

References

Britt, B. (2013). African American male inclusion, involvement, perception and achievement at predominantly White institutions. *McNair Scholars Research Journal, 7*(1), 20-35.

Booker, K. & Brevard, Jr., E. (2017). Why mentoring matters: African American students and the transition to college. *The Mentor: An Academic Advising Journal, 1*. http//doi: 10.26209/MJ1961245

Brooks, M., Jones, C., & Burt, I. (2013). Are African American male undergraduate retention programs successful? An evaluation of an undergraduate African American male retention program. *Journal of African American Studies, 17(*2*)*, 206-221. http://doi: 10.1007/s12111-012-9233-2

Brooms, D. R. (2018). 'Building us up': Supporting black male college students in a black male initiative program. *Critical Sociology*, *44*(1), 141–155. https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920516658940

Brown, S. (2019). Nearly half of undergraduates are students of color, but black students lag behind. Chronicle of Higher Education, Retrieved May 25, 2020 https://www.chronicle.com/article/Nearly-Half-of-Undergraduates/245692

Carter, Sr., J.L. (2018). Black student success report card shows PWI failure is more valuable than HBCU excellence. HBCU Digest. Retrieved May 25, 2020 from https://hbcudigest.com/black-student-success-report-card-shows-pwi-failure-is-more-valuable-than-hbcu-excellence/

Connolly, S., Flynn, E. E., Jemmott, J., & Oestreicher, E. (2017). First year experience for at-risk college students. *College Student Journal, 51*(1), 1-6. Retrieved May 4, 2019 https://search-ebscohost-.com

Eakins, A., & Eakins, S. (2017). African American students at predominantly White institutions: A collaborative style cohort recruitment & retention model. *Journal of Learning in Higher Education, 13(*2), 51-57. https://search-ebscohost-.com

Goings, R. (2015). Nontraditional black male undergraduates. *Adult Learning, 28*(3), 121-124. http://doi: 10.1177/1045159515595045

Hall, R. (2017). Factors contributing to the persistence of African American and Hispanic undergraduate males enrolled at a regional predominantly White institution. *Administrative Issues Journal: Connecting Education, Practice and Research, 7(*1), 51-65. http:// doi: 10.5929/2017.7.1.4

Harper, S. R. (2013). *Five things student affairs administrators can do to improve success among college men of color*. Washington, DC: NASPA.

Harper, S. R. & Quaye, S. J. (2009). *Student engagement in higher education: Theoretical perspectives and practical approaches for diverse populations.* New York: Routledge.

Harris, S. M. (2018). Barriers to black male college success: Identifying and conquering the saboteur. *Negro Educational Review, 69*(1-4), 77-99.

Kelly, B.T., Gayles, J.G., & Williams, C.D. (2017). Recruitment without retention: A critical case of black faculty unrest. Journal of Negro Education, 86(3), 305-317. http://doi:10.7709/jnegroeducation.86.3.0305

McClain, K., & Perry, A. (2017). Where did they go: Retention rates for students of color at predominantly White institutions. *College Student Affairs Leadership, 4*(1).

Neuman, L.W. (2019). *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches, 7th*

(Ed). Boston, MA: Pearson Education Inc, publishing as Allyn & Bacon.
Postsecondary National Policy Institute (2020). African American students in higher education. Retrieved May 25, 2020 from https://pnpi.org/african-american-students/
Regis, T.R. (2019). Doctoral students: Attrition, retention rates, motivation, and financial constraints. Bloomington: Xlibris.
Sinanan, A. (2016). The value and necessity of mentoring African American college students at PWI's. *The Journal of Pan African Studies, 9*(8), 156-166.
Tinto, V. (2017). Through the eyes of students. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory, & Practice, 19*(3), 254-269. http://doi. 10.1177/1521025115621917
Tolliver, D. V., III, & Miller, M. T. (2018). Graduation 101: Critical strategies for African American men college completion. *Education, 138*(4), 301-308. Retrieved May 3, 2019 from https://search-ebscohost-com
Wood, J.L., Newman, C., & Harris, H. (2015). Self-efficacy as a determinant of academic integration: An examination of first-year black males in the community college. *The Western Journal of Black Studies*, *39*(1), 3-17.

Tough Choices: District Spending in Alabama During Financial Crises

Andrew Pendola
Auburn University

Abstract

In times of financial crises, it is crucial to understand how district leaders prioritize spending to ensure an adequate and equitable education for all students. This paper examines how districts in Alabama altered spending during the Great Recession. Results demonstrate that expenditure cuts were more intense for high needs student populations, with the most substantial reductions in instructional support, teacher salaries, and administrative positions. While cuts were more significant amongst high needs districts, supports for At-Risk students were enacted. Results highlight the consequences of inequitable state funding for students, teachers, and leadership during financial crises.

Keywords: Great Recession, budgeting, Alabama school funding, school spending, equitable spending

The Great Recession of 2008 ushered in significant cuts to public education funding, with nearly every state seeing roughly five years of unprecedented reductions (Evans et al., 2019; Leachman et al., 2015, 2017). These cuts were disproportionately felt in districts serving the highest needs students, including those of low income, low achievement, and high proportions of English language learners (Evans et al., 2019; Knight, 2017). While there have been several studies examining how the impacts of the Great Recession played out in terms of school funding (Baker, 2014; Jackson et al., 2018; Knight, 2016; Shores & Steinberg, 2019), there has been less attention paid to how district and school leaders adjusted their spending allocations in response to these financial crises. Given that Alabama is a state with a high proportion of economically and historically disadvantaged students, as well as a funding system often considered to be highly inequitable (Larkin, 2016; Neher et al., 2017), it is prudent to understand how financial crises affect district spending decisions across the state.

This paper thereby aims to add to our existing knowledge of how Alabama districts prioritized expenditures in reaction to severe financial crises. Under the notion that how organizations respond to shocking events helps to reveal underlying organizational priorities, we seek to explore two main questions: 1) *How were districts and students impacted by funding cuts during the Great Recession?* and 2) *How did district and school leaders reapportion expenditures in response to these cuts?* To address these questions, we draw on district revenue, expenditure, and staffing data covering every public school in Alabama from 2008-2015. Results demonstrate that (1) the largest proportional cuts occurred amongst the highest needs populations, particularly in core instructional spending and teacher salaries; (2) Black Belt, low achieving, and high poverty districts maintained At-Risk and ELL positions amongst general cuts; (3) high needs districts cut central administration expenditures, and vastly reduced school administrative positions. These results underscore that district and school leaders need strategic plans to be prepared for economic downturns, so that Alabama's most vulnerable populations are afforded an adequate and equitable education when choices are tough.

Background

School Finance in Economic Crises

Research has repeatedly demonstrated that it is not only the amount of funding that schools receive but how they spend it that matters (Baker, 2017). Districts that target their funds towards quality teachers, support staff, instructional materials, and reduced class sizes have repeatedly shown to improve student outcomes, with a more significant impact on high needs[1] populations (Baker, 2017; Cobb-Clark & Jha, 2013). However, under fiscal shortfalls, compensatory staff and support programs are often the first to go, systematically affecting the most vulnerable students (Odden & Picus, 2013; Sorenson & Goldsmith, 2017). Furthermore, high needs districts will face the largest budgetary shortfalls. Lower-income districts have both smaller tax bases and property valuations more exposed to market fluctuations (Evans et al., 2019), and research has shown that economic strains exacerbate inequalities in school funding (Shores & Steinberg, 2019). Even with structural

[1] We use the term "high needs" to designate student populations that require additional resource support, including low achieving, high poverty, English language learner (ELL), and special education (SPED) students.

adjustments to funding formulas, rapid economic downturns have shown to be felt more severely in low income districts (Knight, 2017).

Leadership Decisions and Economic Shocks

To better understand how leadership responds to economic downturns, we utilize a 'shocks' framework. Shocks are defined as an external event that is both unexpected and destabilizing to the organization, requiring immediate changes to stabilize the organization (Beabout, 2012). Decisions made in this state are thought to be more directly attuned to the current state of operations, and less dependent upon continued norms, ideals, or 'business as usual' practices (Shapiro & Gross, 2013). Given this, reactions to shocks by district and school leadership may be more directly influenced by current needs than by entrenched organizational practices, offering a window into leadership priorities (Bevan et al., 1991).

Alabama Finances and the Great Recession

Alabama presents a unique case to examine how district and school leaders may respond to economic shocks. First, Alabama has a high proportion of districts likely to be affected by financial constraints. With 25% of its students living in poverty and 52% eligible for free/reduced meals (Baker et al., 2018), Alabama has the fifth-highest student poverty rate in the nation (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2019). Second, Alabama's school funding system has been defined as highly inequitable and regressive (Chingos & Glagg, 2017; Larkin, 2016). In an annual study by Baker et al. (2018), across four measures of funding 'fairness,' Alabama ranked among the bottom quartile of states. Third, preliminary research suggests that the Great Recession considerably impacted Alabama. In response to local revenue shortfalls, Alabama ranked third to last in financial counterbalancing, meaning that the state funding did not offset losses in local revenue (Baker, 2014). Overall, although it is clear that the Great Recession impacted school funding in Alabama, it is still unclear how spending responses manifested. Given this gap in the literature, this paper seeks to explore how districts undergoing economic shocks reallocated their spending.

Method

Data

To examine how district spending responded to economic shocks during the Great Recession, we utilize data covering all public school districts in Alabama from the 2007-8 to 2014-15 school year from the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) Common Core of Data (CCD), matched with Stanford Education Data Archive (SEDA) (Fahle et al., 2018). This data includes measures of federal, state, and local funds received each year, as well as categorical program spending. We identify spending related to instruction and support services (pupil support, instructional staff support, central administration, and school administration),[2] as well as salaries for faculty and staff (regular teachers, special education, vocational, other, pupil support,

[2] To keep an emphasis on student-focused decisions and maintain scope, we do not report noninstructional expenses, including enterprise operations, community services operations, facilities acquisition, maintenance & operations and debt service. For a full list of categorical spending, as well as definition of each category, see National Forum on Educational Statistics (2007).

instructional staff, central administration, and school administration). We also include the number of district personnel, including teachers, counselors, librarians, administrators, support staff, and central office administrators. See Appendix 1 for a description of each budgetary category. Districts have been categorized by their locale (suburban, urban, rural) if they are defined as part of the Black Belt (McDonald & Burnes, 2015), as well as by status of student achievement, student poverty, English language learners (ELL), and special education students. The resulting set covers 138 school districts across the time frame for 966 district-year observations.

Analysis

We utilize a rich descriptive analysis to explore how the Great Recession impacted districts in Alabama. For our first research question, "*How were districts and students impacted by funding cuts during the Great Recession?*" we begin by identifying 'shocked' and 'stable' districts. Shocked districts are those that had the most substantial funding shortfall from the prior year, as identified by the top tercile of annual per-pupil funding decrease, averaging a 6% reduction. Stable districts are those in the bottom tercile of per-pupil funding change, representing district-years where there was either a funding increase or little change, averaging at a 3% increase from the prior year. We compare these districts by their size, student achievement, demographics, and locale to see if there are systematic differences in funding. For our second question, "*How did district and school leaders reapportion expenditures in response to these cuts*?" we examine annual *changes* in spending, salaries, and personnel for those districts that underwent shocks. Here, we use annual changes in per-pupil spending and student-staff ratios rather than extant levels. We report the magnitude of these changes across district locale (suburban, urban, rural, Black Belt), poverty, student achievement, ELL, and special education.

Limitations

As a descriptive analysis, the main goal of this paper is to establish a baseline picture of how districts responded to funding cuts. However, we cannot observe if a reduction in funding led to the changes demonstrated, nor can we observe if districts were indeed 'shocked' by such funding shortfalls. Other factors may drive district expenditures and choices. For example, a reduction in staff may have been due to retirements at the time rather than a deliberate decision to reduce salary expenditures. As such, we caution the reader to see these as broad trends rather than causal relations.

Results

How were districts and students impacted by funding cuts during the Great Recession?

To begin, we explore which types of districts were the most impacted by funding cuts during the great recession. Given a large amount of information presented, we will only focus on a few trends here. Figure 1 presents the yearly proportion of 'shocked' Alabama districts, or those that had a roughly 6% decrease in annual funds. Notably, we see that in the 2008-9 school year, roughly 70% of districts underwent a financial shock, with nearly 90% of Black Belt districts reaching that threshold. Notably, rural districts did not recover as quickly as other locales. Looking at the bottom

panel of student characteristics, shocked high poverty districts were about 5% lower than the state average.

Figure 1
Proportion of Shocked Districts by Year

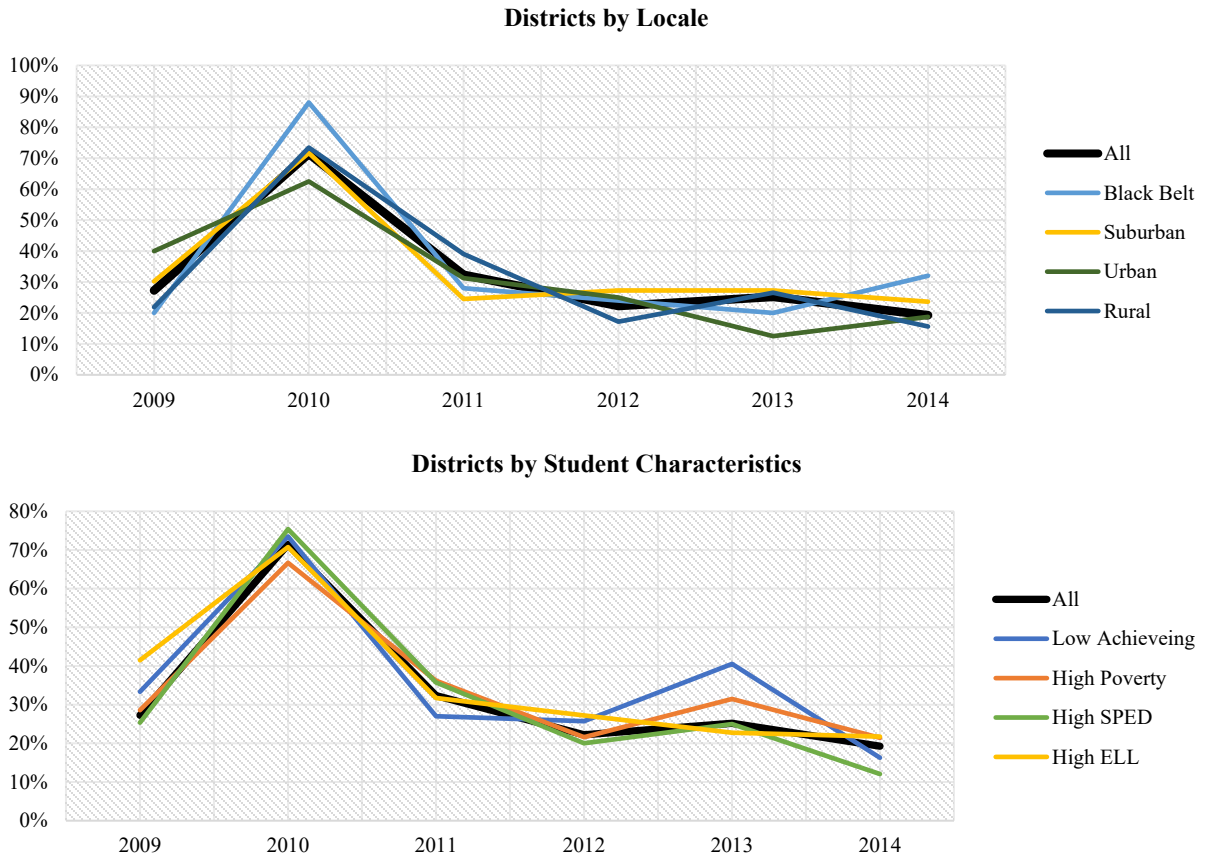


Table 1 presents a comparison of shocked and stable districts by student and district characteristics. Shocked districts were generally similar to stable districts along with each characteristic, with no statistically significant differences in two-tailed t-tests.
Next, in Table 2, we examine the difference in total revenue and expenditure by program and salaries for all shocked and stable schools. Here, we see that for shocked districts, the majority of revenue reduction took place from local funds, with an average of $409 less per-pupil in local funds and an average of $766 less per-pupil in total funds. Turning to expenditures, we see that

Table 1

Average Characteristics of Alabama School Districts by Shock Level, 2008-2015

	All Districts	Shocked Districts	Stable Districts	Difference
District Enrollment	5598.46	5277.38	4664.22	613.15
High Achieving	33.65%	35.98%	33.46%	2.52%
Low Achieving	33.23%	36.74%	34.60%	2.14%
% Latinx	35.21%	36.45%	38.03%	-1.58%
% African American	4.75%	4.74%	4.30%	0.44%
% White	58.50%	57.37%	56.18%	1.19%
% FARM	62.78%	64.12%	64.30%	-0.18%
% ELL	2.20%	2.22%	1.83%	0.39%
% Special Education	9.12%	10.45%	10.55%	-0.10%
Suburban	46.26%	46.97%	47.91%	-0.94%
Urban	11.86%	11.36%	10.27%	1.09%
Rural	56.09%	54.92%	57.79%	-2.87%
Black Belt	18.70%	20.08%	19.77%	0.31%
Observations	966	264	263	

Note: *p<0.05 in two-tailed t-test between shocked and stable district-years

Table 2

Average District Revenue & Expenditures Per Pupil

	All Districts	Shocked Districts	Stable Districts	Per-Pupil Difference
Revenue Per Pupil				
Total Revenue	9984.38	9741.14	10507.55	766.41*
Federal Revenue	1328.61	1275.36	1374.87	99.51
State Revenue	5635.49	5577.21	5835.02	257.80*
Local Revenue	3020.28	2888.57	3297.67	409.09*
Expenditures Per Pupil	10203.52	10189.70	10561.13	371.42*
Instruction	5178.93	5092.59	5261.39	168.80*
Support Services				
Pupil Support	539.33	531.97	555.54	23.56
Instructional Staff Support	369.34	364.95	389.98	25.03
Central Administration	306.81	309.96	328.60	18.63
School Administration	558.28	556.59	567.72	11.12
Salaries: Teachers				
Regular	2444.44	2422.70	2474.21	51.51*
Special Programs	316.91	305.69	317.99	12.29*
Vocational	170.04	165.17	172.12	6.96
At-Risk/ELL	68.60	69.54	72.33	2.79
Salaries: Support				
Pupil Support	299.55	299.70	306.08	6.37
Instructional Staff	215.71	213.09	221.46	8.37
Central Administration	153.86	157.10	164.07	6.97
School Administration	384.97	386.49	391.18	4.68
Observations (District-Years)	966	264	263	

Note: *p<0.05 in a two-tailed t-test between shocked and stable district-years. Revenue and expenditures may not match due to other omitted expenditures such as debt service. See National Foundation on Educational Statistics (2007) for more details on program codes.

shocked schools spent, on average, $371 less per-pupil than stable schools. This took place mostly in the form of lower levels of spending on instructional services ($169 per-pupil), with slightly lower average spending on support services across the board. Additionally, regular teacher salaries had a substantial reduction, with shocked districts spending on average $51.5 less per-pupil than stable districts for regular teachers.

Turning to staff patterns between shocked and stable districts, Table 3 presents the student-teacher ratio (STR) and student-staff ratio (SSR) for all districts in Alabama. Here, higher ratios represent fewer staff available to each student. On average, school districts in Alabama had an annual STR of 15.74 and SSR of 9.28. Shocked districts had slightly lower STR overall. However, they also had a considerably higher SSR for school-level administrators, including school principals and assistant principals.

Table 3

Student-Teacher and Staff Ratios for Shocked and Stable Districts

	All Districts	Shocked Districts	Stable Districts	Difference
Total Student-Teacher	15.74	15.64	15.67	0.04
Kindergarten	161.47	162.82	156.99	-5.83
Elementary	35.26	35.15	34.20	-0.96
Secondary	37.93	36.99	39.97	2.98*
Total Student-Staff	9.28	9.19	9.43	0.24
Instructional Aides	157.81	150.13	160.51	10.38
Coordinators	1512.64	1189.72	1325.91	136.19
Guidance Counselors	417.46	422.57	411.97	-10.60
Librarians	529.32	521.53	523.78	2.25
Central Admin	1174.25	1068.85	1263.92	195.06
School Admin	238.51	250.23	217.90	-32.33*
Student Support Staff	372.49	398.58	351.81	-46.77
Other Support Staff	42.28	40.25	47.75	7.50
N	924	264	261	

Note: *p<0.05 in two-tailed t-test between shocked and stable district-years

How did district and educational leaders reapportion expenditures in response to cuts?

After looking at how shocked and stable districts differed from one another, we now explore ways in which district and school leaders reapportioned expenditures when facing financial shocks. First, we look at the annual changes in expenditures, followed by staffing patterns for all districts between shocked and stable districts.

Comparative Changes in Expenditures and Staffing

Table 4 below presents the average change in expenditures from the previous year over the sample window from 2008-9 to 2014-15, followed by the annual change in expenditures for shocked and stable districts. We see that shocked districts significantly reduced instructional spending, as well as instituted nearly across-the-board reductions in support services and salaries. Interestingly, while there was a small annual reduction in regular teacher salaries across all districts, shocked districts reduced teacher salaries by $57 per pupil, while stable districts increased salaries by $40.

Table 4
Average District Changes in Expenditures Per Pupil 2008-2015

	All Districts	Shocked Districts	Stable Districts	Per-Pupil Difference
Change in Revenue				
Total Revenue	76.93	-702.69	826.47	1529.16*
Federal Revenue	-70.20	-210.40	46.51	256.91*
State Revenue	78.04	-183.42	340.57	523.99*
Local Revenue	69.09	-308.87	439.39	748.26*
Change in Expenditures	76.43	-169.94	316.11	486.05*
Instruction	11.52	-134.98	145.64	280.62*
Support Services				
Pupil Support	9.37	-6.71	22.73	29.44*
Instructional Staff Support	1.31	-18.86	21.47	40.33*
Central Administration	6.63	-8.80	21.49	30.29*
School Administration	6.01	-6.29	17.97	24.26*
Salaries: Teachers				
Regular	-5.71	-57.39	40.07	112.41*
Special Programs	-6.74	-47.38	0.46	87.45*
Voc/CTE	1.21	-15.95	5.19	16.41*
At-Risk/ELL	9.43	-4.05	6.47	9.24*
Salaries: Support				
Pupil Support	4.04	0.50	8.22	-6.53*
Instructional Staff	-0.40	-5.19	3.19	7.72*
Central Administration	2.71	-3.23	7.98	8.38*
School Administration	4.46	-1.94	11.41	11.22*
Observations (District-Years)	966	264	261	

Next, we turn to student-teacher and student-staff ratio by districts. Generally, while there was a slight increase in the student-teacher ratio across all districts during the sample window, there was a more considerable increase for shocked districts, rising by 0.45 students per teacher. Shocked districts raised the kindergarten and elementary student-teacher ratio, while stable districts reduced the number of students per each kindergarten and elementary teacher. However, while shocked districts slightly increased the student-teacher ratio for secondary teachers, stable districts raised the student-teacher ratio by nearly two students per teacher.

Table 5
Student-Teacher and Staff Ratios for Shocked and Stable Districts

	All District	Shocked Districts	Stable Districts	Difference
Total Student-Teacher	0.28	0.45	0.06	-0.38*
Total Student-Staff	1.61	1.69	1.62	-0.07
Instructional Aides	3.28	7.2	4.32	-2.88
Academic Coordinators	701.38	281.66	1073.75	792.09*
Guidance Counselors	3.81	5.32	0.74	-4.58
Librarians	4.79	8.62	-5.57	-14.19*
Central Admin	190.8	109.61	241.75	132.15
School Admin	8.05	9.71	5.9	-3.81
Student Support Staff	65.07	64.34	60.37	-3.97

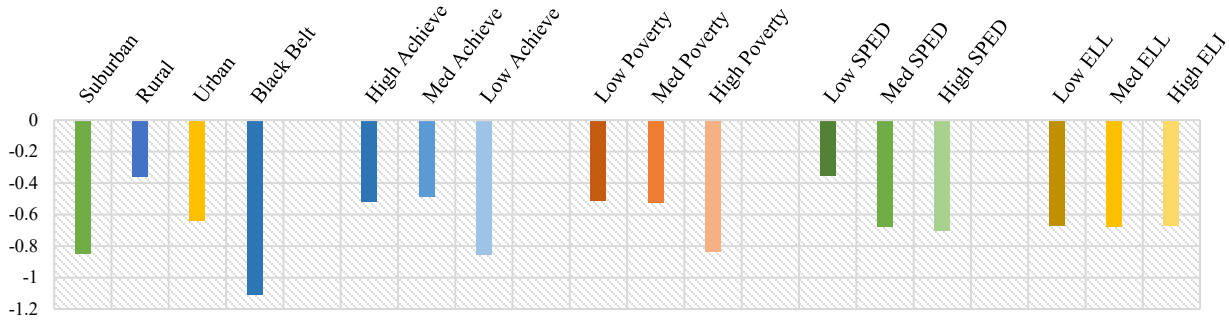
Changes for Shocked Districts

We now examine how spending changes differed by locale, student achievement, poverty, ELL, and special education levels for shocked districts in Figures 2-5. Here, we present per-pupil changes in expenditures and staffing as standardized coefficients to better visualize the relative magnitude of changes by category. As such, these figures represent the extent to which the change in funds was above or below the average district change for each category. To maintain length and scope for this paper, we will again only focus on a few select trends.

We begin with Figure 2, which presents changes in total K-12 expenditures by locale, student achievement, poverty, ELL, and special education levels. Here, we see that suburban and Black Belt districts had the most significant comparative reductions in expenditures, followed by urban and rural districts. Looking across levels of student achievement, poverty, ELL, and SPED status, we also see that low achieving, high poverty, and high SPED districts also had more substantial comparative spending reductions.

Figure 2

Total Expenditure Reductions for Shocked Districts



Next, we turn to categorical spending changes for shocked districts in Figures 3-5. Beginning with Figure 3, we see that Black Belt districts had the most substantial reduction in instructional spending, along with significant reductions in instructional support and central administration. This was generally echoed across student achievement, poverty, and special education status. Here, low achieving, high poverty, and high special education districts reacted to shortfalls with more significant reductions in instructional and support service spending.

Figure 4 presents spending changes in salaries. Suburban, rural, and Black Belt districts instituted massive cuts in regular teacher salaries. Interestingly, we see that overall salary changes for At-Risk/ELL instruction were higher than average, demonstrating that shocked districts did not institute the level of cuts that stable districts did during the sample period.

Figure 5 presents changes in faculty and staff numbers for shocked districts. Here, per-pupil ratios are shown, with larger numbers representing fewer employees per each student. Looking at the "All Teaching" category, the student-teacher ratio generally increased for all

Figure 3

Expenditures for Shocked Districts

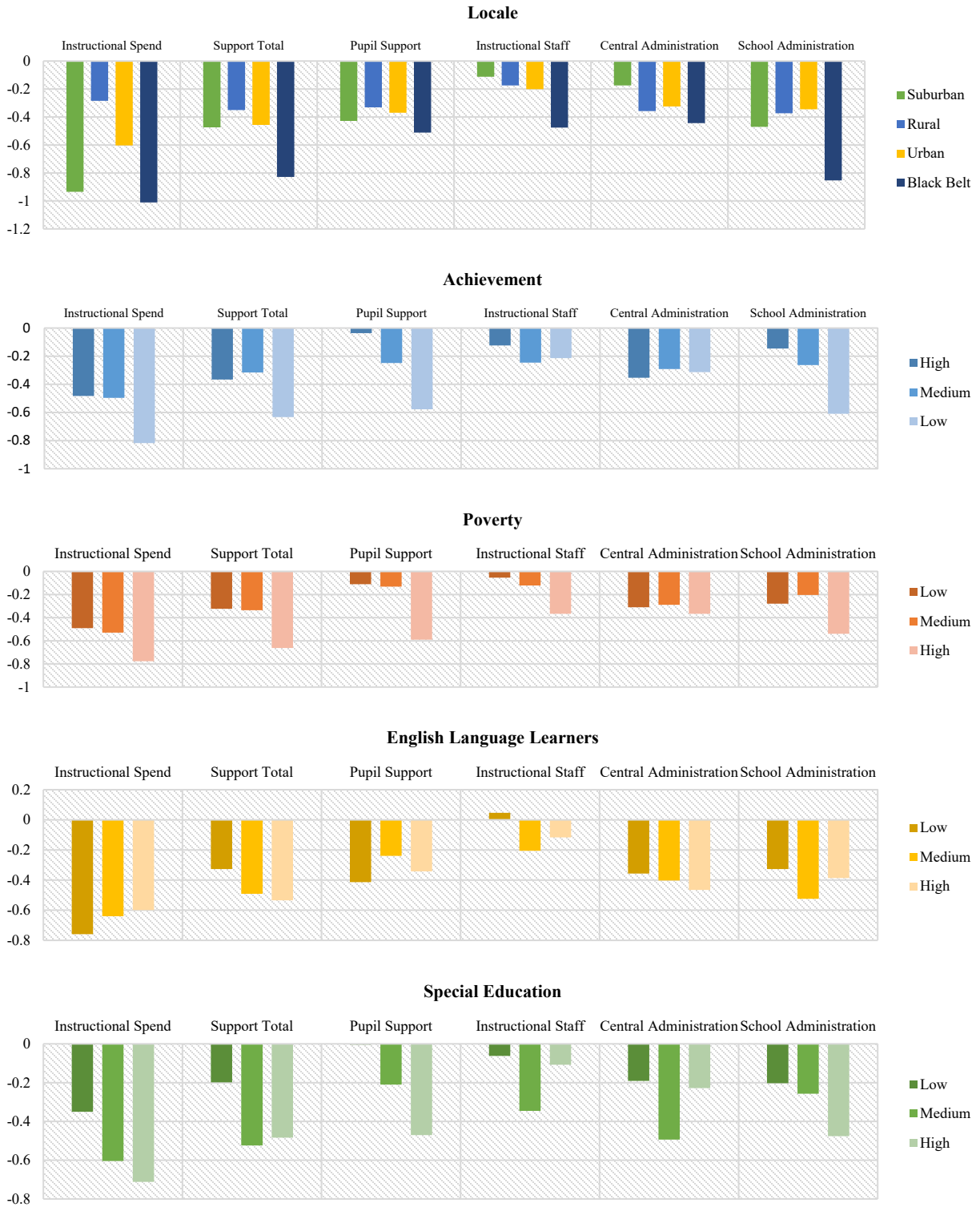
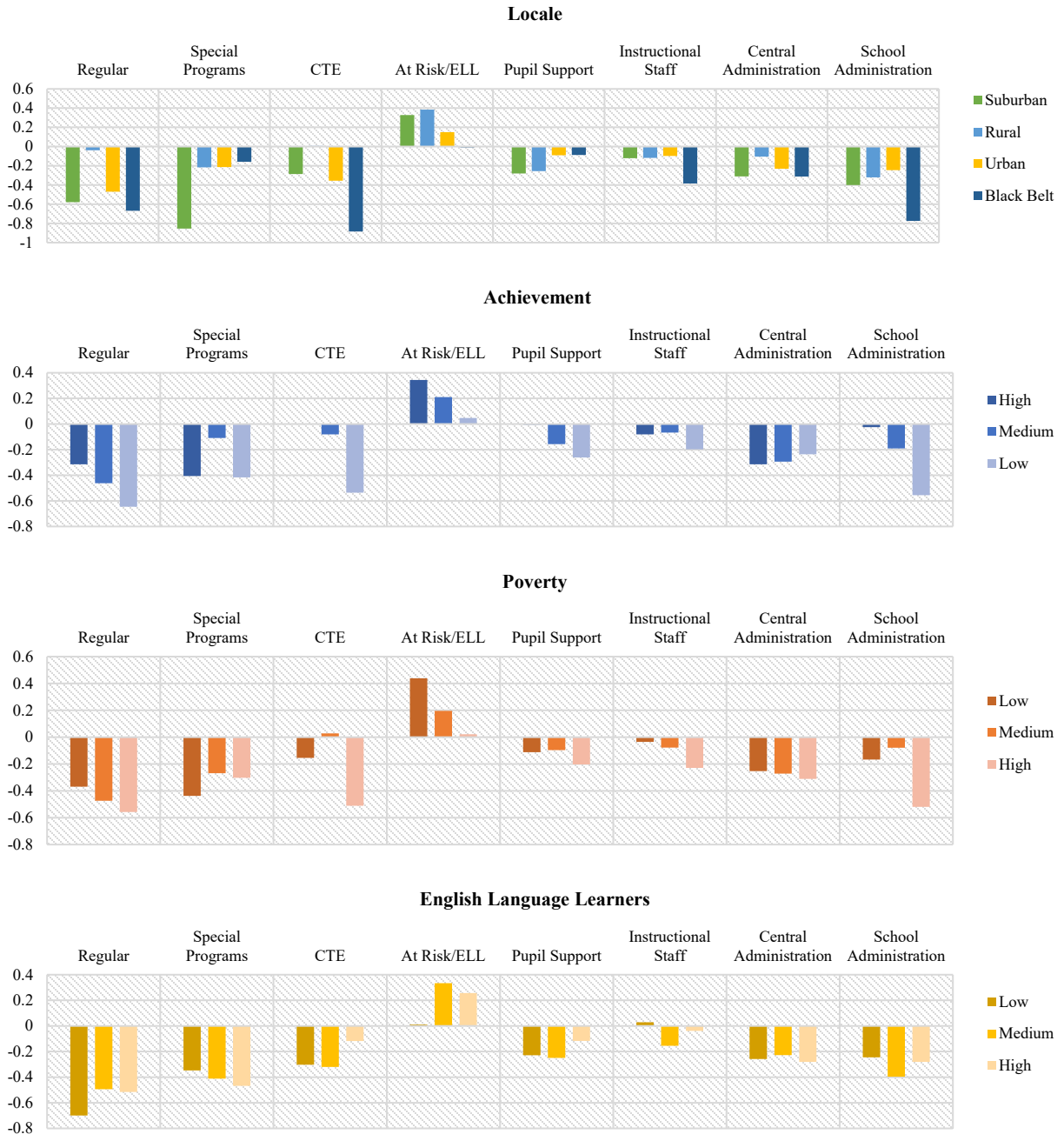


Figure 4

Salary Expenditures for Shocked Districts



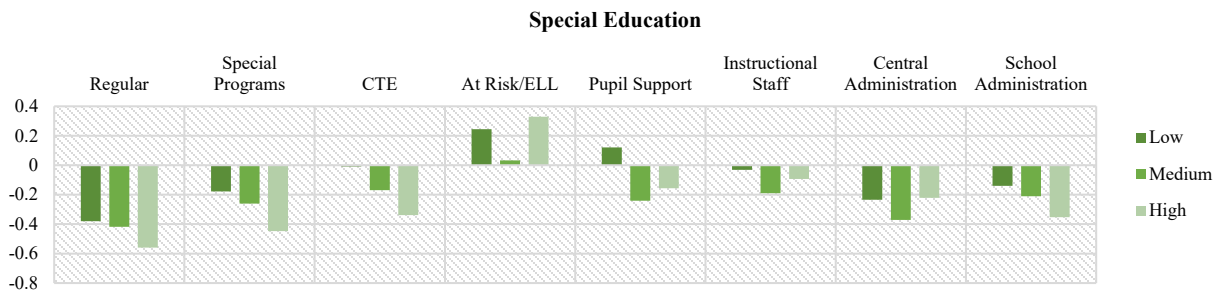
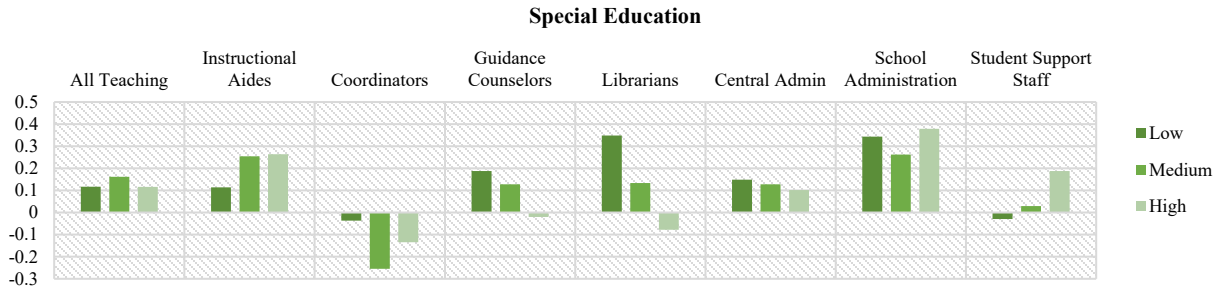


Figure 5

Per-Pupil Ratios for Shocked Districts



shocked district types, except rural, meaning that there was an overall reduction in the number of teachers in these districts. Similarly, there was a considerable reduction in instructional aides and school-level administrators. Interestingly, school-level administrative position reductions were the largest in the highest-needs areas. However, the trend was, in general, the opposite for central administrative staff.

Discussion

In this paper, we have sought to explore how the Great Recession altered district finance in Alabama. Through this, we found that (1) expenditure cuts were the greatest for Black Belt, suburban, and rural districts; (2) the largest expenditure reductions were in instruction and regular teacher salaries. There were smaller reductions generally across the board in support services and staff, while At-Risk and ELL salaries comparatively increased or remained stable; (3) shocked districts reduced the number of teachers per student in general but maintained central administrative positions and student support staff; (4) shocked Black Belt, low achieving, high special education, and high poverty districts demonstrated the greatest reductions in expenditures, reducing spending on instruction, instructional staff support, central and school administration, as well as salaries for regular teachers and school-level administration. In general, they increased the number of students per regular teachers, instructional aides, and school-level administrators. Overall, we see that financial crises impact on school funding have serious consequences for equitable and adequate educational goals, which we outline below.

First, in line with literature on funding inequity both nationwide (Evans et al., 2019; Knight, 2017) and in Alabama (Augenblick, Palaich, and Associates, 2015; Baker et al., 2018; Chingos & Glagg, 2017; Larkin, 2016), these results suggest that financial shocks can be more destabilizing for historically disadvantaged and high needs districts. Black Belt, low achieving, high poverty, high ELL, and high special education districts demonstrated the greatest reductions in expenditures when compared to districts with higher achievement and lower poverty, ELL, and special education students. In short, the expenditure cuts in financial crises are more intense for high needs student populations.

Second, cuts generally came across the board but were proportionally greater for spending on core instruction, instructional support, and administration. Research has shown that core teaching cuts tend to disproportionally impact low performing and low-income districts, given they tend to have more untenured teachers, a finding confirmed here (Knight & Strunk, 2016). As noted above, keeping smaller class sizes has shown to have a greater impact on high needs students (Baker, 2017). Here, district leaders must work to retain teachers, not only to maintain smaller class sizes and qualified personnel but also to reduce the structural shuffling that often induces further turnover (Goldhaber et al., 2016).

Third, in contrast to other states (Evans et al., 2019; Knight, 2017), results suggest that district leadership in Alabama did work to protect compensatory support for vulnerable populations. Targeted support for At-Risk and ELL students remained relatively stable for low achieving and high poverty districts, suggesting commitments to serve some populations that are considered the most underserved in financial crises (Chakrabarti & Setren, 2012; Knight, 2016). Considering that high achieving and low poverty districts increased expenditures on At-Risk/ELL salaries, these results suggest that commitments to horizontal equity were widespread, but that some districts were better able to enact them (Berne & Stiefel, 1984).

Fourth, we see that while there were cuts to both central administration spending and overall salary expenditures, there were no significant reductions in central administrator positions. Similar cuts to school-level administration spending and salaries also included a reduction in the number of administrator positions, suggesting that central office personnel kept their positions and possibly reduced salaries, while school-level administrators lost positions. This may result from the fact that many school-level administrative positions, such as assistant principals, come out of local funding (Alabama State Department of Education, 2018). However, it also points to the notion that central office administrative positions were most prioritized above school administration positions in high needs districts.

Conclusion

The results presented here demonstrate the complexity in decision-making that must take place in the face of financial shortfalls. No doubt, these decisions are based on the specifics of student and community needs, as well as the financial position of the district and schools. However, these general trends point to the importance of supporting high needs districts, even when financial constraints are great.

The sensitivity of low income districts to funding cuts further suggests that student supports would better be dealt with independently of local funds, which are most subject to shortfalls in economic recessions (Evans et al., 2019). Given this, the research presented here supports the claims of Larkin (2016) and Augenblick et al. (2015), who argued that an adequate funding system in Alabama would require additional state student multipliers, including additional student weights for high poverty districts, special education, and ELL students. The inclusion of these weights into the funding formula would not only move closer to an adequate funding system (Larkin, 2016) but would also provide state funds less subject to local funding instabilities for the highest-needs districts (Knight, 2017). This would help offset some of the reductions in core instructional expenditures that were most pronounced in high poverty districts.

Overall, these results highlight the importance of crisis planning for district leadership. District and school leadership must weigh competing priorities and forward-plan for unforeseen events. For example, district and school leaders should be in discussion regarding whether central administrative cuts are prioritized above school level administrative cuts, or if pupil support is more aligned with student success than instructional staff support. Given that leadership during crises is not only essential for equitable and adequate education, but also the greater well-being of students, employees, and the community (Shapiro & Gross, 2013), it is imperative that leadership at both the school and district level recognize how strategic expenditure cuts can be made in a manner that supports the mission and vision of the district while emphasizing student-centered decisions (Sorenson & Goldsmith, 2017).

References

Alabama State Department of Education. (2018). *A guide to state allocation calculations 2018-19*. https://www.alsde.edu/sec/leafa/State%20Allocations/State%20Guide%20to%20Allocations%202018-19.pdf

Augenblick, Palaich, and Associates. (2015). *Equity and adequacy in Alabama schools and districts: Prepared for Alabama State Department of Education*. Author.

Baker, B. (2014). Evaluating the recession's impact on state school finance systems. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*. https://doi.org/10/ggndgm

Baker, B. (2017). *How money matters for schools* (p. 32). Learning Policy Institute. https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/how-money-matters-report

Baker, B., Farrie, D., & Sciarra, D. G. (2018). *Is school funding fair? A national report card*. Education Law Center. www.schoolfundingfairness.org

Beabout, B. R. (2012). Turbulence, perturbance, and educational change. *Complicity: An International Journal of Complexity and Education*, *9*(2). https://doi.org/10/ggpbm8

Berne, R., & Stiefel, L. (1984). *The measurement of equity in school finance: Conceptual, methodological, and empirical dimensions*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

Bevan, D., Collier, P., & Gunning, J. (1991). The macroeconomics of external shocks. In V. Balasubramanyam & S. Lall (Eds.), *Current issues in Economics*. Palgrave.

Chakrabarti, R., & Setren, E. (2012). The impact of the Great Recession on school district finances: Evidence from New York. In *FRBNY Economic Policy Review* (October; pp. 45–66). Federal Reserve Bank of New York.

Chingos, M., & Glagg, K. (2017). *Do poor kids get their fair share of school funding?* (p. 21). The Urban Institute. https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/90586/school_funding_brief.pdf

Cobb-Clark, D. A., & Jha, N. (2013). Educational achievement and the allocation of school budgets. *The Australian Economic Review*, *49*(3), 1–37.

Evans, W. N., Schwab, R. M., & Wagner, K. L. (2019). The great recession and public education. *Education Finance and Policy*, *14*(2), 298–326. https://doi.org/10/ggndgk

Fahle, E., Shear, B., Kalogrides, D., Reardon, S., Chavez, B., & Ho, A. (2018). *Stanford education data archive: Technical documentation (Version 3.0)*. http://purl.stanford.edu/db586ns4974

Goldhaber, D., Strunk, K. O., Brown, N., & Knight, D. S. (2016). Lessons learned from the great recession: Layoffs and the RIF-induced teacher shuffle. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, *38*(3), 517–548. https://doi.org/10/f8zgjc

Jackson, C. K., Wigger, C., & Xiong, H. (2018). Do school spending cuts matter? Evidence from the great recession. *National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper*, *WP-18-02*. https://doi.org/10/ggm9gc

Knight, D. (2016). *Were high-poverty districts in Texas disproportionally impacted by state funding cuts? School finance equity in Texas following the Great Recession*. Center for Education Research and Policy Studies. https://digitalcommons.utep.edu/cerps_pb/3/

Knight, D. (2017). Are high-poverty school districts disproportionately impacted by state funding cuts? School finance equity following the great recession. *Journal of Education Finance*, *43*(2), 169–194.

Knight, D., & Strunk, K. (2016). Who bears the costs of district funding cuts? Reducing inequality in the distribution of teacher layoffs. *Educational Researcher*, *45*(7), 395–406. https://doi.org/10/ggndgj

Larkin, B. (2016). Funding students, not units: Moving alabama from a regressive public school funding state to a progressive public school funding state. *Alabama Journal of Educational Leadership*, *3*, 15–37.

Leachman, M., Albares, N., Masterson, K., & Wallace, M. (2015). Most states have cut school funding, and some continue cutting. *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities*, 1–16.

Leachman, M., Masterson, K., & Figueroa, E. (2017). A punishing decade for school funding. *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities*, 17.

McDonald, R., & Burnes, V. P. (2015). *Visions of the Black Belt: A cultural survey of the heart of Alabama*. University of Alabama Press.

National Center for Educational Statistics. (2019). *Characteristics of children's families*. U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, American Community Survey. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/pdf/coe_cce.pdf

National Forum on Educational Statistics. (2007). *Forum guide to core finance data elements (NFES 2007–801)* (p. 68). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2007/2007801.pdf

Neher, C., Patterson, D., Duffield, J., & Harvey, A. (2017). Budgeting for the future: The long-term impacts of short term-thinking in Alabama K-12 education funding. *Journal of Education Finance*, *42*(4), 448–470.

Odden, A., & Picus, L. (2013). *School finance: A policy perspective*. McGraw-Hill.

Shapiro, J. P., & Gross, S. J. (2013). *Ethical educational leadership in turbulent times:(Re) solving moral dilemmas*. Routledge.

Shores, K., & Steinberg, M. (2019). The great recession, fiscal federalism and the consequences for cross-district spending inequality. *Journal of Education Finance*, *45*(2), 123–148. https://doi.org/10/ggpbm7

Sorenson, R., & Goldsmith, L. (2017). *The principal's guide to school budgeting*. Corwin Press.

Appendix 1

Revenue & Expenditure Category Definitions

Type	Description
Total Revenue	Total of all federal, state, and local revenue to a district in a given year
Federal Revenue	Revenues from the federal government include direct grants-in-aid to schools or agencies, funds distributed through a state or intermediate agency, and revenues in lieu of taxes to compensate a school district for nontaxable federal institutions within its boundary.
State Revenue	Revenues from the state government include both direct funds from state governments, restricted and unrestricted grants-in-aid, and revenues in lieu of taxation. Revenues in lieu of taxes are paid to compensate a school district for nontaxable state institutions or facilities within the district's boundary.
Local Revenue	Local revenues are funds collected and given to school districts without further allocation by the state government. These include revenue from local property and non-property taxes, investments, student fees and charges, and revenues from foundations and trusts, as well as other donations.
Expenditures	Total of all district expenditures in a given year.
Instruction	Activities dealing directly with the interaction between teachers and students. Included here are the activities of aides or classroom assistants of any type (clerks, graders, teaching machines, etc.) assisting in the instructional process.
Support Services	Support services provide administrative, technical (such as guidance and health), and logistical support to facilitate and enhance instruction.
Pupil Support	Activities designed to assess and improve the well-being of students and to supplement the teaching process, including Attendance and Social Work Services, Guidance Services, Health Services, Psychological Services, Speech Pathology and Audiology Services, and Occupational Therapy.
Instructional Staff Support	Activities associated with assisting the instructional staff with the content and process of providing learning experiences for students, including Improvement of Instruction Library/ Media Services, Instruction-Related Technology, and Academic Student Assessment.
Central Administration	Activities concerned with establishing and administering policy for operating the school district.
School Administration	Activities concerned with overall administrative responsibility for a school.
Salaries	
Regular	Salaries for personnel that provide students in prekindergarten* through grade 12 with learning experiences to prepare them for further education or training and responsibilities as citizens, family members, and workers.
Special Programs	Salaries for personnel for elementary and secondary students (prekindergarten* through grade 12) receiving services outside the realm of "regular programs," such as mental retardation, orthopedic impairment, etc.
Voc/CTE	Salaries for personnel involving activities delivered through traditional comprehensive and vocational-technical high schools or recognized charter schools that prepare students to meet challenging academic standards, as well as industry skill standards, while preparing students for broad-based careers and further education beyond high school.
At-Risk/ELL	Salaries for personnel targeted towards "At-Risk" students and students whose primary language is not English.
Pupil Support	Personnel associated with activities designed to assess and improve the well-being of students and to supplement the teaching process, including Attendance and Social Work Services, Guidance Services, Health Services, Psychological Services, Speech Pathology and Audiology Services, and Occupational Therapy.
Instructional Staff Support	Personnel associated with assisting the instructional staff with the content and process of providing learning experiences for students, including Improvement of Instruction Library/ Media Services, Instruction-Related Technology, and Academic Student Assessment.
Central Administration	Personnel associated with activities concerned with establishing and administering policy for operating the school district.
School Administration	Personnel associated with activities concerned with overall administrative responsibility for a school.

Note: Text adopted from National Forum on Education Statistics (2007, pp. 16–33).

Perceived Factors that Hindered the Implementation of a *Freedom of Choice* Initiative in an Alabama School System

Jason C. Bryant
Auburn University

Abstract

The United States Supreme Court, in a unanimous decision, ruled that separate but equal was no longer an acceptable practice in education for students in *Brown v. Board of Education, Topeka Kansas*. Across the country, school leaders grappled with the implementation of integration, and in more portions of the country, especially in the Deep South, integration would be a slow and often tumultuous process for African Americans fighting for their rights. This study investigates one school system's effort to develop a *Freedom of Choice* initiative to desegregate the schools and focuses on the perceived factors that hindered the process.

Keywords: Integration, segregation, freedom of choice, school choice, case study

May 17, 1954 would be an important historic day, influencing education in the lives of African American students in the United States. This was the day which ushered in the unanimous Supreme Court verdict in *Brown v. Board of Education, Topeka, Kansas,* which ruled that "separate but equal" was no longer an acceptable practice in education for students in elementary and secondary schools across the country (Irons, 2002, p. 163; Kluger, 2004, p. 710). From that day forward, it was the law of the land that African American students should be afforded the opportunity to attend schools with their White counterparts regardless of the location of the schools.

The *Brown* decision was a step toward equal rights for African Americans during a time of Jim Crow and other laws that had legally segregated the two races across the country, but especially in the South. In the South, these were a series of rigid anti-Black laws that created a caste system in which Blacks were treated as second class citizens. This dual system was evident in the school systems in which each race had its own school, and the African American schools were always lacking in materials and support.

With the passage of the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, schools were faced with many questions centered on the implementation of this new law. Unfortunately, the Court's rhetoric did not bring about any immediate change, especially in the Jim Crow South, where deeply etched social realities were hard to erase. There was a slow response to desegregation by school systems following the passage of *Brown* in 1954, which many cited the lack of direction from the Supreme Court ruling. Within a year, the Supreme Court issued a second decision that further dictated requirements for school systems to follow. Specifically, in this decision, the court stated that schools should "make a prompt and reasonable start toward full compliance" in implementing its mandates aimed at ending de jure segregation (Russo, Harris & Sandidge, 1994, p. 298), and that school systems must begin integrating schools with "all deliberate speed" (Duke, 2009, p. 16; Klarman, 2007; Wise, 2001, p. 22). It was after this ruling that schools began creating voluntary measures of integration, which included Freedom of Choice plans.

Although the Supreme Court issued this decree, historians have noted that in many states, it would be almost 20 years before they would completely comply with the court's decision. While the Brown decision declared state-promoted segregation unconstitutional and pronounced any such laws or policies null and void, it did not prescribe what school systems must do to desegregate (Armor, 1995). In many cases, states took a very methodical approach to keep the schools segregated while staying clear of the watchful ideas of the federal government. This includes *Freedom of Choice* and *Pupil Placement Laws* that gave southern states the appearance that they were taking steps to integrate schools.

Such laws, passed at the state level, gave local school boards great discretion in pupil assignment, enough to slow or stop implementation of school desegregation. This happened in Tuskegee, Alabama, with the Macon County Board of Education that closed the school when Black students tried to integrate the school (Norrell, 1998). In 1965, only 6% of the Black students in the South were in an integrated school. In 1967 this number rose to 22% in the 17 southern and border states, but this did not fulfill the letter of the law that all schools across the country would be integrated (Weeks, 1971).

Purpose of the Study

This is part two of a four-part study examining *Freedom of Choice* implementation in an Alabama school system following the passing of Brown v. Board of Education in 1954. This part of the

study examined the perceived factors that hindered the implementation of the *Freedom of Choice* initiative by both African American students that actively participated in the initiative and those Caucasian students already at the segregated school. The stories told by the participants and captured in this study are of those who witnessed the integration of schools firsthand, gaining insight into what they learned through this process about their community, school, and most importantly themselves.

There have been limited studies completed that have explicitly focused on the *Freedom of Choice* movement in schools and the impact it had on students that were affected by the integration of schools. Because there has been very little research done, little is known about the actual people involved so this study provides insights not previously examined that could help us to understand issues of racial identity and cultural identity, more thoroughly providing a way to modify the conceptual framework of how students view themselves as individuals and within various subgroups. This study provides an understanding of the lived experiences of both African Americans and Caucasians that came together through a difficult time in American history that can be used to help current educators best understand how to work with students of varying backgrounds in today's classrooms.

Background

School Integration and the *Freedom of Choice* Movement

In an effort to abide by *Brown v. Board of Education*, school systems began to implement *Freedom of Choice* plans in which parents could choose to send their students to either all Black or all White schools. "*Freedom of choice* allowed, in theory, any student to attend any school in the system, thereby allowing equal educational access for every student" (Duke, 2009, p. 18). While the law was initiated to thwart integration, these school-based plans were, for the most part, legitimate attempts to initiate the integration process. The underlying premise of these plans was that parents were given a choice of the educational setting and allowed to choose the environment they feel was most appropriate for their children — a segregated school or an integrated school. The guidelines for integration generally called for freedom of choice to be opened for four grades that were to be spread out, for example first grade, the first and last high school grade, and the first junior high grade. Susan Uchitelle (1993) summarized public school choice programs as:

> These are programs that offer parents a variety of educational settings and allow them to choose the environment they feel is most appropriate for their children. They are schools that offer parents an alternative to neighborhood schools that they consider. They strive to overcome educational inequalities. (p. 15)

These plans were relatively non-controversial because too few schools across the country were using them to integrate the schools, so there was little movement of African Americans into White schools (Rossell, Armor, & Walberg., 2002). This would, however, give school systems the appearance they were integrating since there were only two options, but in many cases, parents kept their students in their neighborhood schools, which were racially segregated.

By 1968, *freedom of choice* plans was generally not approved by the federal courts because these plans did little to integrate large numbers of African Americans in schools across the country (Raffel, 1998). The Supreme Court rulings in *Green v. County* (1968) and *Alexander v. Holmes*

County Board of Education (1969) ended *de jure* dual school systems and ultimately enforced the *Brown* decisions once and for all for school systems across the country.

Methodology

This was a qualitative case study since the nature of the study dealt with the lives of those that participated in the *Freedom of Choice* movement during the integration of schools. Qualitative research investigates research questions of how, what, and why in situations calling for in-depth exploration to provide a greater understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2005; Yin, 2014). Qualitative research relies on the participants' views; asks a broad, general question; collects data that consists mainly of words; and describes and analyzes these words for themes (Creswell, 2005; Yin, 2014).

Creswell (2005) defines a case study as "a variation of ethnography in that the researcher provides an in-depth exploration of a bounded system (e.g., an event, a process, or an individual) based on extensive data collection" (p. 439). Case studies allow people to look at the world in a particular way and to communicate the situation to others to gain knowledge. This type of qualitative research becomes a road-map of knowledge to promote future study; providing an understanding of a specific situation and setting while evaluating people's lives, and what gives meaning to them (Patton, 2002).

Population and Sample

This study occurred in a school setting in a small Southern city with a population of 19,261 residents in the 1960s. The school system examined was Rose City Schools (RCS) (pseudonym). The city of Rose, nestled in the east-central part of the state, had access to a local university and is within an hour's drive of a major metropolitan city. The school system has a unique history in that it was formed as an independent district, later became part of a county system, and then once again became an independent system.

Rose City Schools (RCS) was established in 1961 after citizens favored becoming a separate entity from the county school district. Prior to 1961, the citizens of Rose had voted to tax themselves for local education at a higher rate than the citizens of the county, and felt that because they were paying a higher rate than these funds should be used exclusively for the children living in the city of Rose. Proponents also felt that Rose schools would not improve as long as they remained in the county system (local newspaper article, 1961). Table 1 summarizes the configuration of the school system as it developed as an independent school system from the county school district.

Purposive sampling was used to identify the population and sample. Purposive sampling is the qualitative research process in which the researcher selects individuals with an intentional purpose (Creswell, 2005). The criteria for selection included students who integrated the schools utilizing Freedom of Choice or those that were at the school when integration occurred during Freedom of Choice. After identifying potential participants, nine students chose to be included in the study, listed in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant	Race	Gender	Grade at Time of Integration	Graduation Year
Respondent 1 (R1)	W	Female	11th	1967
Respondent 2 (R2)	AA	Male	10th	1968
Respondent 3 (R3)	AA	Male	11th	1969
Respondent 4 (R4)	W	Male	7th	1971
Respondent 5 (R5)	AA	Female	9th	1971
Respondent 6 (R6)	W	Male	7th	1971
Respondent 7 (R7)	W	Male	7th	1971
Respondent 8 (R8)	AA	Female	6th	1974
Respondent 9 (R9)	AA	Female	6th	1974

Data Analysis

"Data analysis consists of examining, categorizing, tabulating, testing, or otherwise recombining evidence, to produce empirically based findings" (Yin, 2014, p. 132). Interviews were analyzed to determine common themes among the participants and those that were different. The researcher was looking to see what differences existed between the two racial groups during the time of integration to gain insight to their lived experiences.

Open coding was used to examine, compare, break down, conceptualize, and categorize the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This process was used to breakdown or reduce data to manageable segments that can be used to generate themes and categories (Schwandt, 2007). Codes were developed from data collected from transcribed responses from the interviews with all data collected from the interviews that were used in the coding process.

Findings

Implementation Process

Rose City Schools, like many other school systems across the nation, did not initially adhere to the United States Supreme Court's desegregation decision of 1954 when the school system broke away from the Tinnemeyer County School System in 1961. In compliance with the laws, city schools in Alabama sought ways to solve the problem of how to best integrate their schools.

In May of 1965, Rose City Schools implemented a "Freedom of Choice" plan requiring all school-aged children to indicate the school that they wanted to attend for the next school year. Results of this Freedom of Choice plan suggested that the majority of students, both Blacks, and Whites, chose to remain in the school they were already attending. In the first year of integration in 1965, fewer than five students decided to attend Rose High School, the predominately White school. No White students chose to attend Hafley High, a predominantly Black school. Over the next four years, the number of Black students attending the predominately White school gradually increased, but no White students ever chose to attend either of the predominantly Black schools.

Factors that Hindered the Freedom of Choice Initiative

Although the school system had made an effort to develop a plan on integration through Freedom of Choice prior to mandated integration that forced all dual systems of educating Black and White students dissolved in 1970, the fall of 1965 saw only a handful of students integrating the school system. All five of these students were African American, and in the coming years, there would not be a mass number of students integrating under the Freedom of Choice initiative. No Caucasian student would integrate the segregated African American schools in the city. The perceived factors that hindered integration through Freedom of Choice included teacher racism/bias, student racism/bias, and resistance from African Americans to integrate, which was evident in the low numbers that chose to attend the White schools.

Teacher Racism/Bias

Although there were community and teacher support for the integration of the school system through Freedom of Choice, unfortunately, there were some teachers that showed they were not fully supportive of the efforts to integrate the school. Both White and African American participants shared their stories of negative experiences they had with some of their teachers.

Respondent 1 vividly remembered not enjoying her time in the school system because of the teachers. She recalled one incident, in particular, involving her history teacher. She shared:

> When President Kennedy died, and this is Rose City Schools, my civics teacher was called out of the room, came back in and said I have an important announcement. She said President Kennedy had been assassinated, and she said I've been waiting for someone to take care of that man. [Lines 123–136]

Although this incident would take place two years prior to the integration of this school system, it did speak volumes to R1 in how that particular teacher felt about the Civil Rights movement that was occurring at that time, which would have included the desegregation of schools across the country. R1 went on to say:

> I always felt like the students did a much better job adapting than the teachers did. [Lines 38-39]

R1 also shared:

> I have memories of being in trouble a great deal as a teenager. I think that is part of what led me into teaching, the cause that all kids need to be respected…. [Lines 76–77]

R2 had similar feelings of disrespect from the White teachers. He shared:

> The transition there was not real smooth…. Then going to your classroom, my history teacher was named Ms. Edwards and she could never pronounce the word Negro because she would always say the "Nigrass" [Lines 66–70]

This showed that not all the teachers at the school were embracing the changes that were occurring at the school and were not showing respect to the other students.

Respondent 2 remembered how compassionate his teachers were at the segregated Black schools. He stated:

> In the elementary school, the teachers seemed to be more compassionate and caring for you and there was concern about you really learning. [Lines 50–51]

He went on to say:

> She seemed to be more caring about you as you learned things that would help you in life. [Lines 54–55]

At the White school, this feeling of compassion and caring was no longer there. R2 shared:

> The teachers were kind of like nobody verbally mistreated you, it was kind of like hands-off. I will only talk to you if I had to talk to you. [Lines 117–118]

This was not the same atmosphere that had been fostered at the segregated school. This same type of behavior was experienced by Respondent 9. She remembered how a teacher would not call on her in class. In fact, she went on to say:

> I spent an entire year in that class raising my hand and my teacher never called on me. [Line 29]

Respondent 5 had a similar experienced and shared:

> …and I just remember being in that room and not really being noticed or recognized by the teacher necessarily, but the remarks and the things that came from the students more than anything else. I do remember in that classroom at the point that I began to get comfortable; there were questions asked. I remember raising my hand so many times and not being called on. The very time that I didn't raise my hand is when I would be called on. So I finally figured out the trick to this and I am not ever going to raise my hand, so whenever she calls on me if I know the answer I know it and if I don't, then I am lost. [Lines 202–209]

Being ignored by the one person that is supposed to be your advocate is not what students had in mind when they chose to integrate the school system. Respondent 8 shared a similar story:

> The teachers weren't very friendly. You can tell by body language and tone. They really did not want you there. They were forced to teach you and you were there and they just lived with it, but they were not going to make any extra effort. [Lines 349–352]

R8 went on to say:

> So the difficult part was you knew that you had to live with it and you knew that you could not complain about it, because you made that choice. And so because we had made that choice at home and we talked about at home, there were things that I know I did not tell my parents that had happened at school and I am sure that my sister didn't either because they would probably want to have pulled us out of school. [Lines 398–403]

This showed how much she wanted to be at the school, but also how difficult that first year was on her as she transitioned from the segregated Black school. Going back in her interview, R8 reminisced about her teachers at the segregated Black school:

> They had a passion for teaching and wanting to make a difference in the perception of education for everybody in our classroom. The ones that wanted to learn as well as the ones that didn't. But it is really good and I guess to sum it all up I can genuinely say that they cared and you knew they cared. They really wanted you to do well. They really wanted you to do well so that you could become a teacher or someone in the community to help others, but it was real apparent the caring. [Lines 77–84]

This passion and caring attitude is what many of the students did not get from some of their teachers at the integrated schools. These teachers had been trained as educators of their subject matter, but more importantly, they were the role models that would shape the lives of their students. Unfortunately, there were those that did not want to be a role model to all students, and in fact, did what they could not to interact with the African American students. This was seen in another response by R8:

> It was not evident that my teachers cared about everybody in that classroom. African American students like me that were in predominantly Black schools they gave up a teacher that genuinely cared about them. I think that is where the motivation and the desire and

> the passion for learning has been lost with a lot of our African Americans because it is not there. [Lines 892–896]

It should be noted that there was one incident reported that showed that at least one of the African American teachers had her own doubts about one particular student integrating the schools. Respondent 2, as mentioned earlier, was one of the first students to integrate the school system under Freedom of Choice. He remembers a conversation with one of his African American teachers concerning him integrating the schools that fall. R2 recalled:

> I think the biggest problem that I remember were the teachers at Hafley, the adult teachers. I remember one lady [teacher] telling me that I should not be going over there because I was not clean enough to deal with them White folks. The folks are too clean. [Lines 271–274]

This quote showed the bias and thoughts that the African American teacher had concerning this particular student. What other preconceived ideas did she have about the segregated White schools that she was sharing with her students at the segregated Black schools? Although this teacher exhibited bias, it did not stop this particular student from integrating the school system, but her negativity could have swayed the thoughts of others. Respondent 5 remembered having African American teachers at the integrated high school, and it was not a pleasant memory for her. She shared:

> I had a couple of African American teachers at Rose High who treated me worse than some of the other teachers did and they had come from Hafley. I know that they were probably angry. They had their own things going on I am sure. But why take it out on me. I always felt there was some carryover from the way the students were treating me through this one particular teacher also. [Lines 324–328]

What changed in these teachers from their time at Bass Elementary or Hafley High (pseudonyms) where the students so fondly remember their other teachers being caring and compassionate? As R5 stated, maybe these teachers were angry that they were transferred to Rose High. For the students, they chose to be there, but for this particular teacher, it would appear that they had no choice.

Overall, teachers have a lasting impact on the students that they teach, and during this pivotal time in the history of this school system, you have teachers that seemed to not evoke the characteristics that you would want to see in a role model. If others heard or saw these examples occurring, then they would not be likely to want to be a part of the school during integration.

Student Racism/Bias

Integrating the schools would bring both African Americans and Caucasians together in a school setting, but not all students were open to those of a different race. It would be these negative experiences or thoughts that would cause some not to want to choose to integrate the schools.

From the African American perspective, Respondent 3 felt that there was prejudice in the school, which made his time there difficult. R3 went on to say:

> The Whites perceived us as local nonworking people, so we pride ourselves on Hafley being a good school… [Line 283]

R3 continued with:

> We were walking down the hallway and you hear guys calling you names and cursing and all that kind of stuff. [Line 67] They called you niggers and that kind of stuff and it mostly came from the guys. [Line 236]

Sharing these negative experiences with other students that were not at the integrated school could cause other African Americans not to want to leave their segregated Black school to be put in this situation at the integrated school. It is important to note that although R3 had these negative experiences, his views of the opposite race could have been seen as a hindrance for Whites to want to attend the segregated Black school. R3 shared that his viewpoint was that:

> They were crap [Whites]. They were racists and didn't want to have anything to do with us. We were watching TV and seeing all the marches on TV. You watched all of the historical stuff that was going on during that time frame in the Birmingham area and all of those places. I was like I don't need this and until there was a decision made to go over there, I was like okay we are going over here, but I still understand and knew that White people did not like Black people. So you had to prove yourself and prove what you are capable of doing and then let the ball fall where it may. [Lines 402–409]

Respondent 2 was one of the first students to integrate the high school, and he remembered that more incidences that are negative began to occur as more African American students began to attend the integrated high school. R2 shared:

> My first year by myself I never heard the word 'nigger' and I never heard anything derogatory, but then the other Black kids came. Well once that happened then you started hearing things like 'nigger' and you start having folks writing things on the wall and saying things. We had fights and stuff like that. [Lines 325–329]

This racist view was also seen by Respondent 9. When discussing one of her White classmates, she recalled:

> She was so racist and you can imagine a person being that young and that little and so racist. [Lines 335–336]

For R9, racism was something that she felt was taught at home. She stated:

> …..you know one thing about most Black families don't teach racism. We don't. We don't think about it, you know. [Lines 205–206].

She continued with:

> You don't know it unless you are taught about racism and those kids were taught it. It was during a very turbulent time in our country. Little kids don't know anything about what color you are. [Lines 207–210]

Because of these experiences, many African Americans wanted to stay in their own community where they knew people, for the most part, felt as they did. This was evidenced in the following statement by R9:

> You know how people they always think that they are important, White people were not important to me. They existed Jason. My world was with all the little girls and boys that I played with and my cousins. At Thanksgiving, we would always go to Montgomery to Alabama State to their football games against Tuskegee. So we had our life. [Lines 400–404]

Apprehension and Resistance from African Americans to Integrate

In the first year of integration through Freedom of Choice, there were only three African Americans that chose to attend the all-White high school in 1965. This was nine years after the Brown decision from the Supreme Court and two years after the integration of schools in Tuskegee and Mobile. Some would have thought that more students would have wanted to take advantage of the opportunity to attend the all-White high school.

After talking with the participants, they all shared similar stories in fear of the unknown and the fear of losing the culture and traditions from the Black high school. Some of the stories revolved around the school system not being ready for integration those first two years. Respondent 3 stated:

> I just do not think that they were ready for it. We probably were not ready for it, but we did it anyway. [Line 497]

R3 went on to say:

> Now that was some real prejudice stuff going on, but I guess it was because there were not that many students trying to go to Rose. Hafley High School students wanted to stay at Hafley, and they said you can go to Rose High School if y'all want too, but we are not trying to go over there, so it was not a massive move. [Lines 560–564]

These two statements showed how the African American community was not ready to leave their segregated Black school for the segregated White high school. The notion that prejudices were already present in the community could have been another reason why more African Americans chose not to integrate the schools.

Respondent 2 remembered the various activities that would occur during the school day or just how students could easily get involved while they were at the segregated high school. R2 explained:

> We used to have basketball games in the middle of the day and our cheerleaders used to dance and sing, but then when there was integration you came into where our White brothers and sisters, their cheerleaders were different, so they had to go. [Lines 171–174]

R2 went on to say:

> Some of the changes affected us as a Black race. I had one interview one time and I told this guy from this standpoint that I am a minister, a pastor and I think that is why you did not see a mad rush to integrate the church like it was the school. Because we lost so much of our culture with integration because if you come over you are going to do it our way, but your way is gone. [Lines 167–171]

R2 ended with:

> So we lost a lot of our identity and our culture through integration. In Hafley, if you wanted to be in the band, then your parents would buy you an instrument and then you could be in the band, but when it was integrated, then if you got in the band it was based on a performance test to be able to get in. So a lot of those things really affected our culture and our race that I saw happened with integration. [Lines 176–181]

Seeing these changes occur over one or two school years could have kept others from wanting to attend the all-White high school because things as they knew them were not that same or done in the same manner. Respondent 5 remembered losing the spirit that was at Hafley as compared to Rose. R5 said:

> We have to adopt this way of doing it as opposed to Hafley. The spirit was definitely was there [at Hafley]. I enjoyed the spirit that was there. The spirit was different [at Rose]. Here [Rose] there was a method to it. I am not saying one is better than the other, and I am just saying it was different and kids were expected to conform. So, therefore, we ended up with not as many [African American] cheerleaders and when I was in the band, there were two African Americans in the band and that was me and a guy who played drums. That was it my whole four years in high school. [Lines 287–293]

Respondent 9 discussed some an important events at the segregated Black schools. R9 shared:

> May Day at the Black segregated school. Because you put so much effort and there was so much … because people had to actually make uniforms and outfits and that was mommy. Every year you knew that the 5th grade was going to do the Scottish dance and you had to have your little plaid skirt and the little sash and the little hat. My cousin made a lot of them. The 4th grade was the Indian dance and it was a real big deal. We lost a lot of things that were important to us. We had to learn how to acclimatize. They didn't take on any of our stuff, we took on all of theirs and we had to leave our things behind. [Lines 111–119]

This conformity could be seen as a loss of the African American traditions and culture from the segregated Black school that African Americans did not want to lose at this point in their lives. This could be summed up with the reply from Respondent 9:

> … we gave up everything. They did not embrace any of our culture and it is not just in Rose, it was everywhere else. They embraced our athletes as they always do. [Lines 659–660]

The notion that by attending the White schools would mean that you would lose your identity was an important factor that affected why more African Americans did not want to leave their schools. During this time of integration, it was Freedom of Choice, and it was that choice that many African Americans made in not wanting to leave their segregated high school to integrate the White high school.

Respondent 4 was on the opposite side of the spectrum in that he was a White student already at the segregated White high school. When asked how he would have felt if he were the one to attend the segregated Black high school, R4 stated:

> How would I have fit in at Hafley if I had been to Rose High School up until the 11th grade and then they told me that I was going to graduate at Hafley? So that was probably much tougher on them than it was on anybody else. [Lines 353–356]

R4 recognized the sacrifices that the African American students made to leave what they had known for so many years to attend the White high school. The fact that this was a hard decision to make would make likely explain why so few African Americans chose to integrate the school system. Respondent 6 had a similar viewpoint. R6 shared:

> It wasn't until long afterward, looking back on it, to how much that you think golly that had to be tough. That had to be hard and not knowing uncertainties [of integration]. [Lines 387–388]

Discussion

The study sought to examine the experience of being involved in a Freedom of Choice initiative from the perspective of the students involved over six years. A historical case study approach was utilized for this research. Evidence was collected from a variety of sources, including semi-structured interviews with nine participants, a review of primary source documents, and a review of related literature.

Freedom of Choice was an initiative used by many school systems across the country to allows students choice in the school they wanted to attend. They could stay at the school where they had been assigned based on race or they could choose to attend the other school in the district. In this initiative, it would be the African American students that would choose to attend the all-White schools in the district as very few, if any, Whites chose to attend the all-Black schools.

Research Question: What perceived factors hindered the implementation of the *Freedom of Choice* initiative?

From the findings, the significant factors that hindered students from participating in the Freedom of Choice centered on racism from students and teachers within the schools. Kendall (2013) defined racism as "any attitude, action, or institutional structure which subordinates a person or group because of his or their color" (p. 21). This was seen at the school level and was representative of what was going on throughout the country. The African American students were subjected to racism from Caucasian students and the Caucasian teachers at the high school. The negative experiences experienced by the five African American students interviewed for the study were indicative of the experiences of other African Americans around the country. Such experiences included images of the nine African American students that were trying to integrate Little Rock Central High School, where there were crowds of community members yelling racial slurs and posting signs against the African American students that were simply wanting the same opportunities that had been afforded to the Caucasian students. There were also images from the Civil Rights movement that were being shown on the news reports, in local newspapers, and national newspapers. These sometimes violent images would be what many students would see, and would cause many not to want to participate in integrating the schools.

The notion that one is being treated negatively just because of the color of their skin is what the African American students had to endure during this time of integration. Given the opportunity to stay at a segregated school would prevent this from happening, and therefore, would help to explain why more African Americans did not want to integrate the schools. The culture of the South had been developed around the ideas of Jim Crow, and it would be these segregated rules that were so embedded in so many Caucasians that they would still hold onto wanting separate facilities for African Americans and Caucasians. It would be this continued culture that would prevent many across the South from wanting to integrate the schools.

Walking into classrooms where you were not wanted by both the students and the teachers would contribute to why so few African Americans would want to participate in the Freedom of Choice initiative. From the evidence, the African American students each described incidents with White teachers and White students in which they were treated unfairly simply because of the color of their skin. In one incident, even a White student recognized the prejudices that a teacher had against the African American students. It would be these types of occurrences that would give others concern and not want to be a part of the integration efforts.

Another factor that was discovered from the evidence was the fact that African Americans did not want to lose their culture and identity from their Black high school experiences to become a part of the White high school. Many noted that as the African Americans transferred to the White school, none of their traditions were integrated into the schools. Although they were integrating as students, none of the culture from the Black schools was brought over to the White schools. The same traditions and norms that were in place before integration would remain in place for years to come. African American students and parents did not want to lose their identity and sense of culture by having to assimilate to the culture and norms of the White school. African American students did not feel like they were a part of the White school in the beginning, and most found it hard to find their place in the integrated school. The numbers were not on the side of the African Americans because there were so few of them, so at any time there was a popularity vote, it would be impossible for an African American to win.

Schools are a place for students to grow and develop into the leaders of tomorrow. Unfortunately, during the time of integration, not all educators wanted to work with all students. Although the school system leaders wanted to have integration to take place, it would be the racist

acts and the loss of the African American culture that would hinder the number of African Americans from wanting to leave their home to move to integrate the White schools.

Concluding Thoughts

The voices from the nine participants give just a glimpse of the untold stories many other students have during this critical time in the history of education in Alabama and the United States. It is the hope of the researcher that their voices represent the countless others that were not allowed to share their experiences as our country moved toward racial equality. This study only touches the surface of what was occurring throughout the South. Still, the intention is that the lived experiences of these nine participants will open the door for more dialogue among the races and capture their lived experiences as a result of this endeavor. So much has changed in our country, but with the change, it is also said that some things remain the same. It is important that we do not repeat the mistakes of the past. Our schools are instrumental in producing the next generation of leaders, and it is important that these future leaders understand the history from which they come. The stories from this integration effort of these nine participants showed pride, perseverance, and a determination to succeed in spite of the obstacles that may have been before them.

References

Armor, D. J. (1995). *Forced justice: School desegregation and the law.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Corbin, J.M. & Struass, A. (1990). Grounded theory research: Procedures, canons, and evaluative criteria. *Qualitative Sociology, 13 (1), p. 3-21.*

Creswell, J. W. (2005). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research.* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill.

Duke, B. A. (2009). *The strange career of Birdie Mae Davis: A history of a school desegregation lawsuit in Mobile, Alabama, 1963–1997.* Auburn, Alabama: Auburn University.

Irons, P. (2002). *Jim Crow's children: The broken promise of the Brown decision.* New York: Penguin Books.

Kendall, F. E. (2013). *Understanding white privilege: Creating pathways to authentic relationships across race.* New York: Routledge.

Klarman, M. J. (2007). *Brown v. Board of Education and the Civil Rights Movement.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Kluger, R. (2004). *Simple justice: The history of Brown v. Board of Education and black America's struggle for equality.* New York: Vintage Books.

Norrell, R. J. (1998). *Reaping the whirlwind: The civil rights movement in Tuskegee.* Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Raffel, J. A. (1998). *Historical dictionary of school segregation and desegregation: The American experience.* Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Rossell, C. H., Armor, D. J., & Walberg, H. J. (2002). *School desegregation in the 21st century.* Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.

Russo, C. J., Harris, J. J., & Sandidge, R. F. (1994). Brown v. Board of Education at 40: A legal history of educational opportunities in American public education. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 297–309.

Schwandt, T. (2007). The Sage dictionary of qualitative inquiry (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Uchitelle, S. (1993). *School Choice: Issues and Answers. Fastback 348*. Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, PO Box 789, Bloomington, IN 47402-0789.

Weeks, S. B. (1971). History of public school education in Alabama, Westport, CT: Negro Universities Press

Wise, T. (2011). *White like me: Reflections on race from a privileged son.* Berkeley, CA: Soft Skull Press.

Yin, R. (2014). *Case Study research: Design and methods.* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Roadwork Ahead: Fostering Racial Literacy in Educator Preparation Programs

Amy J. Samuels and Gregory L. Samuels
University of Montevallo

Abstract

Equity and advocacy are essential in deconstructing and challenging racism, but how do educators apply these concepts in preparation programs to promote sustainable change? This paper explores a qualitative study on educators' perceptions of racism in P-12 schools to examine how educator preparation can navigate complex terrain to better prepare candidates to employ equitable, and socially just practices informed by critical race theory and foster racial literacy. The researchers' findings support the works of others in the field who assert that educator preparation programs must explicitly address race-related issues to prepare both instructional and teacher leaders to confront critical concerns that impact students and communities.

Keywords: critical race theory, educator preparation, racism, racial literacy, social justice

Professional standards support educators in developing the individual and collective capacity to meet professional performance expectations by highlighting knowledge, skills, behaviors, attitudes, and dispositions for educator effectiveness. The standards guide policies and programs and establish outcomes for professional learning in both educator preparation programs and professional development.

According to the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (2015), the *Professional Standards for Educational Leaders* (PSELs) highlight foundational principles of leadership that provide a framework for instructional leaders to accelerate student achievement and promote increased equity in relation to outcomes. Ten interrelated standards present a holistic view of leadership that directly connect to student learning. Specifically, standard one, which relates to vision, mission, and core values, states, "Effective educational leaders develop, advocate, and enact a shared mission, vision, and core values of high-quality education and academic success and well-being of each student" (p. 9). Connecting more explicitly to the idea of *each student*, element three of standard one states that instructional leaders are expected to "articulate, advocate, and cultivate core values that define the school's culture and stress the imperative of child-centered education; high expectations and student support; equity, inclusiveness, and social justice; openness, caring, and trust; and continuous improvement" (p. 9).

As said by the Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium (2011), the *Teacher Leader Model Standards* highlight foundational principles of leadership that provide a framework for teacher leaders to work collectively with administrative leadership roles to support effective teaching and promote student learning. The standards emphasize a broad range of knowledge, skills, and competencies characterized as domains that define critical dimensions of teacher leadership. The standards consisted of seven domains and included in each domain are functions that explicitly outline actions and expectations that include how teacher leaders serve to promote increased equity and foster collaborative communities. Domain one, which relates to "Fostering a Collaborative Culture to Support Educator Development and Student Learning" (Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium, 2011, p. 14) emphasizes the importance of developing a collaborative culture of collective responsibility while promoting an environment of collegiality, trust, and respect that focuses on continuous improvement. Connecting more specifically to the idea of equity and inclusiveness, function 1d states that the teacher leader, "strives to create an inclusive culture where diverse perspectives are welcomed in addressing challenges" (p. 14) and function 1e emphasizes that the teacher leader "uses knowledge and understanding of different backgrounds, ethnicities, cultures, and languages to promote effective interactions among colleagues" (p. 14).

Although professional standards underscore the critical need for equity, inclusion, and social justice in leadership dispositions and actions, data suggests there is a lack of continuity between theory and practice. While educators have been aware of race-based educational inequalities for decades (Coleman, Kelly, & Moore, 1975), such inequities and injustices continue to persist in schools and manifest themselves in a variety of ways. Educational disparities can be seen in unequal access and opportunities (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Gay, 2010; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017), lowered expectations for students from historically marginalized backgrounds (Grissom & Ressing, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2014), implicit bias (Dynarski, 2016; Gilliam, Maupin, Reyes, Accavitti & Shic, 2016), the resegregation of schools (Hannah-Jones, 2017; Orfield, 2014), and the school-to-prison nexus (Anderson & Ritter, 2018; Blad & Harwin, 2017; Smith & Harper, 2016; U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014). To advance the profession and better support development, leadership preparation programs must consider

how to interrupt traditional perspectives and narratives that avoid, minimize, and silence implications of racist ideology in schools. If preparation programs are genuinely committed to equity, inclusion, and social justice, the programs must prepare educators to reflect and act on difficult questions such as (a) How can teachers and instructional leaders effectively challenge unequal and inequitable outcomes for students of Color? (b) How can teacher and instructional leaders counter implicit biases, a culture of low expectations, and underlying racism that are built into the systems and institutions? and (c) How can teachers and leaders promote equitable excellence for *all* students? The time has come for a strategic response to challenge oppression, disempowerment, and unjust policies and practices. Educators must consider how to disrupt the narratives of silence and avoidance (DiAngelo, 2018; Diem & Carpenter, 2013; Oluo, 2018; Pitts, 2016) and advocate sustainable change for equity, inclusion, and social justice.

The researchers situate this discussion by presenting a study designed to (a) examine educators' perceptions related to race, racism, and racial (in)justice and (b) explore how educator preparation can better prepare teacher and instructional leadership candidates to engage in practices informed by critical race theory and foster racial literacy.

Critical Race Theory

While some purport America is a post-racial society (Bonilla-Silva, 2015), with the increase of hate-based speech and actions (Potok, 2017) and the perpetuation of alarming achievement gaps (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Gay, 2010; Hannah-Jones, 2017), data suggests that racism is deeply embedded in American society and racist ideology plagues educational institutions. Although schools should promote a caring, safe, and welcoming climate and culture, given the pernicious and irrefutable implications of racial disparities, this is not the reality for many students of Color. Further troubling the existence of race-based disparities, research suggests that both teacher and instructional leaders are ill-prepared to discuss or address such issues which, often results in a culture of silence and avoidance (Boske, 2010; Diem & Carpenter, 2013; Gay, 2010; Samuels, 2017). Many educators report educational training did not prepare them to meet the needs of racially diverse learners (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Gay, 2010), give attention to issues of race (Boske, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2014), or challenge the implications of racism in educational contexts. Interpreting silence as informative, rather than a lack of information, Diem and Carpenter (2013) contend educators must consider how such silences "shape the ways in which students and professors interpret, address, and avoid race-related issues" (p.57). Many instructional leadership programs continue to marginalize issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion to a single course (Hawley & James, 2010), which often results in a culture of silence and fear where preparation programs are less likely to graduate leadership candidates who have the skills to address complex, yet essential, discussions connected to issues of race (Rusch & Horsford, 2009).

Given the existing implications of racism in P-12 schools, as well as the corresponding silence related to race in educator preparation, the researchers believe it is advantageous to employ critical race theory (CRT) as an analytical tool to frame the study, as well as consider how to better prepare educator candidates to apply equitably and socially just practices. CRT establishes a foundation that racism is endemic in the United States' society and influences social, political, and economic aspects. The critical theory addresses the dynamics of power and oppression and explores strategies to advance society in a more equitable direction. It examines and evaluates power relations and highlights questions such as (1) who controls power, (2) what constitutes power, and (3) how is power utilized to maintain current social standings (Lynn & Parker, 2006).

CRT is a critical theory that establishes racism as the precursor to disempowerment and oppression, identifies racist ideology as the critical component in existing social inequities, and offers a framework for studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power (Bell, 2002; Delgado & Stefancic, 2013). "Critical race theory begins with the notion that racism is normal in American society" (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 7). Although CRT is interdisciplinary, it can be used to explore various educational components and provide a foundation to challenge the dominant discourse on race and racial oppression (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Derrick Bell, one of the leading scholars in CRT, contends that "racism lies at the center, not the periphery; in the permanent, not in the fleeting; in the real lives of black and white people, not in the sentimental caverns of the mind" (2002, p. 37).

Racial Literacy

Teachers and instructional leaders must be aware of the explicit and pervasive consequences of the underlying racism that persists in educational contexts, as well as understand how to challenge and dismantle it. Consequently, educators need to be racially literate. Although the term racial literacy was first used by sociologist France Winddance Twine (2004) to describe strategies White mothers with biracial children in the United Kingdom used to heighten racial awareness and promote positive racial identity development in their children, the term has come to be applied in a broader sense. It is currently used to describe an understanding of the origins of race and the role it plays in schools and society (Horsford, 2014). As Stevenson (2014) highlights, racial literacy is the ability to read, recast, and resolve racially stressful situations. To be racially literate means that one can recognize a racial moment; understand the contextual, fluid, responsive, and socially constructed nature that race plays in those moments; and apply a sophisticated understanding to decode racial encounters to promote improved racial understanding and positive race relations (Horsford, 2014; Stevenson, 2014).

Research Design

This IRB-approved qualitative study sought to explore perceptions of P-12 in-service educators at public schools in the Deep South related to race, racism, and racial (in)justice. Participation was voluntary, and participants were recruited based on the interest in racial equity and social justice they exhibit in academic or professional work. Since teaching has implications for instructional leadership and instructional leadership has implications for education, the researchers decided to explore the perceptions of both teacher and instructional leaders. As such, the researchers contacted 30 people who serve as teacher leaders, assistant principals, and principals. Nearly two-thirds of those who were contacted agreed to participate in the research study. Data were collected from 20 participants over six weeks. First, participants completed a ten-question online survey, where the average completion time was 55 minutes. Then, participants engaged in a brief 15-minute follow-up phone interview with the researchers where they were asked questions about how race and racism impact teaching, learning, access, and opportunities, as well as their perceptions of how to advocate for racial equity and racially just schools.

While most participants were teacher leaders (academic coaches, department chairs, and team leaders) in elementary and secondary settings (approximately 70%), 30 percent of participants identified as building-level administrators (assistant principals or principals). The professional experience of participants spanned a broad continuum and represented educators from

three years to those with over fifteen years of experience. In addition, participants represented a mix of female and male (60% female, 40% male), as well as Black and White (55% Black, 45% White) educators.

Once the researchers collected the data, a system of open coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2007), in which data was deconstructed, examined, compared, conceptualized, and categorized, was used for both the ten open-ended survey questions, as well as the transcripts from the interviews. Several categories of codes emerged as significant themes related to (a) the impact of race and racism on teaching and learning, (b) racial climate in schools, and (c) advocacy for racially just schools.

Findings

Findings from the study revealed commonalities regarding educators' perceptions of how race and racism impact access, opportunities, outcomes, and the overall school climate. While the findings were neither novel nor unique, the study reinforces what research suggests about the substantial implications of race in schools and the need to promote increased racial awareness and racial literacy among teacher and instructional leadership candidates to shift racist ideology and address underlying racism built into systems and institutions.

Participants suggest that racial disparities are revealed in a variety of ways in educational contexts that include but are not limited to (a) deficit thinking, (b) inequitable access and opportunities, (c) implicit bias, (d) disproportionality, (e) pervasive academic achievement gaps, and (f) a culture of low expectations where students of Color are not expected to perform as well as their White counterparts. The participants in the study were in strong agreement that race is a prevalent factor that impacts the educational context and climate of schools but is frequently not acknowledged. As one participant stated, "We like to act like we don't have racial problems here. We say we don't see race among our students. We say we don't see color; students are *just* students." However, according to participants, given existing academic achievement gaps, where students of Color are not performing as well on standardized tests as their White counterparts, and vast disparities in behavioral consequences, where students of Color receive disproportionate numbers of referrals and suspensions, race-related issues are evident. As one participant stated, "Educational systems operate within a country and society that is continuing to grapple with a past and present history of racism. Economic contexts for education result from racist policies and funding formulas. Racism is part of our history, so it is always present in education. It is revealed in hidden biases, unconscious racism, perceived stereotypes, and it plays out in our expectations for students."

Similarly, another participant added, "I think that racism does exist in my district--maybe not blatant racism, but more of unconscious, implicit racism and hidden biases. The number of discipline referrals and special education referrals of Black and Brown students is disproportionate to that of White students. The low number of minority students in gifted or advanced classes is also largely disproportionate to that of White students." The participant continued, "I notice that the expectations of some teachers and administrators are not the same from one group to the next. It seems to be the exception, not the expectation, for minority students to perform well academically and stay out of trouble. Also, there seems to be a level of 'uncomfortableness' or 'we don't want to deal with this' when topics about race arise. It's like the elephant in the room. However, our school data and district data show these are the facts, so they can't be ignored."

There was also a consensus among participants that while most people seem to be respectful to one another, there is a lack of awareness and engagement regarding race-related matters. One participant stated, "Almost all teachers are White, and most teachers are out of touch and show little interest in relating to students' racial backgrounds. They prioritize White European history and literature and assume the goal of our students is assimilation and compliance." Another participant emphasized that although faculty and staff "employ a veneer of civility," the racial climate is still "incredibly divisive." The participant explained, "Although racial things are open for conversation between Black teachers and Black students, things are guardedly cautious, if not completely unspoken, between White teachers and Black students."

Notwithstanding the general lack of engagement with race-related issues, several participants emphasized witnessing an increased commitment for heightened awareness and advocacy. Although most participants articulated an absence of diversity-related topics in preparation and professional development, several participants emphasized progress in professional contexts. For example, one teacher stated, "Our principal has provided in-service to our faculty on race in education and leads us to make school changes that will be more inclusive to students and faculty of Color. We (faculty) discuss how we can be aware of these issues and make sure we are diverse in choosing students to participate in school competitions and events or consider who is being placed in gifted and talented programs or who we are hiring for positions in our school." The teacher continued, "We also talk about how we can best address students who have said racially inappropriate comments and use those opportunities as teachable moments for growth." On a related note, a principal reported, "I try to support my teachers to be more equitable in their practices and communicate the importance of getting to know students and building relationships to help break down some of the barriers that exist, especially those race-related barriers. As a school, we constantly engage in discussions about how race is a factor, and that it can create unfair barriers for some students, and we brainstorm ways to help overcome the issues that arise within the classroom and the school."

Participants emphasized a need for increased discussion and difficult conversations to explore racial inequities and examine strategies to promote increased equity and justice. To encourage issues related to race to enter the dominant discourse, participants contend that educators must challenge the silence related to racism in schools. As one principal stated, "I encourage conversations about race, and we talk about misconceptions regarding race. In our school, we promote appropriate language and do not permit insensitive language or terms to go unchallenged." The participant continued, "We also work to challenge biases and preconceived notions about race and class. Many people like to say they don't have them, but they do. We all do. So, it is really important to talk about them. We also present whole school activities and presentations that address race and diversity and provide perspectives on how we can meet the needs of all of our students and do right by them."

Discussion

As with most research, the design of this study is subject to limitations. First, the researchers acknowledge that findings may have been limited given that participants were recruited based on their interest in racial equity and social justice. As such, they were likely more willing to highlight and discuss racism and related injustices. Second, it is important to emphasize that the experiences of the researchers, who self-identify as advocates for equity and social justice, influenced the interpretation of the data. However, given that the findings reinforce what research suggests about

the troubling existence of race-based disparities in educational contexts, the researchers assert that there is a strong need to promote increased racial awareness and racial literacy among teacher and instructional leadership candidates.

Critical Self-Reflection

To understand the role racist ideology plays in schools and society, teachers and instructional leaders must understand the impact underlying racism has in their own lives and how it has influenced their beliefs, values, assumptions, dispositions, and actions. Therefore, racial literacy is tightly entwined with critical self-reflection and increased self-awareness. Educator candidates must be given opportunities to think reflectively about how race has influenced and shaped their place and position in society, as well as their understanding of others. "The personal journey begins within" and "culturally proficient leadership is distinguished from other leadership approaches in that it is anchored in the belief that leaders must clearly understand their assumptions, beliefs, and values about people and cultures different from themselves to be effective in cross-cultural settings" (Terrell, Terrell, Lindsey, & Lindsey, 2018, p. 9).

To cultivate equitable and socially just practices, educators must engage in authentic self-assessment, including thoughtful deconstruction of their own perceptions, beliefs, biases, actions, and inactions. To truly understand how experiences inform thoughts, behaviors, and positionings, educators must employ a reflective practice of self-examination to unpack personal narratives, as those narratives are a powerful influence in developing the lenses used to see the world. Exploring how one's identity impacts one's thoughts and behaviors is a complex process that can result in cognitive dissonance and discomfort. As such, activities that promote self-reflection and self-assessment must be strategically employed in educator preparation programs so candidates can develop an understanding that worldviews are shaped and influenced by life experiences. Subsequently, candidates can understand worldviews (including their own) are limited and include blind spots. Educator candidates should be given opportunities to reflect on questions such as (a) Who am I as a racial being? (b) How have my experiences shaped who I am? (c) What are my assumptions, values, and beliefs about those who are similar and different from me? (d) How do my (in)actions and dispositions reinforce and challenge diverse perspectives? (e) In what ways do my (in)actions and dispositions promote or interrupt racist ideology and underlying racial oppression? Candidates cannot unlearn misconceptions if they do not first explore how they came to know them. Therefore, knowledge of self is a critical component in increasing critical consciousness, which Freire (2000) defines as expanding one's worldview to truly recognize and comprehend the role of power in creating and sustaining structural inequities, as well as developing a sense of efficacy about how to expose and actively challenge those inequities in given spaces and places.

Applying Critical Race Theory and Fostering Racial Literacy

Since CRT offers a framework for studying and transforming the relationships among race, racism, and power, educator preparation programs should promote learning to prepare teachers and instructional leadership candidates to reflect on and engage in practices informed by CRT. As participants in the study highlighted, there are deep-rooted implications of racist ideology in schools that result in harsh disparities that continue to marginalize many students of Color. Rather than grappling with the difficult questions, a climate of avoidance and silence often prevails, and discussions about race are treated as the elephant in the room. To promote heightened awareness,

engage complex and disruptive discourse, and encourage dispositions and actions that truly promote diversity, equity, and justice, teacher and leadership candidates must be given opportunities to develop their racial literacy. Educators must understand that racism is endemic in American society and, consequently, is built into educational institutions (Ladson-Billings, 1998). If teachers and instructional leaders are to be prepared appropriately to counter racism, they must come to know the origins of racism and how racist ideology operates in schools and society (Horsford, 2014).

As such, leadership preparation programs must revisit content and pedagogy to better address race-based issues related to privilege and oppression and bring race and racism to the forefront. To more effectively prepare educator candidates to engage in culturally responsive and socially just practices, this process should not be limited to one "diversity" course but should be a framework for thinking that is encouraged throughout preparation programs. Rather than allowing candidates to inaccurately proclaim the United States is post-racial or permit students to minimize racist ideology by citing race-based discrimination as individual acts only, teacher and leadership candidates should be given opportunities to investigate the historical underpinnings of race-related oppression, examine how structural exclusion and inequality operate in schools and explore sociocultural and political contexts that perpetuate inequity and injustice at structural and institutional levels. Educator candidates must understand the complex dimensions of racism and develop a deeper and more nuanced comprehension of the role that power and privilege play in sustaining racist ideology and oppression.

To shift the tide and truly advocate for change that fosters school environments conducive to learning and that promote equitable access and achievement for all students, as one participant proclaimed, "We cannot be silent. We must commit ourselves to bring racial disparities to light." We must first ensure educator candidates know that such disparities exist because equitable and socially just practices cannot be employed without a solid and informed understanding of existing inequities and injustices. Educators must develop foundational knowledge about achievement gaps, disproportionality, and disparities in access, expectations, and outcomes. In addition, teachers and instructional leaders must understand the value in advocating for a curriculum that deeply reflects all students, as well as employing and retaining diverse and representative faculty and staff. To increase racial literacy, along with ensuring candidates have a working knowledge of how racist ideology and oppression are manifest in schools, educator preparation programs need to ensure teacher and leadership candidates have the necessary skills, commitment, and courage to speak. As one participant stated, "I believe the first thing educators can do to combat racially unjust schools is to be brave enough to speak and act on it when it is witnessed."

Conclusion

Leadership preparation programs must support continuity between theory, preparation, and practice. Although the PSELs and Teacher Leader Model Standards emphasize principles that promote increased academic success, equity, inclusiveness, high-quality education, and social justice to promote the success and well-being for all students (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015; Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium, 2011), data from the study suggests a disconnect between theory, preparation, and practice. While there are a variety of reasons for the inconsistent progression, given the existing inequities, the researchers contend the data is disconcerting, argue there is strong reason to be troubled, and assert that educators cannot be cavalier about the issue. If preparation programs are genuinely committed to equity,

inclusion, and social justice, the programs must place the countering of racist ideology at the forefront of the work and ensure teacher and leadership candidates are equipped effectively with the dispositions and actions to challenge the implications of racism in educational contexts. While this is an intricate and complicated process that will not come without opposition, resistance, and roadblocks, if educators are dedicated to progress, they must strengthen efforts to encourage critical self-reflection and disruptive discourse that interrogates race and racism. It is time to generate solidarity to foster racial literacy and critically informed practices in educator preparation that embrace equity and justice orientations and actions.

References

Anderson, K. P., & Ritter, G. W. (2018). Do school discipline policies treat students fairly? Evidence from Arkansas. *Educational Policy*. http://doi:10.1177/0895904818802085

Bell, D. (2002). *Learning the three "I's" of America's slavery heritage. Slavery and the law.* (P. Finkelman, Ed.). Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Blad, E., & Harwin, A. (2017, February 27). PBS. News hour. Education. Retrieved from https://www.pbs.org/newshour/education/analysis-reveals-racial-disparities-school-arrests

Bonilla-Silva, E. (2015). The structure of racism in color-blind, "post-racial" America. *American Behavioral Scientist, 59*(11), 1358-1376.

Boske, C.A. (2010). "I wonder if they had ever seen a black man before?" Grappling with issues of race and racism in our own backyard. *Journal of Research on Leadership Education, 5*(7), 248-275.

Coleman, J.S., Kelly, S.D., & Moore, J.A. (1975). *Trends in school segregation, 1968-1973*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.

Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2007). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2010). *The flat world and education: How America's commitment to equity will determine our future*. New York, NY: Teacher's College, Columbia University.

Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2017). *Critical Race Theory: An introduction*. (3rd ed). New York, NY: New York University Press.

Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2013). *Critical Race Theory: The cutting edge.* (3rd ed). Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

DiAngelo, R. (2018). *White fragility: Why it's so hard for White people to talk about racism.* Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Diem, S., & Carpenter, B. W. (2013). Examining race-related silences: Interrogating the education of tomorrow's educational leaders. *Journal of research on leadership education, 8*(1), 56-76.

Dynarski, S. (2016, April 8). Why talented Black and Hispanic students can go undiscovered. *New York Times.* Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/10/upshot/why-talented-black-and-hispanic-students-can-go-undiscovered.html

Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed.* 30th-anniversary ed. New York, NY: Continuum.

Gay, G. (2010). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice* (2nd ed.), New York, NY: Teachers College.

Gilliam, W., Maupin, A., Reyes, C., Accavitti, M., & Shic, F. (2016). Do early educators' implicit biases regarding sex and race relate to behavior expectations and recommendations of preschool expulsions and suspensions? [Research Study Brief]. *Yale University Child Study Center.* Retrieved from http://ziglercenter.yale.edu/publications/Preschool%20Implicit%20Bias%20Policy%20Brief_final_9_26_276766_5379_v1.pdf

Grissom, J. A., & Redding, C. (2016). Discretion and disproportionality: Explaining the underrepresentation of high-achieving students of color in gifted programs. *AERA Open, 2*(1), 1-25.

Hannah-Jones, N. (2017, September 6). *The resegregation of Jefferson County: What one Alabama town's attempt to secede from its school district tells us about the fragile*

progress of racial integration in America. The New York Times Magazine. Education Issue. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/06/

Hawley, W., & James, R. (2010). Diversity-responsive school leadership. *UCEA Review, 52*, 1-5.

Horsford, S.D. (2014) When race enters the room: Improving leadership and learning through racial literacy, *Theory into Practice, 53*(2), 123-130.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2014). Culturally relevant pedagogy 2.0: A.k.a. the remix. *Harvard Educational Review, 84*(1), 74-84.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1998). Just what is critical race theory and what's it doing in a nice field like education? *Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 11*(1), 7-24.

Lynn, M., & Parker, L. (2006). Critical race studies in education: Examining a decade of research on U.S. schools. *The Urban Review, 38*, 257-290.

National Policy Board for Educational Administration (2015). Professional Standards for Educational Leaders, 2015. Reston, VA.

Orfield, G. (2014). Tenth annual Brown lecture in education research: A new civil rights agenda for American education. *Educational Researcher, 43*(6), 273-292.

Oluo, I. (2018). *So you want to talk about race*. New York, NY: Seal Press.

Pitts, J. (2016). Don't say nothing: Silence speaks volumes. Our students are listening. *Teaching Tolerance*. Southern Poverty Law Center. Retrieved from http://www.tolerance.org/magazine/tt54-fall-2016/feature/dont-say-nothing

Potok, M. (2017, February 17). The year in hate and extremism, *Intelligence Report* [Southern Poverty Legal Center]. Retrieved from https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2017/year-hate-and-extremism

Rusch, E. A., & Horsford, S. D. (2009). Changing hearts and minds: The quest for open talk about race in educational leadership. *International Journal of Educational Management, 23*, 302-313.

Samuels, A. (2017). The dialogue of denial: Perpetuating racism through thoughtful inaction. *Understanding and Dismantling Privilege*, *7*(1), 67-82.

Sensoy, O., & DiAngelo, R. (2017). *Is everyone really equal? An introduction to key concepts in social justice education. (2nd edition)*. New York, NY: Teachers College.

Smith, E.J., & Harper, S.R. (2016). *Disproportionate impact of K-12 school suspensions and expulsion on Black students in southern states*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education.

Stevenson, H. (2014). *Promoting racial literacy in schools: Differences that make a difference.* New York, NY: Teachers College.

Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium. (2011). Teacher leader model standards. Carrboro, NC: Retrieved https://www.ets.org/s/education_topics/teaching_quality/pdf/teacher_leader_model_standards.pdf

Terrell, R., Terrell, E., Lindsey, R., & Lindsey, D. (2018). *Culturally proficient leadership: The personal journey begins within* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Twine, F. W. (2004). A White side of Black Britain: The concept of racial literacy. *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 27* (6), 878-907.

U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights. (2014). *Civil rights data collection: Data snapshot: School discipline.* Washington, D.C. Retrieved from https://ocrdata.ed.gov/downloads/crdc-school-discipline-snapshot.pdf

Two Communities, One School: Educational Leaders and Parents/Caregivers Talk Across the Divide in an Urban High School

Shannon N. McCarthy, Jenna M. LaChenaye , D. Keith Gurley, and Larrell L. Wilkinson
The University of Alabama at Birmingham

Abstract

Family involvement has emerged as an essential component of education with the expectation that school leaders strive to engage families in their children's learning effectively. Yet traditional models of "involvement" often fail families in minority, lower socio-economic status (SES) communities. This qualitative case study documents perceived barriers to involvement and identifies gaps in understanding between two groups of stakeholders – school leadership and personnel and parents and caregivers in a lower SES, minority, urban school district. Data collected in individual interviews and focus groups revealed systemic patterns that have created two closed and sometimes conflicting communities inhabiting the same physical space.

Keywords: Urban school, urban education, family involvement, parent involvement, parent engagement

The facilitation of family involvement and engagement has long been established as a best practice in schools that positively affects academic, social-emotional, and behavioral outcomes for students (Epstein, 1995; Jeynes, 2016; Ross, 2016). Educational leadership standards, promulgated by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), established the expectation that school leaders and other school personnel strive to engage families effectively (CCSSO, 1996). Nevertheless, for minority families with lower socio-economic status (SES) in urban schools, multiple barriers to such involvement persist, barriers such as lack of resources, limited parental abilities, and limited time available to enable involvement and engagement (Brown et al., 2020; Hornby & Blackwell, 2018; Jeynes, 2015 Murphy, 2010; Reynolds et al., 2015; Wassell et al., 2017).

The terms *parental involvement* and *parental engagement* have been used interchangeably in the related literature. Recently, several authors have delineated the difference between these two concepts (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014; Hill et al., 2004; O'Toole, 2019). Hill et al. (2004) characterized parental involvement as parents' interactions with the school to promote student academic success. Involvement, however, denotes school agency, as opposed to parent agency, meaning that parents participate in structures and processes created by school personnel. Parental engagement, however, is qualitatively different and is one wherein parents and caregivers take part in their children's education process through structures and processes that they helped to co-create. Engagement suggests strong parental ownership or agency. Goodall and Montgomery (2014) proposed a conceptual continuum with parent involvement on one end and parental engagement on the other.

For school personnel, a lack of training in family engagement strategies and tools, some evidence of insensitivity, and the prevalence of traditional practices of involvement can make it difficult to surmount these barriers and work effectively with families (Murphy, 2010). While research has documented the barriers as mentioned above, few studies have explored the barriers that exist at the high school level in minority, low SES urban schools with the goal of understanding first-hand any divisions or conflicts that may exist between families and schools in these communities. Without a closer, real world view of what is happening in these schools and surrounding homes, it may be difficult to close the achievement gap for at-risk students and the larger population as a whole.

Literature Review

> *"The way schools care about children is reflected in the way schools care about the children's families." (Epstein, 1995, p.81)*

Scholars have been increasingly investigating the family's role in the educational equation since the mid-1990s when Joyce L. Epstein published her seminal work describing six *types of parental involvement*: (1) basic parenting, (2) learning in the home, (3) communication with the school, (4) volunteering, (5) participating in school decision making, and (6) making connections to the community (Epstein, 1995). Epstein presented three overlapping spheres that influence a student's life: the school, the family, and the community. She advocated that schools make every effort to tie these three spheres together through careful and thorough communication and high-quality interaction. She wrote,

> With frequent interactions between schools, families, and communities, more students are more likely to receive common messages from various people about the importance of school, of working hard, of thinking creatively, of helping one another, and of staying in school. (p. 82)

Over the last two decades, research has established that students whose parents/caregivers are involved in their education do better in school. Thus, the *impact* of parental involvement and community engagement on student learning is undoubtedly powerful and lasting (Epstein, 1995: Jeynes 2015, 2016; Ross, 2016; Wilder, 2014).

During this same time frame, school leaders have formalized and repeatedly strengthened the importance of family involvement in standards to guide policy development, pre-service training programs, and practice at all levels. In the most recent iteration, the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL), Standard 8 (of 10) calls for "Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community" (National Policy Board for Educational Administration [NPBEA], 2015). Specifically, it states: "Effective educational leaders engage families and the community in meaningful, reciprocal, and mutually beneficial ways to promote each student's academic success and well-being" (NPBEA, 2015, p. 16). Accompanying this revised standard are now ten indicators describing specific behaviors that school leaders are expected to demonstrate in their efforts to engage the school community (i.e., families, care providers, partners, students, school personnel) in meaningful ways.

Yet, despite the proven effectiveness of parent/caregiver involvement and its endorsement by the educational leadership profession, researchers continue to document *limited participation* from parents. As Murphy observes in his expert review of the literature supporting the standards (2017), "This research [on parental involvement in schools] typically demonstrates that minority and low-income parents participate less frequently than middle- and upper-class white parents" (p. 227). Barriers identified that may hinder parental involvement with schools, particularly among low-income parents, include a lack of resources, limited parental abilities, the possession of lesser amounts of cultural capital, and limited time available to enable involvement (Brown et al., 2020; Hornby & Blackwell, 2018; Jeynes, 2015; Reynolds et al., 2015; Wassell et al., 2017). Families of ethnic minorities may experience particular barriers such as disparate academic outcomes, racism, and a perceived dearth of opportunities for school engagement (Reynolds, 2010; Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999). Parents who identify as ethnic minorities report attending less in-school events or activities, and volunteering for school committees or fundraising events (NCES, 2016). Researchers have found, however, that minority caregivers do engage in their students' academics, but that the parental involvement in these families may be more subtle and less traditional than in Caucasian families (Jeynes, 2015).

Researchers have also identified possible shortcomings in school personnel, such as a lack of understanding about the various types of parental involvement that they might promote (Auerbach, 2009; Chavis et al., 1997; Epstein, 1995; Reynolds et al., 2015; Wassell et al., 2017). Of cause for more concern, researchers have also identified the presence of negative and unwelcoming attitudes on the part of school personnel toward involving parents in the educational process (Auerbach, 2009; Chavis et al., 1997). Eccles & Harold (1996) stated that such attitudes might lead to hostility toward parents and to a school culture that does not welcome parents as an integral part of the education of their children.

To overcome these shortcomings, some researchers have suggested that school personnel engage in targeted training to help educators understand (a) how critical parental involvement is to the education of children, (b) the various ways that parents can become involved in the school, and (c) to increase awareness of how to promote parental engagement (Chavis et al., 1997; Reynolds et al., 2015; Wassell et al., 2017). Others point to the importance of school leaders actively *building trust* between the school and its families through increased communication

(Eccles & Harold, 1996), school meetings and events in a variety of spaces and times (Auerbach, 2009; Johnson & Asera, 1999; Lloyd, 1996), opportunities for parents to observe classes (Johnson & Asera, 1999), and a professional parent coordinator who develops and nurtures parent-school relations (Epstein, 1995).

More recently, Epstein and Sheldon (2016) urge school leaders and other personnel to refocus their thinking about parental involvement and engagement through a more updated lens of *school, family, and community partnership*, a lens that recognizes that children's learning is firmly embedded in a context that involves the school, family, and community in which they live. Still, how this refocusing can be accomplished, without a shared understanding of concepts like *parental involvement*, *parental engagement*, and *community partnerships*, remains an open question, as discussed in a comprehensive review of more recent literature by O'Toole and colleagues (2019). Other researchers highlight the myriad challenges of moving beyond traditional paradigms to more progressive ones (Brown et al., 2020; Dockett et al., 2012; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Robinson & Harris, 2014). What is not in question, however, is the conclusion that traditional models of "involvement" often fail families in the minority, lower socio-economic status (SES) communities, with negative academic consequences for the children. The purpose of this qualitative instrumental case study was to document perceived barriers to involvement and identify gaps in understanding between two relevant groups of stakeholders – school leadership and personnel and parents and caregivers in a lower SES, minority, urban school district.

Methods

The high school under study, a Title I institution situated in a smaller, urban school district in the southeast, serves an enrollment of fewer than 500 students. Of this student population, 95% self-identify as African American, and approximately 80% qualify for free and reduced lunch. Researchers employed a community-based participatory approach to elicit perspectives from all stakeholder groups within the school system, including parents/guardians, district and school administrators, teachers, and affiliated staff. A combination of individual interviews and focus groups were utilized to explore stakeholders' perspectives of current family engagement practices and perceived barriers to family-school-community collaboration. To facilitate confidentiality for school personnel participants and to best accommodate their schedules, individual interviews were completed with 11 administrators, administrative staff members, and faculty in their respective offices. Researchers also conducted a focus group with 12 parents and caregivers of students at the high school under study. Interview and focus group questions were similar across stakeholder groups and included questions addressing how participants saw caregivers and parents' current involvement in the school, their perspectives on how caregivers and families can best be involved in their child's education, their perspectives of barriers to effective family-school involvement at the high school, and their perspective on how this involvement could be improved. Resulting transcripts were organized by stakeholder groups and analyzed using thematic analysis. Themes were compared and contrasted between groups to explore potential areas of conflict in the system's parental-school relationships. Data were collected under approval of the Institutional Review Board. All participant identifiers were removed from transcripts, pseudonyms were assigned, and all content was stored on a secure server.

Results

Overarching thematic findings were identified through thematic analysis of the collected interview and focus group transcripts and comparisons and contrasts between themes occurring within the various participant groups. Four main themes emerged: 1) the presence of two isolated and separate systems, 2) incongruencies in beliefs regarding parent involvement in schools, 3) the impeding role of historical influences, and 4) the persistence of traditional models.

Theme 1: The Presence of Two Isolated and Separate Systems

The division between these overlapping systems emerged as a complicating factor in the pursuit of increased parental involvement and engagement within the school system and community. Both systems, one consisting of parents and families in the community and the other containing the school environment/community and school personnel, existed and functioned mainly in the absence of one another. The school and its staff seemed to exist both figuratively and physically separate from the community system in which the students and caregivers resided, with students tasked to transverse the boundaries of these incompatible systems. Factors contributing to this separation included a teaching and administrative faculty that commute to the school from outside communities, perceived differences and expectations, and a lack of agency of parents and caregivers within the school system. Regarding turnover, both caregivers and school personnel highlighted the weight of this barrier and the influence of economics in its persistence. As one parent stated, "If [teachers] get a better paying job, they're gone. A lot of them I know personally were good teachers, and they cared about the kids". These sentiments and observations were mirrored by school personnel:

> If you look at that makeup, and again, not to really down anybody, like the teachers and the people that tend to make the most money, of course, we don't really live here, but the people that, you know, don't make as much as a teacher, they're the ones that live here, and so that's also, you know, a difference between us.…

Both groups of participants described systems that are kept separate by relatively rigid boundaries, contributing to a breakdown in communication that does not allow each system to understand the other's challenges and ultimately widening the gap between them. Additionally, the potential for the school environment to be intimidating or unwelcoming to some families can act as a mechanism to keep the systems separate. Further complicating the interaction between the two systems is the lack of role definition for both families and school personnel. Families may not be sure of the role that they are meant to play in the school system, and school personnel may not be aware of the role that they are intended to inhabit among families. As one teacher discussed, "I think we could do a better job of letting parents know that they could come into the school and the classrooms. I don't think they know that they can". These complications often produced misunderstandings in perceptions and purpose, such as caregivers interpreting school policies and personnel as intimidating or inaccessible, stating that they "just don't feel comfortable" interjecting in their child's education. This experience was also perceived by personnel within the school. As one teacher responded:

> Some of the parents don't know how they will be perceived. You know, you're the teacher, so you seem like you might be more critical than I am or you're the principal, so you might be more important than I am…

Theme 2: Incongruencies in Beliefs Regarding Parent Involvement in Schools

The schism between belief systems and the resulting perceptions of the opposite system emerged as a second theme. Not only is communication lacking or problematic, it often presented as deficit-based and largely one-way. Although espousing a more progressive approach to engagement, the reported communication activities were school-initiated, as has been the traditional model. One caregiver described her frustration with the form, focus, and top-down approach to communication by the school:

> There's no roles (for parents) because nothing's ever offered or brought to our attention…and they could probably give material to the kids, but I'm gonna tell you, my daughter comes home, and I probably won't get it until after she thinks about it. And I think there should be some type of notification that lets parents know exactly what's going on…

Participants also described deficit-based communication toward families that was frequently spurred by adverse events or when a child has exhibited poor academic or behavioral performance. Both caregivers and school personnel stated that they were aware that this was often the case, and both saw it as problematic in increasing engagement. As one teacher participant said:

> Also, another barrier is if we have a behavior problem, that will be the only time that they may feel like they hear from us. And, even though we're reaching out with the flyers, with the calls, um, I'm sure as a teacher, I could be better about calling saying, 'Oh, your daughter had a 100 on the exam today'.

Some school personnel participants posited beliefs that the caregivers of high school students are less interested in involvement or that some parents just may not place as much value on their child's education and academic achievements as others. The caregivers in the study, however, all discussed wanting more information and communication from the school and further opportunities to be involved. This highlights a disconnect between the caregivers' views of school collaboration and involvement and some school employees' perceptions of those views. For example, when asked about barriers to family involvement at the high school one administrator responded:

> … I don't know if at one point that if because of the age of the kids, the parents kind of feel like, "Oh, they're almost grown, they're at that point, like why do I need to…I don't have to walk them into school anymore," and you know, they're kind of on their own. I think that plays a big part, and I don't know, just maybe the mindset of some of the parents and not valuing education really, so they don't think that it's important to be active and a part of it.

Theme 3: The Impeding Influences of Personal School Histories

This third theme emerged at both at the systemic and individual levels, generated further barriers to involvement in the form of mistrust between systems and reduced collaboration. This reported mistrust emerged from specific incidents with the school system throughout the year, and caregivers' previous experiences as a student. Administrators discussed perceiving that some caregivers may be intimidated by coming or may be reluctant to being in the school environment due to negative experiences that they may have had as students. As one administrator states:

> ...some parents may just be intimidated by school in general just because if they didn't have a good experience, then they're not going to come or they may have had a negative

> experience with us, and nobody's tried to rectify that negative experience, and so they're like, "I'm not dealing with them anymore unless I absolutely have to."

School administrators described this lack of trust's effects being most strongly felt in school-to-parent communication and the reluctance of some caregivers to give updated contact information to the school. For many caregivers, prior communication had generated a sense of negativity and dread regarding school interaction and the inability to "keep taking time off to deal with something negative." The administration identified the connections between trust and communication:

> On the flip side, I think we've got to build a level of trust with the parents so that they give us the right phone number consistently or they give us an email address or they give us an alternative means of communicating with them because that's a big roadblock for us.

Theme 4: The Persistence of Traditional Models

The final theme centers around the concept that, while many schools and school personnel are eager to embrace the language and concept of "engagement" versus "involvement," the structure and environment of the school remains based on traditional models. Despite stating a desire to utilize modern co-constructed models of engagement typified by shared power and decision-making, the school personnel in this study described past and current utilizations of top-down power structures and lines of communication. Both caregivers and teachers described communication and invitations for involvement as school initiated, definitions of involvement professed by the school required caregivers to be responsive to their communications and invitation, and involvement was primarily seen as caregivers being present in the schools and at school meetings and events. While school personnel use the language of engagement, and many expressed knowing the difference between the concepts of involvement and engagement, the practices still seem to be embedded in the school-centered models of involvement. One administrator discussed how she would like parents to be more involved:

> …just because their child is not a little kid anymore, it matters just as much still to let them know that you're involved and that you care, that you're taking it seriously and they'll take it serious. And just, I don't know if upfront having a parent meeting every quarter just to keep stressing -- we want you in the building, we want you here, and you can come up here eat with your child, and you can come up here and volunteer or whatever, during the day if you're able.

A caregiver described her desire to have teachers interact differently with her and her child:

> I'd like to see teachers more engaged. You know, get to know my kid. Everyone has a different personality. Reach out to them and say, Hey, and, deep in my heart, I know she's struggling with something… so you know, the teacher needs to do that while they're in the classroom. And if she's aware of something, then let the parent know and let the parent help out.

Discussion

The results of this study demonstrate that while both the caregivers and school personnel seem to understand the importance of family involvement in education and both want families and caregivers to be involved, multiple barriers exist for effective collaboration and engagement. Within the school unit under study, there exists a disconnect between how both sides seemed to

value school involvement and the continued use of a traditional school model of parental involvement, which appeared to be limiting the possibilities of change. Although the school cited elements of a more progressive engagement model as the foundation for their approach, the more traditional model that underscored the actions discussed here embodies a top-down approach of institutional dictation of relationships. This effectively hinders communication and strips parents and caregivers of agency, creating two closed and conflicting systems or communities inhabiting the same physical space.

When describing the concept of engagement, Goodall and Montgomery (2014) state that "engagement with children's learning may not equate to – and should not be judged on the basis of – engagement with the school" (p.400). Multiple researchers have found that caregivers who identify as ethnic minorities often report difficulty engaging with schools, and they still express wanting to be part of their child's academics and education (Cooper, 2009; Crozier, 2001; Latunde, 2018; Reynolds et al., 2015). Many of the descriptions of involvement or engagement in this study from both caregivers and school personnel focus on involvement within the school environment. There is not much acknowledgment from any of the participants of caregivers' behavior or energy towards engagement in their child's education outside of the school.

Further, there is little evidence that school personnel in this study have much knowledge of their students' caregivers' non-school or home-based involvement or engagement. This demonstrates the need for school personnel to value and have knowledge of multiple definitions of engagement. Among her six types of involvement, Epstein (1995) includes "parenting," which includes parents' beliefs about education, parents' academic expectations for their children, and "learning at home," which encompasses parents assisting with and monitoring homework, providing learning experiences for their children, etc. Both of these types of involvement fall under caregivers' environments, and purview and are generally hidden from school personnel unless deliberately uncovered or solicited. Given that, for many school personnel, courses and learning experiences that focus on effective practices in caregiver and parent involvement remain scarce, it stands to reason that they would fall back on traditional involvement practices that are more deeply-rooted (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Young & Hite, 1994).

The barriers presented in this study largely have a basis in the research literature, though there are some specific differences. Hornby and Lafaele (2011) presented a model describing barriers that affect parent-school involvement in four major areas, including parent and family factors, child factors, parent-teacher factors, and societal factors. Parent and family factors such as parents' beliefs about school involvement and perceptions of invitations of involvement by the school could be recognized in barriers described by participants in the current study. The parent-teacher category of barriers, however, seemed to be the category that best fits many of the obstacles described in this study, including the perception of mistrust by caregivers towards school personnel, differing attitudes towards and perceptions of each other, and the rhetoric and language that informs their understanding of family-school relationships (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). The participants in this study were much less likely to specifically discuss individual child factors and societal factors.

Additionally, specific barriers mentioned by participants here such as the perception that school personnel were primarily removed from or temporary in the community system, and school personnel's lack of recognition of the traditional models in which they were operating, were not as prevalent in other studies. Hornby and Lafaele (2011) also discussed the gap between rhetoric and research around the importance of parental involvement and the actual range of practices that were employed in schools. That gap can be seen in the microcosm of this school, as school

personnel would discuss the importance of parental engagement but described traditional school-centered practices.

Notably, the school personnel and caregivers in this study did agree on many of the barriers to involvement in their school. While they identified many of these common themes, they showed little understanding or detail of the other's perspective, and little consensus on how to address these barriers. There was blame in some areas, but the disconnect was rooted mainly in the lack of communication and the lack of invitation for parents to share their student's and family's needs and ideas with the school. Rather than the families being granted equal partnership and agency, the school created involvement initiatives based on their perception of families' needs and their experience with what involvement initiatives worked from trial and error. The traditional models could be seen in school personnel's descriptions of involvement as expecting caregivers to enter the school environment and expecting caregivers to be responsive when contacted or called.

Findings from this study offer school leaders a unique opportunity to reevaluate parental engagement strategies within their schools. Deliberately working to connect the school mission and vision, and to communicate the mission and vision for family and community engagement is essential to this process. Involving all stakeholder groups in creating a mission and vision for the school, leaders can help to define and develop what is meant by collaboration between and among various groups who have invested in the school and community.

Additionally, school leaders must understand the difference between family and community *involvement* (Hill et al., 2004) and true family-community *engagement* through the enrollment of stakeholder groups in the processes of co-construction and shared ownership in educating students (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014, O'Toole et al., 2019). Educators must be willing to examine their assumptions about family and community engagement by looking closely at the current state of their context to determine whether a disconnect exists between stakeholder groups as well as developing mutual understanding between the groups to bridge that disconnect where possible (Epstein, 1995; 2011; Epstein & Sheldon, 2016; Wassell et al., 2017).

Further research on effective ways of bringing caregivers and school personnel together through engagement practices and breaching barriers in urban high schools, in particular, is needed to fully understand the interconnections of context and school climate at these grade levels. As much family involvement research occurs at the elementary level, examining how urban high schools transition from traditional models of involvement to progressive engagement models will further discussions in building this foundation for possibilities and suggestions for best practice.

Additionally, the researchers recommend extended training and professional development to encourage the application of these ideas of engagement in high school systems. Further effort should be focused on translating the research suggested above into useful and effective training for school leaders as well as reassessing program policies to include this content in certifications and professional development offerings.

As a qualitative case study, the goal of this research is not generalizability but rather to add to a necessary spectrum of cases and contexts to more wholly understand the phenomenon of school-family partnerships and engagement. One of the aims of this study is to represent a case from a context that may be underrepresented in studies of engagement. To continue to inform the bigger picture of the challenges and barriers that different schools and communities may face in implementing effective family-school partnerships, further studies should be conducted in other demographics that are not examined as dominantly in the literature.

Conclusion

Overall, this study demonstrates the importance of recognizing and addressing the specific factors that can act as barriers to school personnel and families creating a cohesive system. A prominent barrier to the full implementation of authentic engagement in this context may have been superimposing the progressive engagement models over the traditional parental involvement foundation used within the school. This approach simply layered new actions for best practice over old paradigms without identifying and deconstructing these practices and their negative impact on genuine engagement. The result was a traditional involvement/school-focused model tempered with mild elements of engagement rather than an accurate application of engagement principles. For educational leaders, these tenets of engagement best practice should be embodied throughout all levels of the school environment as inherent and organic to the system rather than externally forced if an authentic change is to be seen. Although all participants shared a genuine interest in engagement and parental connectedness to the school and community, these underlying historical and interpersonal barriers continue to support the existence of two isolated systems operating under differing paradigms; paradigms that foster continued blame and hinder the growth of engagement in this multi-stressed school.

References

Auerbach, S. (2009). Walking the walk: Portraits in leadership for family engagement in urban schools. *The School Community Journal, 19*(1), 9-32.

Brown, J.C., Graves, E.M., & Burke, M.A. (2020). Involvement, engagement, and community: Dimensions and correlates of parental participation in a majority-minority urban school district. *Urban Education,* 1-36.

Chavis, G., Ward, L., Elwell, T., & Barret, C. (1997). Improving student performance in high poverty schools. (Report number: 96-86). Tallahassee, FL: Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability.

Clark, R., Anderson, N. B., Clark, V. R., & Williams, D. R. (1999). Racism as a stressor for African Americans. A biopsychosocial model. *American Psychologist, 54*, 805-816.

Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), (1996). *Interstate school leaders licensure consortium (ISLLC): Standards for school leaders*. Author.

Cooper, C. W. (2009). Parent involvement, African American mothers, and the politics of educational care. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, *42*(4), 379–394.

Crozier, G. (2001). Excluded parents: The deracialisation of parental involvement. *Race Ethnicity and Education, 4*(4), 329–341.

Cullen, S. M., Cullen, M. A., Band, S., Davis, L., & Lindsay, G. (2011). Supporting fathers to engage with their children's learning and education: An under-developed aspect of the Parent Support Advisor pilot. *British Educational Research Journal, 37*(3), 485-500.

Dockett, S., Perry, B., & Kearney, E. (2012). Family transitions as children start school. *Family Matters, 90*, 57-67.

Eccles, J. S., & Harold, R. D. (1996). Family involvement in children's and adolescents' schooling, In A. Booth & J. F. Dunn (Eds.), *Family-school links: How do they affect educational outcomes?* (pp. 3-34). New York: Routledge.

Epstein, J. L. (1995). School/family/community partnerships: Caring for the children we share. *Phi Delta Kappan, 76*(9), 81-96.

Epstein, J. L. (2011). *School, family, and community partnerships: Preparing educators and improving schools* (2nd ed.). New York: Westview.

Epstein, J. L., & Sheldon, S. B. (2016). Necessary but not sufficient: The role of policy for advancing programs of school, family, and community partnerships. *Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences, 2*(5), 202-219.

Goldenberg, C. (2004). Literacy for all children in the increasingly diverse schools of the United States. In R. Ruddell & N. Unrau (Eds.), *Theoretical models and processes of reading* (5th Ed.). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Goodall, J., & Montgomery, C. (2014). Parental involvement to parental engagement: A continuum. *Educational Review, 66*(4), 399-410.

Greenwood, G. E., & Hickman, C. W. (1991). Research and practice in parent involvement: Implications for teacher education. *The Elementary School Journal, 91*(3), 279-288.

Hill, N. E., Castellino, D. R., Lansford, J. E., Nowlin, P., Dodge, K. A., Bates, J. E., & Petit, G. S. (2004). Parent academic involvement as related to school behavior, achievement, and aspirations: Demographic variations across adolescence. *Child Development, 75*(5), 1491-1509.

Hornby, G., & Blackwell, I. (2018). Barriers to parental involvement in education: an update. *Educational Review*, *70*(1), 109-119.

Hornby, G., & Lafaele, R. (2011). Barriers to parental involvement in education: An exploratory model. *Educational Review, 3*(1), 37-52.

Jeynes, W. H. (2015). A Meta-Analysis: The Relationship Between Father Involvement and Student Academic Achievement. *Urban Education, 50*(4), 387–423.

Jeynes, W. H. (2016). A Meta-Analysis: The Relationship Between Parental Involvement and African American School Outcomes. *Journal of Black Studies*, *47*(3), 195–216.

Johnson, Jr., J. F., & Asera, R. (1999). *Hope for urban education: A study of nine high-performing, high-poverty, urban elementary schools.* (ED438362). ERIC. http://www.ed.gov/pubs/urbanhope/index.html

Latunde, Y. C. (2018). Expanding their opportunities to engage: A case of the African American parent council. *The Journal of Negro Education*, *87*(3), 270-284.

Lloyd, G. (1996). Research and practical application for school, family, and community partnerships. In A. Booth and J. Dunn (Eds.), Family –school links: How do they affect educational outcomes? (pp. 255–264). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Murphy, J. (2010). *The educator's handbook for understanding and closing achievement gaps.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Murphy, J. F. (2017). *Professional standards for educational leaders: The empirical, moral, and experiential foundations.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). (2016). The Condition of Education 2016. NCES 2016-144. National Center for Education Statistics.

National Policy Board for Educational Administration, (2015). *Professional Standards for Educational Leaders 2015.* Author.

O'Toole, L., Kiely, J., McGillacuddy, D., O'Brien, E. Z., & O'Keeffe, C. (2019). *Parental involvement, engagement and partnership in their children's education during the primary school years.* National Parents Council. http://hdl.handle.net/10197/9823

Reynolds, R. (2010). They think you're lazy, and other messages Black parents send their Black sons. An exploration of critical race theory in the examination of educational outcomes for Black males. *Journal of African American Males in Education*, *1,* 145-163.

Reynolds, A. D., Crea, T. M., Medina, J., Degnan, E., & McRoy, R. (2015). A mixed-methods case study of parent involvement in an urban high school serving minority students. *Urban Education*, *50*(6), 750-775.

Robinson, K. & Harris, A. L. (2014). *The broken compass: Parental involvement with children's education.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Ross, T. (2016). The differential effects of parental involvement on high school completion and postsecondary attendance. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, *24*, 1-38.

Wassell, B.A., Hawrylak, M.F., & Scantlebury, K. (2017) "Barriers, Resources, Frustrations, and Empathy: Teachers' Expectations for Family Involvement for Latino/a ELL Students in Urban STEM Classrooms." *Urban Education 52*(10), 1233–1254.

Wilder, S. (2014). Effects of parental involvement on academic achievement: a meta-synthesis. Educational Review, 66, 377–397

Young, J. R., & Hite, S. J. (1994). The status of teacher pre-service preparation for parent involvement: A national study. *Education*, *115*(1), 153-158.