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These manuscripts have been peer-reviewed, accepted, and endorsed by the International Council of Professors of Educational Leadership as a significant contribution to the scholarship and practice of school leadership and K-12 education.

From the Editors

Here it is! The long-awaited Fall/Winter 2021 issue of *Education Leadership Review*! Whereas a global pandemic created substantial challenges and change within our field, it did not stop the production of quality research over a variety of meaningful topics in education leadership, which we are incredibly pleased to provide you in this issue.

In their article, *Symbiotic Partnership: Using a Virtual Coaching Model to Develop Principal and Teacher Candidates*, Dr. Karen D. Jones, Dr. Jennifer L. Gallagher, and Dr. Christina Tschida report on a unique collaboration between principal and teacher preparation programs within a rural university in the southeastern United States. The collaborative project worked to meet both the need of teacher candidates to receive instructional feedback and coaching on their teaching and the need of principal candidates to gain experience giving instructional coaching to novice teachers.

Dr. Christian Stevenson Winn, Dr. Thomas L. Cothorn, Dr. Renee Lastrapes, Dr. Amy Orange conducted a mixed methods study to examine the relationship between principals' leadership practices and teachers' efficacy. Their findings offer new insights to teachers, principals and other school leaders regarding teacher efficacy.

Dr. William T. Holmes, Dr. Michele Parker, Dr. Jentre Olsen, Dr. Jam Khojasteh focused on the dimensions of source credibility and their impact on superintendent leadership effectiveness and principal job satisfaction when mediated by motivating language as part of rural superintendents' administrative talk and practice in their cross-sectional study involving over 40% of the principals from a top-ten ranked state located in a rural western area of United States of America. Their findings suggest that Motivating Language (ML) serves as an important mechanism for superintendent communication effectiveness in achieving the outcomes of Job Satisfaction and Leadership Effectiveness.

In *Public and Private Schools: A Study of Teacher Job Satisfaction*, Dr. David Buckman and Dr. Christopher Small report on their study focusing on contributing factors of job satisfaction: personal attributes, human capital, occupational characteristics, and school characteristics and differences between public and private school teachers' job satisfaction.

Dr. Benjamin Jankens' study, *Charter School Authorizing: Understanding the Differences Among Authorizers and School Performance*, examined the differences between Michigan charter school outcomes by authorizer type, and provides some important insight regarding both academic and operational differences.

Dr. Odessa Y Mann, Dr. Dan Novey, Dr. Travis Lewis explored the impact of rural school district consolidation in eastern North Carolina. This case study reviewed the process of consolidation one year after the 2017-2018 consolidation in terms of academic, financial, and community.

We conclude our latest issue with wise words from the 2021 ICPEL Living Legends Award recipient, Dr. Julia Ballenger, with a forward written by Dr. Sandra Harris.

On behalf of the editorial staff of *Education Leadership Review*, we want to express our unending gratitude for everyone who submitted manuscripts with us last year, our faithful reviewers who make sure that we publish works that are important to our field, and ICPEL's Director of Publications, Dr. Brad Bizzell, for all he does to make sure our publications get to you and look so good when they do! Finally, I (Ken Young) want to express my sincere gratitude to *ELR's* assistant editors, Dr. Casey Graham Brown and Dr. Sandra Harris, for their years of friendship and ongoing commitment to the journal. The world and this journal are so much better because of you!

Peace,

J. Kenneth Young, Casey Graham Brown, & Sandra Harris
Editors

Symbiotic Partnership: Using a Virtual Coaching Modell to Develop Principal and Teacher Candidates

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This article reports on a unique collaboration between principal and teacher preparation programs within one college of education at a rural university in southeastern United States. The collaborative project worked to meet both the need of teacher candidates to receive instructional feedback and coaching on their teaching and the need of principal candidates to gain experience giving instructional coaching to novice teachers. Feedback and coaching were provided through video capture and annotation technology (VCAT) allowing the principal candidate to provide specific feedback using evidence from the teaching candidate's teaching video to support their instructional coaching. Researchers explored quantitative and qualitative data of principal candidates' coaching experience to determine the change in their self-efficacy in providing instructional coaching over the course of a semester and their perceptions of their experience using VCAT to facilitate the coaching.

Clinical experiences are a critical component of learning to teach (Grossman, Compton, Igra, Ronfeldt, Shahan, & Williamson, 2009; Wilson, 2006). These experiences offer opportunities for teacher candidates to learn by doing and construct their knowledge of and skills in teaching, critical thinking, reflection, and analysis of their practice (Alsup, 2006; Danielewicz, 2014). Recent movement towards a more practice-based model of teacher preparation emphasizes participation, engagement, feedback, and reflection (Grossman & McDonald, 2008; Hoffman, Wetzel, Maloch, Greeter, Taylor, DeJulio, & Vlach, 2015; Zeichner 2010) what Linda Darling-Hammond calls “practice in practice, with expert guidance” (2010, p. 40).

Instructional coaching offers teacher candidates opportunities to engage in this type of practice. Such coaching can provide teacher candidates with purposeful, specific, and constructive feedback that is needed to move them toward deeper reflection on their practice. When they enter the schools, they will receive instructional feedback from administration within their building; thus principal candidates in educator preparation programs must develop knowledge of and skills in providing such instructional coaching. Principal candidates typically get more managerial instruction (i.e., budget, hiring, scheduling, laws) in their programs; but there is a documented need for more instruction and practice with their very important roles in instructional leadership and coaching (Darling-Hammond, Meyerson, LaPointe, & Orr, 2010; Murphy, 2006; Reames, 2010).

This article reports on a unique collaboration between principal and teacher preparation programs within one college of education at a rural university in southeastern United States. The collaborative project worked to meet both the need of teacher candidates to receive instructional feedback and coaching on their teaching and the need of principal candidates to gain experience giving instructional coaching to novice teachers. Feedback and coaching were provided through video capture and annotation technology (VCAT) allowing the principal candidate to provide specific feedback using evidence from the teaching candidate’s teaching video to support their instructional coaching. Researchers explored quantitative and qualitative data of principal candidates’ coaching experience to determine the change in their self-efficacy in providing instructional coaching over the course of a semester and their perceptions of their experience using VCAT to facilitate the coaching.

Literature Review

The literature supporting this research spans general teacher and principal education as well as specific research on instructional coaching and technology tools that support it.

Principal Preparation Programs

A modern school principal is an instructional leader, assigned to improve the instructional practices of teachers. Previously, principals were seen as managers who maintained discipline and followed bureaucratic procedures (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; Davies, 2005; DuFour & Marzano, 2011). The shift from management to instructional leader asks principals to facilitate what teachers know and how they teach in the school (Grogan & Andrews, 2002). This occurs as principals coach and mentor teachers on their instructional practices through observation and feedback (Blasé & Blasé, 1999; Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; Zepeda, 2005).

The quality of principal preparation matters as it is a strong predictor of future principal self-efficacy (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2007). Principal preparation programs (PPP) have

traditionally focused on the development of management skills (Murphy, 2006). As the role of principal shifted to that of instructional leader, principal preparation programs also had to redesign to meet the needs of their candidates (Reames, 2010). Researchers have found that many PPPs are not meeting the needs of candidates to become strong instructional leaders for their schools (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; Grogan & Andrews, 2002; Levine, 2005). This often results from a lack of opportunities within the program for candidates to practice the theories and skills they have learned (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; Lashway, 2006; Reames, 2010). Modern PPPs need structures and activities that allow candidates to engage in the practice of instructional leadership through mentoring and coaching (Franey, 2013; Jones & Ringler, 2018). Instructional coaching is a partnership where teachers and coaches (principals) work together to improve teaching and learning (Knight, 2007). This is a skill that should be developed through practice in principal candidates.

Teacher Preparation Programs

The charge of teacher preparation programs (TPP) has evolved in both similar and different ways than that of principal preparation programs. There has been a long entrenched debate in the field of teacher education between the importance of content knowledge and pedagogical skills in the training. Ultimately a framework of pedagogical content knowledge was established, which values subject matter knowledge specifically for teaching (Shulman, 1986). Now, that paradigm has shifted to the importance of inquiry stances towards the profession of teaching whereas teacher preparation is no longer seen as a one-shot pre-classroom experience but a career-long focus on growth, learning, and development through deliberate inquiry (Darling Hammond, 2006; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). TPPs can play an important role in cultivating teacher candidates with an inquiry-stance towards their profession (Schulz & Mandzuk, 2005). One way to foster inquiry stances is through developing teacher candidates who learn for teaching and from teaching (Darling-Hammond, 2010). “An authentic space for candidates to learn in this way is through field experiences. But the mere experience in classrooms is not enough to cultivate strong TPPs,” (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Teacher candidates need scaffolded field experiences with meaningful feedback and opportunities to reflect in order to improve their pedagogical skills (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Grossman & McDonald, 2008; Hoffman et al., 2015, Zeichner 2010).

Providing meaningful feedback to teacher candidates in the field, although important, can logistically be burdensome for faculty in teacher education programs that are already stretched thin (Tschida et al, 2019). Teacher candidates within one program might be placed in a number of different geographic and temporal contexts to complete their practicum with only one instructor to provide feedback; their time being divided between the sites. One way to overcome this logical obstacle is to engage other stakeholders and coaching experts to provide additional feedback to teacher candidates such as instructional supervisors and other potential coaches (Tschida et al, 2019).

Instructional Supervision and Coaching

Several researchers have provided models for instructional supervision (Beach & Reinhartz, 2000; Glickman, Gordon & Ross-Gordon, 2013; Knight, 2009; Sergiovanni & Starrat, 2007). This project chose to follow Glickman and colleagues’ (2013) definition of instructional supervision, which includes having the knowledge, interpersonal skills, and technical skills to develop a school

where teachers engage in the study of teaching and learning. One task of instructional supervision outlined by Glickman et al. (2013) is direct assistance. This process includes working individually with a teacher through pre-conferencing, observing and post-conferencing to improve teaching. PPPs must not only teach the theory of this process, but must allow principal candidates to actively engage in this process to develop and improve their skills (Jones & Ringler, 2018). This process of direct assistance through instructional supervision is part of the work of modern principals.

Another aspect to their work is that of instructional coaching. Instructional coaching is different from instructional supervision in that supervision is evaluative and coaching is a formative process. Though evaluation of teaching is a part of the work of many principals, the focus of this paper is instructional coaching. Knight (2011) defines instructional coaching as a partnership between teachers and coaches who work together to improve teaching and learning. Coaches engage teachers in identifying their goals, listen, ask questions, explain, and provide feedback (Knight, 2011). The goal of the process is to help teachers reflect on their own practice and make informed, thoughtful decisions to improve their teaching (Jones & Ringler, 2018). Both the skills of instructional supervision and instructional coaching are important for modern principals as instructional leaders. Both are skills that principal candidates must develop to effectively move into an administrative role in schools. Research has found that opportunities to practice coaching and instructional supervision can improve principal candidates' self-efficacy in these areas (Author 1, 2019).

Video Recording and Feedback of Teaching

Video has been used in educator preparation since the 1960s to engage teacher candidates in peer reflection and feedback (Rich & Hannafin, 2009). Reflection centered on identifying teaching skills had been correlated to effective teaching. In the 1990s, teacher self-reflection encouraged with the use of video (Lambdin, Duffy & Moore, 1997). Teachers were encouraged to examine teacher thinking and decision making and in TPPs, teacher candidates were provided cases through video to examine other teachers' practice. The use of video technology expanded in the early 2000s to a tool for teacher preparation. Teacher candidates would video record themselves teaching during field experiences and then reflect on their own skills and practices.

The incorporation of video into educator preparation programs gave teacher educators and candidates a way to reflect on teaching in deeper and more concrete ways rather than relying on memory (Marsh & Mitchell, 2014; Rosaen, Lundeberg, Cooper, Fritzen, & Terpstra, 2008). Through video, teacher candidates can review a captured lesson, analyze it for predetermined elements, and scrutinize instructional decisions using evidence directly from the video (Brunvand, 2010; Marsh & Mitchell, 2014; Zhang, Lundeberg, Koehler, & Eberhardt, 2011). The advancement of technology allowed for not only the capture of teaching episodes through video but the ability to annotate one's reflection connected directly to that particular place in the video. This video capture annotation technology (VCAT) gave both teacher educators and candidates an even more powerful tool for self-reflection and feedback.

While there is increasing research on the use of virtual coaching in TPPs to help teacher candidates develop reflective practices and teacher educators to provide effective quality feedback (Kleinknecht & Gröschner, 2016; Rock et al., 2013; Rock et al., 2014; Stapleton, Tschida, & Cuthrell, 2017; Tschida et al., 2019); there is little research exploring the use of VCAT tools to provide principal candidates authentic experiences giving instructional coaching feedback (Jones

& Ringler, 2018; Stapleton et al., 2017; Tschida et al., 2019), which makes this collaboration and research unique.

Methodology

This case study reports on an ongoing collaborative project between faculty in the PPP and TPP in a large rural university in the southeastern United States. This paper reports on the effects of the intervention on the principal candidates' self-efficacy in coaching. Using a case study for this exploratory research generates new ideas around instructional coaching with preservice teachers and principals.

Theoretical Framework

Bandura's (1986) cognitive theory describes self-reflection by individuals to evaluate their own experiences. According to Parjares (1996) an individual's ability to predict the outcomes of his/her future performance is based on his/her self-beliefs. Self-efficacy is, "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the course of action required to manage prospective situations" (Bandura, 1995, p. 2). One's self-efficacy also determines the amount of effort they will apply to an activity and persist in the face of barriers (James, 1885/1975). It is measured by asking individuals to describe their self-confidence to accomplish a task (Pajares, 1996).

Social cognitive theory describes one's beliefs in his/her ability to complete a task as a predictor of motivation and future task performance (Bandura, 1999; Iroegbu, 2015; Lunenberg, 2011; Wyer & Carlston, 2018). Individuals tend to avoid situations in which they have little confidence of success. The higher an individual's self-efficacy, the more likely they are to engage in a task and be successful (Bandura, 1977). People will persevere when they have strong self-efficacy and confidence. Our goal was to understand the impact of the virtual coaching experience on principal candidates' instructional coaching in the future. This study examined the change in self-efficacy and confidence of principal candidates in their ability to provide instructional coaching to teacher candidates before and after the VCAT coaching experience.

Research Design and Research Questions

Data for this study were taken from a larger ongoing study examining the partnership between principal candidates as they learn to provide instructional feedback and elementary teacher candidates in a field experience during their junior year. This article reports on one aspect of a larger case study data set, exploring the experiences of one cohort of principal candidates during the fall 2018 semester. Case studies are helpful when describing a project or event in detail, set in real-world contexts (Bromley, 1986; Merriam, 1988; Yin, 1984). This study made use of survey data and interviews with principal candidates to explore the usefulness of VCAT in practicing instructional coaching in an authentic virtual setting. Specifically, this data was designed to further understand the following questions: (a) What effect does virtual coaching have on the self-efficacy of principal candidates in a principal preparation program? (b) What were the principal candidates' perceptions of their virtual coaching experiences?

Context

This case study describes an ongoing project that meets the needs of both a principal preparation program (PPP) and teacher preparation program (TPP) within the university. The college of education is one of the largest producers of educators in the state and graduates work in every district across the state. Both the PPP and TPP programs needed to improve their instructional coaching--to help both principal candidates and elementary teacher candidates. Second-semester juniors in the TPP, who were enrolled in an elementary social studies methods and practicum course, were each paired with a principal candidate from the PPP for one semester. The pairing was random. The partners engaged in an initial meeting for introductions and to set goals for the semester-long project. The teacher candidates taught and video recorded three lessons over the course of the semester in their practicum elementary school and received instructional feedback and coaching from a principal candidate, taking an educational leadership course on instructional coaching. The project utilizes video capture and annotation technology (VCAT) to make the coaching logistically possible across distances and various stakeholder schedules.

In the PPP course, candidates moved theory into action. The course involved studying theories of instructional coaching and applying them with preservice teachers. Course instructors reviewed the feedback provided to the preservice teachers and coached the principal candidates on the feedback. This allowed the course instructors to ensure preservice teachers were presented with quality feedback. Since the teacher candidates taught and recorded three lessons, the principal candidates were able to receive feedback on each round of coaching. The coaching of the principal candidates also provided an additional model for them of how to deliver appropriate, quality coaching feedback to the preservice teachers.

Participants

Students in the TPP are often full-time students earning their undergraduate degree and elementary teaching license. They attend the majority of classes during the day, which include practicums to teach lessons at nearby public K-5 schools. The PPP candidates are often part-time students working full time in K-12 public schools. They generally attend classes in the evenings to earn a master's degree in school administration and a principal license. In order to meet the needs of both groups, VCAT technology is used to record the lessons taught by the teacher candidates and then watched by principal candidates to provide feedback.

A convenience sample of PCs (n= 36) served as the subjects of this study and were students in 4 sections of an instructional leadership course in a Master of School Administration degree program. The PCs have teaching experience at varying grade levels and content areas (Table 1). As the lesson conducted by the TCs and upon which the PCs provide coaching is in the area of elementary social studies, it is noteworthy that 25 of 36, or 69.4 %, of PCs have experience in teaching at the elementary level, while 19 of 36, or 52.7 %, of PCs have experience teaching in the social studies content area.

Table 1
Content Area Experience

Grade Level	# of Principal Candidates	ELA/ English	math	science	social studies	Other
Elementary	25	16	16	12	13	6
Middle	12	6	3	1	3	1
High	19	5	4	2	3	6

Procedure of Data Collection

The principal candidates received instruction in their class on how to coach and provide effective feedback. This included strategies from the models of Knight (2009) and Glickman, Gordon, and Ross-Gordon (2013). The VCAT project allowed them to then practice these skills. In order to effectively use the coaching cycles described earlier in this article, principal candidates completed a pre-conference, observation, and post-conference. Pairs conducted the pre-conference using real-time video technology, such as Skype or FaceTime. The teacher candidates recorded their lessons using VCAT and uploaded to a shared server. The principal candidates were then able to provide time-coded, specific feedback within the VCAT system. Finally, the principal candidates lead a post-conference with the teacher candidates to discuss the lesson and make plans for future improvements. The coaching cycle was completed two times during the semester as part of this project.

Surveys were administered to the PCs measuring their self-efficacy in providing coaching feedback. Researchers administered the survey at the beginning and at the end of the project. The survey asked PCs to report their opinion of their effectiveness and confidence in providing coaching feedback to TCs using a likert scale (Mertler, 2019).

Researchers conducted focus group interview of 12 PCs at the end of the coaching project. The interview data was transcribed and coded. Interview data was analyzed using a grounded theory approach to qualitative analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This theory refers to a systematic method for creating common themes. Themes emerged from the coded interview data and are explored in detail below.

Data Analysis

Researchers analyzed the quantitative data collected from the likert scale survey using descriptive statistics. Then, researchers analyzed the data by response to each question of the whole group. In addition to the quantitative data from the survey, qualitative data was collected through interviews. Researchers transcribed interview data and coded to find emerging themes. Grounded theory approach lead to qualitative analysis. Researchers used emergent coding to analyze the open-ended responses (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Themes were then developed based on the relationships

found amongst the codes. This theory refers to a systematic method for creating common themes. Themes emerged from the coded interview data and are explored in detail below. The qualitative findings also further substantiate and deepen the quantitative findings from the survey.

Findings

Findings to answer the first research question were produced by analyzing data from the likert scale questions to produce findings. Findings to answer the second research question were produced by analyzing data from the open-ended interview responses.

More principals reported being confident or very confident giving feedback at the elementary level in the post survey than they reported in the pre-survey. Figure 1 shows that in the pre-survey, 19 PCs (53%) felt very confident or confident in delivering feedback to pre-service teachers at the elementary level. In the post-survey, 30 PCs (83%) described themselves as very confident or confident in providing elementary level feedback. None of PCs described themselves as not at all confident in providing elementary level feedback at the end of the project.

Figure 1

PCs' Confidence in Giving Feedback at the Elementary Level

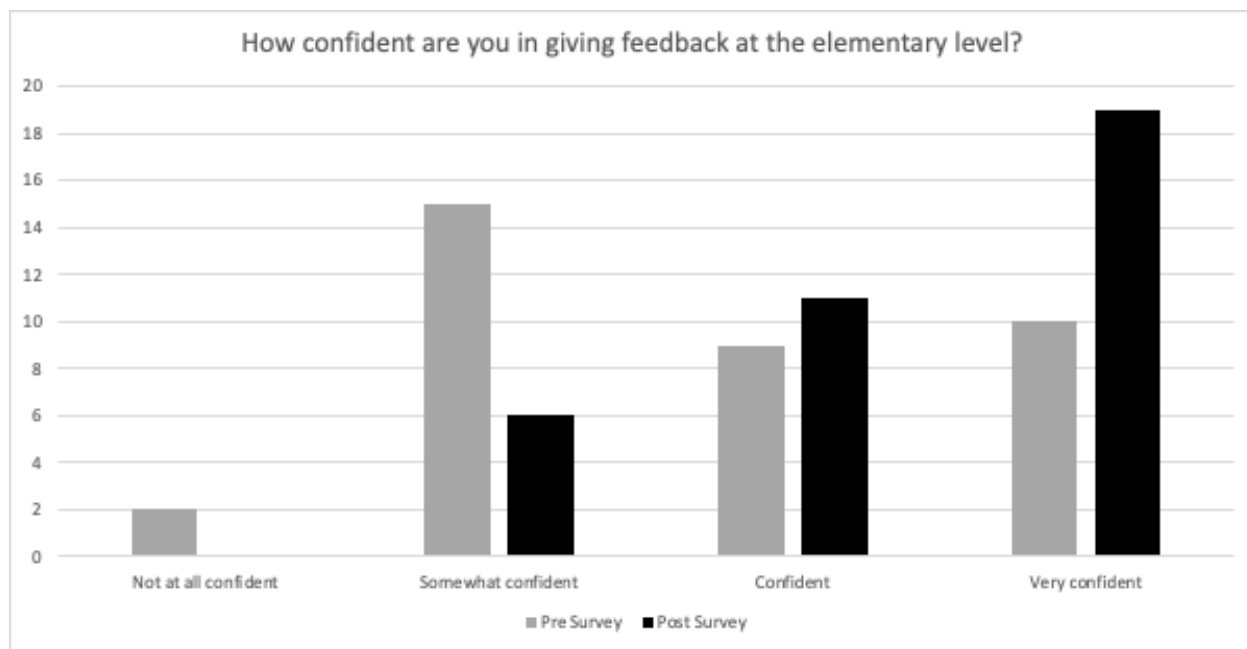


Figure 1 shows that in the pre-survey, 19 PCs (53%) felt Very confident or Confident in delivering feedback to pre-service teachers at the Elementary Level. In the post-survey, 30 PCs (83%) described themselves as Very Confident or Confident in providing elementary level feedback.

Additionally, more principal candidates reported being confident or very confident giving feedback in the social studies content and instruction in the post survey than they did in the pre-survey. Figure 2 demonstrates the PCs' confidence in providing feedback in social studies content and instruction. Before starting the virtual coaching project, 18 PCs (50%) described themselves as confident or very confident in providing social studies feedback. At the end of the project the post-survey shows that 26 PCs (72%) described themselves as confident or very confident in

providing feedback to pre-service teachers in the area of social studies. In the post-survey, none of the PCs described themselves as not at all confident in providing feedback in social studies instruction. PCs increased their self-efficacy in providing coaching feedback at the elementary level and in social studies instruction.

Figure 2

PCs' Confidence in Giving Feedback in Social Studies Content and Instruction

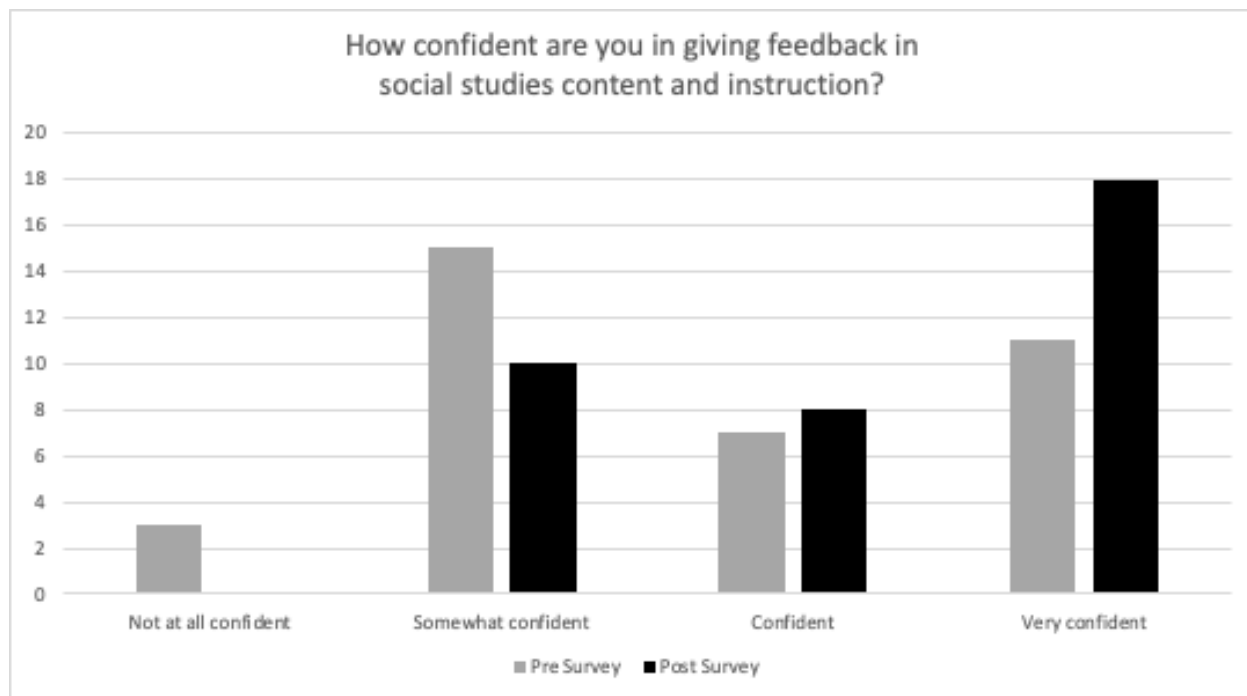


Figure 2 demonstrates the PCs' confidence in providing feedback in social studies content and instruction. Before starting the virtual coaching project, 18 PCs (50%) described themselves as Confident or Very confident in providing social studies feedback. At the end of the project the post-survey shows that 26 PCs (72%) described themselves as Confident or Very Confident in providing feedback to pre-service teachers in the area of social studies.

What were the principal candidates' perceptions of the virtual coaching experience?

The open-ended interviews provided more information from PCs on their experience of working with TCs in the coaching process. PCs described their own perceptions of the virtual coaching project, specifically what they were able to learn and how the experience was meaningful to them. Responses were analyzed and common themes were discovered using a grounded theory approach. These themes are discussed below.

Opportunity for Theory into Action

As one learns to provide instructional feedback and coaching, it can remain theoretical and abstract until one actually engages in coaching. While coursework provided valuable information on theories of coaching and the importance of providing timely and guiding feedback, the PC's experience with coaching a teacher candidate was a powerful assignment for seeing theories in

action. PCs reported that they were able to use the skills learned in class to provide the virtual coaching for TCs. One PC said of her coaching experience, “I knew more than I thought I did about providing feedback to my Junior teacher. The ideas from class were helpful in completing this project.” Another PC shared a similar conclusion about the connection of her coursework to the virtual coaching experience saying, “I was able to practice the things we talked about in class. It made the coaching a real thing, not just an idea.” The abstract theories of instructional coaching became concrete practices through which the PCs developed skills in providing feedback and coaching beginning teachers.

Increased Confidence

Learning to actually engage in coaching of a novice teacher can be intimidating for beginners. The PCs in this study expressed a shared belief that the project worked to increase their confidence in their abilities to provide coaching. One PC shared that “[she] was worried about the coaching at first,” but as she engaged in the assignment with her junior TC she learned, “it’s something I can do. I’ll only get better at it from here.” The PCs recognized their potential to be a good coach by participating in the project over the course of the semester, and many were able to articulate that the opportunity gave them a way of practicing and learning from their virtual coaching. “I have learned a lot through this process...moving forward, I’ll be able to give coaching feedback without being so nervous.” Additionally, the assignment allowed some PCs who did not have a background in elementary education the opportunity to coach elementary level teachers. One PC identified that the experience specifically increased his confidence to coach to a particular grade level and subject. “Being a high school business teacher, I didn’t think I’d be any good at helping in elementary social studies. I found I was able to apply what we learned in class and really help her [the TC].” The coaching done in this assignment increased PCs confidence in their ability to provide meaningful and beneficial feedback to beginning teachers.

Preparation for being a Principal

The work of a principal is multifaceted, and the role of instructional leader is an important aspect of their duties. During the interviews, PCs identified their work with the teacher candidates as a valuable exercise in practicing the coaching skills they were learning in their course work. They recognized that they were engaged in the very work they would be doing in their future role within the schools. “Providing feedback this way allowed me to simulate what I’ll actually do as a principal,” explained one PC. Another shared, “this will help me as I move into administration.” Thus, practicing instructional coaching and working with elementary teacher candidates allowed PCs to develop skills they found valuable for their future careers.

Conclusion to Findings

The likert style surveys illuminated that the PCs in this study felt more confident giving feedback at the elementary level as well as in the subject of social studies after the virtual coaching experience. The qualitative data from their interview supports this finding as well as provides additional ways the PCs perception of the virtual coaching experience were positive.

Discussion and Significance

Bandura (1986) posits that future behavior is forecast by one's confidence in his/her abilities. Since school principals are increasingly responsible for coaching of teaching in their schools and instructional leadership practices (Derrington & Campbell, 2015; Donaldson et al, 2016), it is important for principal preparation programs to build PC's confidence in these capacities. The findings described in this paper support an innovation aimed at increasing PC's confidence in these skills by overcoming two barriers the field of principal preparation often faces, turning theory into practice and providing more opportunities to practice coaching.

Through instructional leadership, principals influence the work of teachers in the classroom through coaching (Hitt & Tucker, 2016). According to Knight (2019), a major challenge for school leaders is transforming theory into practice around instructional coaching. An important theme that emerged from interviews with the participants in the virtual coaching innovation is that they felt it allowed them to implement the theory they were learning in their program into practice. Therefore, the study described in this paper is an example of how principal preparation programs can turn theory into practice and positively influence the practice of principal candidates.

Additionally, the findings illuminate that the virtual coaching innovation provides an effective addition to in-person coaching. Previous research (Knight, 2019) describes how opportunities to practice in-person instructional coaching influences positive practice in the future. Research has shown that opportunities to practice instructional coaching in-person, with feedback from experts, is a best practice to improve a coach's abilities (Joyce & Showers, 1982; Showers & Joyce, 1996). Ongoing, in-person training has been shown to improve a coach's abilities working with teachers successfully (Gallucci & Swanson, 2008; Knight, 2006; Smith, 2009). This paper further supports this and describes how virtual coaching practices also increase a PC's self-efficacy in their coaching practice.

Conclusion

The findings of this research offer a new innovation in how principal preparation programs are supporting their principal candidates to fill their role as instructional leaders who can coach teachers within a process of observation and feedback (Blasé & Blasé, 1999; Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; Zepeda, 2005). Literature from the field has already substantiated the claim that opportunities to practice coaching influences improvement in an instructional coach's future ability. However, the problem remains that principal candidates/novice instructional coaches do not have enough opportunities to practice these skills due to various programmatic, logistical, and geographic challenges (Tschida et al, 2019). The innovation described in this paper and the research findings on it provide a technology based solution that can hurdle some of those previous barriers to providing opportunities for principal candidates to practice coaching. However, future research on this innovation is necessary. This was a single study with one situated group of principal candidates who worked with one situated group of teacher candidates. The short survey and small focus group are limitations to the study. In the future, it would be helpful to expand the content of the survey and the number of focus group participants. This study focused on the use of VCAT for feedback and did not focus on the ability of the principal to understand teacher's developmental levels. According to Marzano (2011), "Teacher evaluation should recognize different stages of development progressing towards expertise" (p. 104). Future research can

explore principal candidates' ability to identify a teacher's developmental levels and chose appropriate direct or indirect feedback formats.

Another limitation is that researchers collected feedback on the skills and content, but not on the technology itself. It could be helpful to find how the participants' abilities and knowledge of the technology used affected their abilities to complete the coaching project. It will be important to see if the findings are similar in studies completed in different settings and with more participants using VCAT technology. Another area to consider for future research is to follow-up with the principal candidates as they move into official leadership roles at schools and determine if virtual coaching in the preparation program influences their future abilities in similar ways as principals working with teachers in-person. Virtual instructional coaching is new and more research needs to be done to determine its effectiveness in a variety of settings. Future research can explore which specific skills of instructional coaching are effective in a virtual setting. However, the research reported in this paper provides evidence that the innovation of virtual coaching is worthy of implementation and further exploration in the field.

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Teacher Self-Efficacy and Principal Leadership Behaviors

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More than 30 years ago, the concept of teacher efficacy, teachers' confidence and belief in their ability to promote students' learning (Protheroe, 2008), was first discussed as an imperative in educational outcomes. The impact of school leadership on teacher efficacy was soon discovered as a component to overall teacher effectiveness (Gallante, 2015). While many studies of each factor have been conducted in isolation, few studies have directly examined the relationship between teacher efficacy and principal leadership behaviors (Blase & Blase, 1999). The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between principals' leadership practices and teachers' efficacy. In this mixed-methods study, 144 teacher participants from schools located in an urban school district responded to a 36-item survey instrument and participated in an interview to measure and assess teacher effectiveness and efficacy, as well as the leadership behaviors of their principals. The survey instrument administered to teachers included the Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale—Short Form (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2001) combined with the Principal Leadership Questionnaire (Jantzi & Leithwood, 1996). Teacher participants completed this questionnaire to measure their respective principals' leadership behaviors. Results revealed a statistically significant relationship between the teachers' efficacy and principals' leadership behaviors. These findings offer new insights to teachers, principals and other school leaders. Additionally, those who support principals will also gain new leadership practices to positively impact teacher efficacy.

When the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) outlined its principles for effective school improvement, the focus on high-quality leadership and teaching was at the top of the list (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2017). Their 10 principles explain the recommended systems for states to follow under the *Every Student Succeeds Act*, which called for strong teachers in every classroom and entailed innovative approaches for states and school districts to support talented educators (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2017). One of the improvement principles CCSSO identified in its list was the focus on effective leaders and teachers with the talent needed to transform low performing schools. Therefore, the instructional leadership that teachers receive from principals, and the effectiveness of their principals' daily practices, is critical to the enhancement of teaching and learning (Cagle & Hopkins, 2009). Teacher efficacy has been a vital element of teacher effectiveness, and its role in teaching and learning remains of interest to researchers and practitioners (Hoy & Spero, 2005). Moreover, teacher efficacy affects teaching and learning, according to Hoy and Spero (2005), and teachers, administrators, and policy makers continue to be interested in its development, how it is supported, and the factors that diminish it. Researchers have found compelling relationships between various aspects of leadership and teacher quality (Kelley et al., 2005; Waters & Cameron, 2007), and their associations with overall school effectiveness (Waters et al., 2003). Teacher efficacy and leadership behaviors are complex topics that have been studied individually using various methodologies to resolve many questions. Research studies have directly examined the relationship between teacher self-efficacy and principal leadership behaviors and the impact of those behaviors on teacher practice (Blase & Blase, 1999).

Effective Leadership

Second only to teaching, leadership is the most crucial component of education. Effective leaders are the key to meaningful teacher support and development, which lead to high-quality teachers (Khalifa et al., 2016; Leithwood et al., 2004). Leithwood et al. (2004) also suggested ineffective leadership may cause the best teachers to falter, leave a school, or worse, exit the profession. In a comprehensive meta-analysis, Waters et al. (2003) asserted that effective principal leadership encompasses the what, when, how, and why of doing things, along with a leader who imparts the vision on others in a way that influences them to follow.

The Nature of Self-Efficacy

When facing a challenge, does a person rise to accomplish the goal or give up in defeat? Self-efficacy is defined as an individual's belief in their ability to successfully fulfill tasks and obligations, and to overcome challenges, according to Barni et al. (2019). A person's efficacy self-system is central to how situations are perceived and behaviors are demonstrated in response to challenges as it is comprised of a person's attitudes, abilities, and cognitive skills (Bandura, 1997). It is further characterized by Mombourquette (2017) as one's belief in positively impacting the lives of others. Cansoy and Parlar (2018) posit that teacher self-efficacy enhances the way teachers view their role in student achievement outcomes and motivates them to put forth more effort to improve their teaching practices. One's performance or task outcome that is perceived as successful, results in increased self-efficacy while those interpreted as failures weaken it (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007a). It is thusly understood that self-efficacy, with the best efforts, impacts the very way a person approaches goals, tasks, and challenges, and yields results that

improve student learning and promote the likelihood of students reaching their potential (Bandura, 1997; Cansoy & Parlar; 2018).

Self-Efficacy Theory Applied to Teaching

Self-efficacy theory is related to the context of teaching. When teacher behaviors are common in those with a strong sense of self-efficacy, performance is improved (Bandura, 1977 as cited by Kodden, 2020). Cansoy and Parlar (2018) asserted that teachers' self-efficacy beliefs are highly linked to the use of effective instructional strategies, as well as to students' academic progress and learning outcomes. Zee and Koomen (2016) posited similar findings, adding that teacher self-efficacy has also been linked to students' own self-efficacy. Teachers with a high level of self-efficacy tend to exhibit greater levels of planning and organization, are more willing to try new methods of teaching, persist and demonstrate higher levels of resiliency when things do not always go as planned, are less critical of students when they make errors, and are less inclined to refer students to special education (Bandura, 1997). Hoy (2000) viewed the school setting according to how new teachers are inducted into the profession and socialized by their colleagues. These experiences, Hoy (2000) posited, have the potential to powerfully impact a teacher's sense of efficacy.

Not all researchers agree that higher self-efficacy equates to positive influences. Wheatley (2002) proposed that lower levels of self-efficacy have benefits as well as the notion that teachers who doubt their skills and abilities are more inclined to reflect on their practice than those who are sure of their performance. Wheatley (2002) also suggested that teachers with lower self-efficacy have shown a greater motivation to learn and are more likely to engage in collaboration with other teachers who strive to improve in their practice.

The role of self-efficacy in teaching and learning continues to be of interest to researchers and practitioners (Hoy & Spero, 2005). For principals, experiences that provide for collaboration and the exchange of ideas tend to positively impact teachers' sense of efficacy (Goddard et al., 2000). Self-efficacy beliefs are, in sum, individuals' estimation of their ability to perform, conceived as a dynamic set of beliefs that are linked to particular performance domains and activities (Bandura, 1997).

Teacher Perceptions of Principal Leadership Behaviors

Principal leadership has been connected to teacher self-efficacy for many years (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). The principal is the one individual uniquely positioned in the school as the formal leader and whose influence is directly tied to teacher performance (Hipp, 1996, as cited by Prelli, 2016). Allowing teachers time for professional learning that involves active participation and collaboration, and goes beyond "sit and get" are most meaningful, according to Matherson & Windle (2017, p. 29). Pearson and Moomaw linked teacher autonomy to empowerment, and asserted that exalting teachers as professionals requires them to be granted freedom to "prescribe the best treatment for their students as doctors/lawyers do for their patients/clients" (2005, p. 38). Teachers believe they are the most qualified authorities in the instructional process, which is credited to their specialized expertise and understanding of students' needs (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005). Strong leaders pave the way for a common purpose and vision for the school. They create a safe, orderly environment where teachers have a greater level of efficacy (Hipp & Bredeson, 1995). Finally, teachers who perceived fewer impediments to teaching and access to resources to

enhance their classroom had a stronger sense of efficacy (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). According to Blase and Blase (1999) as cited by Sahin (2011), teachers reported positive outcomes on their efficacy and collaboration with one another as a means of improving teaching experiences in the classroom and student performance. Working through challenges toward growth in teaching can increase collegial trust and encourage teachers to rely on one another toward a common goal (Cansoy & Parlar, 2018).

Teacher self-efficacy and student achievement have been strongly related as evidenced by standardized test scores, particularly in reading and mathematics (Hipp, 1996; Shaukat & Iqbal, 2012). Also, principal behaviors were found to significantly influence teacher motivation and student achievement in the following ways: (a) recognizing and supporting efforts, (b) clarifying roles and expectations, (c) encouraging a sense of competence and confidence in teachers and students, (d) empowering teachers in decision-making, (e) protecting the staff from external pressures and intrusions, and (f) building bonds of community within the school. Simply stated, principals influence student learning through their work with teachers (Marzano et al., 2003). With the growing demands and rising expectations facing principals in their daily work, their leadership is at the center of school improvement and can be a predictor of teachers' self-efficacy (Derbedek, 2008 as cited by Calik et al., 2012).

Theoretical Framework

Bandura (1997) theorized the concept of self-efficacy as a person's attitudes, abilities, and cognitive skills that comprise the self-system, which plays a major role in the perception of situations and response behaviors. Self-efficacy is an essential part of this self-system. According to Bandura (1997), the four major areas of self-efficacy are mastery experiences, social modeling, social persuasion, and psychological responses. These areas are the sources from which self-efficacy derives.

Bandura's social cognitive theory provided the theoretical framework for this study. Social cognitive theory is based on the idea that individuals are agents proactively engaged in their own learning (Bandura, 1986). Key ideas within this theory are that individuals possess self-beliefs that enable them to control their thoughts, feelings, and actions. The idea that an individual has the potential to influence change, regardless of skill, is central to the social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986). Bandura (1986, 1997) also asserted that behavior, both cognitive and other personal factors, interacts with an individual's environment to influence through a process known as reciprocal determinism. This term, identified by Bandura (1997), refers to the relationship between cognition, behavior, and the environment.

Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998) further developed these concepts, stating that the perception of one's capabilities is more influential on one's performance than the actual level of ability. Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998) have proposed an integrated model of teacher self-efficacy that considers the research contributions of Rotter (1966) and Bandura (1997). This model includes the analysis of both teaching tasks and the context in which these tasks exist. Hence, both internal and external factors can influence a teacher's perception of a student's capacity to accomplish a given task (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). Further explained, self-efficacy is a cognitive process and, therefore, the process of performance, reflection, and assessment are repeated. As efficacy increases, so does effort and persistence. On the contrary, negative experiences mirror the same effect; failed tasks leading to lower self-efficacy lead to less effort, persistence, and resilience (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). Efficacy is a predictor of success and achievement in teaching.

Discovering the relationship between teacher self-efficacy and principal leadership behaviors was the goal of this study.

This study examined the relationship between principals' leadership behaviors and teacher self-efficacy and was guided by the following questions:

- (a) Are teachers' perceptions of their principal leadership different by years of experience?
- (b) Do teachers' ratings of their principals' leadership predict their own level of self-efficacy?
- (c) What are teachers' perceptions of principal leadership behaviors?

Method

Research Design

An explanatory mixed-methods design was utilized in this study. Participants responded to a survey to determine their perceptions of their principal's leadership as well as their level of self-efficacy. After analyzing the quantitative data, the qualitative portion of the study was initiated to better explain the quantitative results.

Participants and Setting

A purposeful sample of ($n = 144$) teachers from 11 combined-level schools in a large urban school district in Texas was solicited to complete the Teacher's Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2001) and the Principal Leadership Questionnaire (PLQ; Jantzi & Leithwood, 1996). The sample of teachers was drawn from the district's combined-level campuses that serve students from kindergarten through eighth grade. At the end of the survey, teachers were then invited to volunteer to participate in a face-to-face interview. Only teachers classified as full-time employees were included in the study. The sample of teachers possessed a range of experience and taught various content areas and grade levels. The majority of the participants were female (83%), white (37%), and were 40-49 years old.

Instrumentation

The TSES was developed by Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk-Hoy (2001) to determine teachers' beliefs in their ability to make a difference in student learning as well as the ability to successfully teach students who are difficult to manage or are unmotivated. The TSES asked teachers to assess their ability related to instructional strategies, student engagement, and classroom management (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2001). This study used the short 12-item version of the TSES, designed for in-service teachers with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.86.

The PLQ was used to measure and assess principal leadership behaviors as observed by the teacher participants. The six PLQ leadership practices consist of Provides Vision, Fosters Commitment, Provides Individual Support, Provides Intellectual Stimulation, Models Behavior, and Holds High Performance Expectations. The 24-item survey includes a 5-point Likert response scale that incorporates specific behaviors to assess in each competency area (Jantzi & Leithwood, 1996). The Cronbach's alpha for the PLQ ranges from .77 to .88 (Mees, 2008). The PLQ has been used in studies examining principal leadership practices, particularly focusing on instructional and/or transformational leadership (Blase & Blase, 1999; Jantzi & Leithwood, 1996).

Data Collection Procedures

The data collection phase began by contacting the school principal at each of the combined-level schools regarding teacher participation in the study. Once the researcher received approval from the principal, an e-mail was sent to the teachers to introduce the study. The TSES and PLQ online surveys were administered using Qualtrics, and an anonymous link was sent to the teachers via e-mail. At the end of the survey, teachers were asked to volunteer to participate in an interview. A total of 13 teachers participated in an interview. The teachers were asked nine questions regarding their level of self-efficacy and their principals' leadership behaviors and practices. The interviews were 30 to 45 minutes in length, audiotaped, and transcribed at the conclusion of each interview.

Data Analysis

To determine if teachers' perceptions of their principal leadership were different by years of experience, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine if teachers' years of experience significantly predict their perceptions of their principals' leadership skills. Teachers' years of experience was treated as a categorical variable in the analysis. A simple linear regression was calculated to determine if teachers' ratings of their principals' leadership behaviors significantly predicted their own self-efficacy. The dependent variable or outcome measure was the teacher's sum score on the TSES survey. The independent variable was the PLQ sum score.

To determine teachers' perceptions of their principal's leadership, an inductive coding process was applied to find emergent themes in the teachers' interview responses. The data gathered from the interviews were analyzed throughout the collection process. The researcher transcribed the responses to the individual interviews and analyzed them to determine the themes and codes. The coded data were framed to provide general, identified themes and more abstract, complex themes. After the coding was completed, the researcher transferred the data into categories to support leadership principles, practices, and strategies.

To ensure reliability, the researcher documented the procedures of the study, including as many details within each step as possible (Yin, 2003). The reliability procedures of checking transcripts for accuracy, as well as comparing data with the codes and memo writing, were followed (Gibbs, 2007). Themes that provided overarching commonalities between the perceptions of the principals' leadership behaviors were developed and summarized. To ensure quality and validity of the data gathered from the interviews, Creswell (2009) recommends the following strategies: triangulation; member checking; rich, thick description; bias; discrepant information; and peer debriefing.

Results

An ANOVA, which was conducted to determine if teachers' perceptions of their principals' leadership skills were different by years of experience. Analysis of variance was used because the independent variable, years of experience, was treated as a categorical variable (1-5 years, 6-10 years, etc.) The results indicate that teachers' perceptions of their principals' leadership skills were not different by years of experience, $F(3, 96) = 1.56, p = .20$.

Simple linear regression was used to determine if teachers' rating of their principals' leadership behaviors significantly predicted their own self-efficacy. The calculations revealed that

the PLQ score significantly predicted the teachers' sense of efficacy scores, $F(1, 98) = 9.3, p = .003$.

With regard to the parameter estimates for TSES scores as predicted by the PLQ score, findings suggested that when the PLQ score was 0, the TSES score would be 73.4. For every unit increase in PLQ score, there was an increase of .17 in the TSES score, meaning, as teachers' perceptions of their principal's leadership increased, they had an increase in their own self-efficacy.

In order to ascertain the perceptions teachers held about their principal's leadership, an inductive coding process that was applied to find emergent themes in the teachers' interview responses. Four major emergent themes were identified across the teachers' interviews, regardless of teaching assignment or content area: (a) autonomy, (b) trust, (c) leading by example, and (d) professional development. Themes unique to the four correlated factors of self-efficacy, instructional strategies, student engagement, and classroom management, also emerged. These themes were organized through the aspect of principal leadership behaviors that enhanced or diminished teacher self-efficacy in the three related factors. Common themes, which were reported across the teacher interviews, will be reported first followed by the themes that were unique to instructional strategies, student engagement, and classroom management. Themes that emerged from teachers' perceptions of their principals' leadership strengths and weaknesses were also reported.

Autonomy

Autonomy was a recurring factor that teachers connected to their perception of principal leadership behaviors, both positively and negatively. This theme emerged in nearly two-thirds of the participants' responses. From most responses, the teachers felt that principals' ability to release control and give them freedom in the classroom made a positive impact on the way they approached their job as a teacher. An example of the teachers' opinions who felt their principals allowed the participants to operate autonomously included,

She generally allows us to be autonomous and take responsibility for our classrooms. I really appreciate that. I don't have to do any sort of asking [or getting permission] about my curriculum, or what I want to teach, or really how I want to teach...I feel like I have a lot of control over my classroom most of the time.

Two of the participants felt that allowing too much autonomy adversely impacted their perception of their principals' leadership behaviors. Leon shared, "We're trusted to do what we're there to do, but we need a national system for some things. Maybe there's too much delegated power for some things. We do need some strictness and guidance."

Overall, the interview participants shared positive perceptions of their principals' leadership when they allowed them to work autonomously and independently in their daily efforts. However, too much autonomy resulted in negative perceptions of principal leadership as two participants equated excess freedom to a lack of rules, structure, and direct principal involvement in key school activities.

Trust

Another common theme that emerged from the teacher interviews was trust as a leadership behavior. The teachers who mentioned trust in their responses all described it in the positive sense and perceived their principals' leadership as stronger for this reason. This theme was present in five of the participants' responses. There were recurring comments centered on principals who demonstrate trust in their teachers' classroom performance.

Darla stated,

I do sense that my principal has a great deal of trust in the teachers' ability to teach and in their knowledge of the content. I feel there is trust because he hired us and thinks we are capable of doing our jobs. I also feel an increased level of respect that I have for my principal, knowing I'm supported and trusted to do my job well.

Teachers perceive trust from the principal as confidence in their knowledge and abilities.

Overall, teachers expressed a positive perception of their principals' leadership when there was a recognizable level of trust that was demonstrated by the principal. The teachers also perceived a high sense of trust from the principal when they believed they were allowed to perform their job duties as capable and effective professional educators.

Leading by Example

Another common perception that teachers had of their principals' leadership behaviors was their ability to lead by example. This referred to the principal's ability to model behaviors and what they wish to see in others within the school community. Modeling desirable behavior is perceived as the most impressionable approach to setting an example for others. Alicia expressed optimism and inspiration from her principals and shared her perceptions of her principal leading by example when she stated:

She [my principal] is super active. She is always really positive by greeting the students and kissing them on the forehead. She models the behavior I know I should be exhibiting to the students, even on their worst days or even on my worst days. She also is super understanding with the demographics and the situations we have here.

Maria described ways her principal leads by example by stating, "My principal definitely does everything that he asks us to do. Everything is about the students. For example, student involvement - he's there, he's involved, he's a role model."

The overall consensus among the teachers was that principal leadership behaviors can be modeled for others to follow. They elevate the teachers' level of buy-in and support for the principal as they see the principal committing to the very acts that he or she says are important.

Professional Development

The fourth common theme in teachers' perceptions of principals' leadership behaviors was access

to and encouragement to attend professional development. The teachers' responses indicated that they view professional development as an opportunity to learn more about teaching methodologies or resources, and improve their teaching practice. Moreover, principals who willingly offer these opportunities and encourage teachers to attend were demonstrating a commitment to supporting their achievement toward individual professional goals. Martha Kate shared her thoughts on access to professional development by stating,

She [my principal] provides access to a lot of resources, and that definitely enhances and has been very helpful to me because it's my first year. She's given me the access to go to trainings during the school day. She's been generous with budget for trainings in content areas that I'm not familiar with.

Teachers feel valued when their principal demonstrates a commitment to their development and improvement.

There were several factors that were associated with professional development and teachers' perceptions of principal leadership. Factors such as having access to quality professional development and the principal encouraging teachers to attend workshops was prominently discussed. Teachers believed that their principal was committed to their growth and quest to achieve their professional goals when they encouraged them to attend professional development, use what they learned in the classroom, and share those practices with each other.

Enhancing and Diminishing Leadership Behaviors

Participants were asked three questions regarding the constructs, or correlating factors, of self-efficacy: In what ways does your principal enhance or diminish your ability to implement effective instructional strategies? The question was posed similarly for student engagement and classroom management as correlating factors of self-efficacy. Themes related to the principal enhancing or diminishing instructional strategies included professional support and resources, and the principal's instructional leadership. Two unique themes that emerged when discussing student engagement were positive relationships and classroom expectations. Emergent themes from participant responses regarding classroom management included consistency and support.

The teachers stated that professional support and resources were important aspects of their principals' leadership, and ways their instructional strategies were enhanced or diminished. Martha Kate shared, "My principal provides access to a lot of resources and to needed trainings." Leon also commented on resources from the principal enhancing instructional strategies in his classroom by stating, "She shares information with us regularly from the district that we can use with our students. We're also given freedom to teach how we need to teach using various resources that are available to us." Katherine extended the ideas around resources to further include,

Instruction in my classroom is enhanced by the environment the principal has created. He has invested in instructional support such as a math coach, a reading specialist, and dyslexia specialist. He values these human resources to support instruction and I like having these experts around to help me get better as a teacher.

Amy commented on principal leadership behaviors that diminish her ability to implement effective instructional strategies. She said, “Having too many programs to focus on at once makes me lose traction.” Her comment aligned with the ideas that teachers perceive principal leadership to be a major factor in their ability to deliver high-quality instruction. Moreover, they realize how the impact of principals’ instructional leadership ties into their success.

Another theme that emerged when the teachers discussed principal leadership behaviors and student engagement was relationships with students. Two teachers described the importance of student relationships in their school and the emphasis their principal placed on them. Alicia stated,

I see my principal and the relationships she has with our kids. It pushes me to keep having those relationships as well and to engage my students by understanding what’s going on in their lives...and to know their interests. I think that keeps it going in my classroom, as far as my instruction.

Alicia believed strong relationships with the students in their school was one of her principal’s most emphasized imperatives. Alicia discussed her principal’s interactions with students, the importance of knowing the students, and maintaining a relationship with every student.

Another emerging theme related to student engagement and the teachers’ perceptions of their principals’ leadership was modeling the expectations. Katherine stated,

There is a high expectation in the school as to what goes on in a classroom. We have a common practice of using visuals to make our classrooms engaging spaces, and our principal has set a bar for reimagining how classrooms look and operate.

These teachers realized their principals emphasize strong student relationship and the interrelatedness of strong relationships to student engagement.

The discussions around classroom management drew comments on principals enhancing and or diminishing teachers’ ability to effectively manage their classroom. The teachers’ perceptions of principal leadership varied in both areas. Support from the principal enhances classroom management. Three teachers connected classroom management and principal support in their responses. An underlying theme herein was mentoring, which one teacher coupled with support. Darla stated,

Consistency and support are the key. It’s nice to have a behavioral management system that is uniformly implemented across the school. Plus, the leadership team provides support on these kinds of issues immediately. They address it with urgency.

Two teachers described their principals’ support in classroom management similarly as “having their back” in student and or parent situations. The teachers believed their ability to manage their classroom effectively was enhanced when they had their principals’ support. On the contrary, three teachers shed light on principal leadership behaviors that diminished their ability to effectively manage their classroom. Amy candidly described how her principal’s inconsistent approach to student behavior diminished her ability to effectively manage her classroom. She said,

“In terms of classroom management, we do not get a lot of support from our principal at all. There’s really not a discipline system in place in our school that has any regularity.”

Leon discussed the inconsistencies in school-wide behavior management when he said, “We need more guidance on mid-level classroom management issues. For example, how to handle those behaviors that are worse than being tardy [to class], but a student who won’t stop talking.” From their responses, it is apparent that consistency in school-wide rules and consequences is very important, as well as providing support when tense student or parent situations arise.

Key Leadership Behaviors

The participants were asked to reflect on their principals’ leadership behaviors as identified by the Principal Leadership Questionnaire (Jantzi & Leithwood, 1996). Six leadership qualities were described in detail along with characteristics that are central to each. The first part of the question focused on the teachers’ perception of the area in which his or her principal was most skilled and ways these practices increased their sense of self-efficacy. Conversely, the participants were asked about their principals’ weakest leadership behavior and how it diminished their level of self-efficacy.

There were commonalities in teachers’ perceptions of their principals’ key leadership strengths. Themes emerged as nearly one-half of the teachers interviewed discussed two areas in which their principal was most skilled, which included providing vision and fostering commitment. Four teachers referred to their principal providing a vision for the school, while two teachers described their principal as most skilled in fostering commitment. Teachers shared perceptions of these behaviors and their sense of self-efficacy.

The teachers stated that knowing the vision for the school was important, citing it as an essential aspect to forecasting their future and giving them a sense of direction as a school community. Having a strong vision provided teachers with a sense of direction for all members of the school community. Similarly, two teachers perceived the area of fostering commitment through demonstrating an understanding for personal life situations to ensuring ongoing communication and accessibility to be their principals’ strongest leadership skill.

As perceived leadership strengths were highlighted, principals’ leadership weaknesses were also discussed. Two central themes emerged as leadership behaviors that were perceived to be the principals’ weakest areas, including principals’ inability to provide individual support and holding high expectations for all.

Providing individual support to a teacher was cited as an area that was lacking in principals’ leadership practice. Darla commented, “My principal is so far removed from my classroom. He approaches everything in the school, issues and problems, from a large scale.” The teachers’ responses indicate their thoughts about individualized support and attention to their class or content area, and to their overall performance as a teacher.

The other area that was perceived as the principals’ weakest leadership skill was related to demonstrating high performance expectations for all staff members. According to these teachers, high performance expectations were lacking most when the principals did not hold teachers accountable for maintaining excellence in their teaching practice, or overall job performance, resulting in mediocre performance.

Discussion

The quantitative data indicated there was not a significant difference in teachers' perceptions of principals' leadership behaviors by years of experience. These findings are indirectly reinforced by the interview responses that indicated teachers' perceptions of principals' leadership, of which skills and characteristics were identified without respect to years of experience. Several research studies indicated the importance of leadership practices such as allowing teachers autonomy and flexibility, providing a common purpose and vision for the school, and creating a safe school environment (Moore & Esselman, 1992; Hipp & Bredeson, 1995; Marzano et al., 2003; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007; and Cansoy & Parlar, 2018). Pearson and Moomaw (2005) linked teacher autonomy to teacher empowerment, stating that teachers are empowered when they are granted the freedom to make instructional decisions in their classroom. Hipp and Bredeson (1995) asserted that leaders who establish a common purpose for the school and create an orderly environment enhance teachers' efficacy. Additionally, teachers' perceptions of fewer impediments in their work and access to resources had a stronger sense of efficacy (Moore & Esselman, 1992).

The PLQ score significantly predicted the teachers' sense of self-efficacy scores. These results are supported by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy's (2007) findings regarding verbal persuasion, in which they asserted that a teacher's success extends from many sources, including administrators, colleagues, parents, and persons from the school community. Similarly, Bandura (1977) asserted that through social persuasion, principals can influence teachers' level of self-efficacy by sharing persuading words to help them overcome self-doubt and focus on their skills, attributes, and giving their best effort. Hoy's (2000) research tied this together by finding that such persuasion is likely to lose its positive impact if subsequent experiences repeatedly yield defeat.

The findings here revealed that there was a significant relationship between teachers' sense of efficacy and principal leadership behaviors. These findings are supported by conclusions Guskey (1987) reached in a study involving elementary and secondary teachers in which he concluded that neither years of experience nor teaching assignment was significantly related to any of the perceptual or attitudinal variables of new program implementation. The variable differences did not associate with teachers' experience or the grade level at which they taught, according to Guskey (1987). On the contrary, Wolters and Daugherty (2007, as cited in Klassen & Chiu, 2010) conducted a study that showed modest correlations between years of experience and self-efficacy for instructional strategies and classroom management, and no effect for self-efficacy in student engagement and years of experience. The qualitative data indicated that teachers' perceptions of principal leadership were significantly related to leadership behaviors they demonstrate on a daily basis, the support principals provided to the teachers, and the leadership strengths and weaknesses they possess. These perceptions are highly correlated to the research presented by Marzano et al. (2003) in which principal behaviors were found to significantly influence those of teachers, particularly through actions such as encouraging a sense of competence and confidence in teachers and empowering teachers in decision-making.

One of the themes that emerged in the qualitative analysis was teacher autonomy to perform one's job. Factors that teachers discussed included being free to make decisions in content materials and lesson sequence, and the positive impact this made on the way they approached their job as a teacher. This was consistent with research that identified autonomy as one of the most important aspects of teacher success. A lack of autonomy may upend a teacher's level of efficacy (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Pearson and Moomaw (2005) cited the lack of teacher autonomy as a critical

component of teacher motivation and a reason teachers leave the profession.

Another theme that emerged from the interviews around teacher perceptions of principal leadership was trust. The teachers revealed their perceptions of their principals' level of trust in them, while also describing the trust they have in the principals, which was based on actions the principals had consistently demonstrated over several years. This aligns with the research of Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (1998), which concluded that trust should exist in school leadership, in particular, teachers' trust in the principal. These conclusions are also supported by the research findings of Bryk and Schneider (2003) who stated that the principal needs to be trusted to be able to lead the school staff, to collaborate with members of the faculty, and in other efforts such as providing guidance, resources, and support.

Other evidence of trust pointed to principals demonstrating trust in their teachers to perform effectively in the classroom as these comments recurred in multiple interviews. Moreover, teachers perceived trust from the principal as a testament of their confidence in their knowledge and abilities.

This study also found that teachers have a strong perception of principals leading by example, or modeling behavior, and value it as an asset that undergirds their own success. Another commonality among the teachers in the study was that modeling behavior was perceived as the most impressionable approach to setting an example for others to follow. Muhammad's (2009) research supported these ideas in which he concluded that the human factor of schools, particularly through school leaders, immensely impacts the way things are done in a school. Teachers pointed out observations of their principals' interactions with students, parents, and other staff members. The overall consensus among the teachers was that principal leadership behaviors can be modeled for others to follow. Giles et al. (2005) and Griffith (1999) recognized these dynamic observations in their research, stating that principals function in social, economic, and political contexts that are diverse in nature.

The final common theme that emerged across the teacher interviews was professional development and principals who promoted the opportunity to attain meaningful professional learning. Providing access and support for personalized professional learning with direct links to the classroom is necessary for teachers' ongoing growth and development over time (Dolighan & Owen, 2021). Fullan (2005) confirmed that supporting teachers and building their capacity are core features of effective principal leadership. The teachers in this study felt valued when their principal demonstrated a commitment to their development and improvement. Further aligned with these findings was principals' responsibility for ensuring coherent, relevant professional development experiences that is sustained over time from a firmly-laid foundation they can build upon, which promote teacher competence and confidence (West Ed, 2000; and Matherson & Windle, 2017).

Implications

Teacher self-efficacy is a critical factor in a teacher's success in the classroom. According to Bang and Frost (2012), teachers with a strong sense of self-efficacy will be resilient, solve problems with greater effectiveness, and most importantly, learn from their experience. These ideas align with the social cognitive theory, the theoretical framework of this study (Bandura, 1986). According to Bandura (1986), an individual possesses self-beliefs that enable him or her to control their thoughts, feelings, and actions. The conclusion that teachers with higher efficacy are "more open to new ideas and are more willing to experiment with new methods to better meet the needs

of their students” (Protheroe, 2008 , p. 43), as well as more committed to teaching (Coladarci, 1992) is supported by the social cognitive theory. Recent research promoting teacher effectiveness has been conducted, finding that leadership practices and behaviors have the potential to positively affect teachers’ lifelong professional development in the school context and to empower them toward a commitment to change (Emmanouil, et al., 2014). Moreover, effective leadership has a key role in motivating teachers toward success (Emmanouil et al., 2014).

These findings are important and have the potential to inform teacher and leadership preparation programs, as well as professional development and training that is tailored to meet teachers with varied skill sets in teaching. Although teachers can recover from negative experiences they attribute to their principals’ leadership practices and experience success in the classroom, their performance is higher overall when their principal demonstrates one of the six leadership behaviors as described in the PLQ (Jantzi & Leithwood, 1997; Kouzes & Posner, 2012). Principals should first become aware of these leadership practices, reflect on those they possess or lack, and gain a deeper understanding of how these practices can positively impact their teachers’ performance if exercised consistently.

Additionally, the level of confidence teachers possess, and the extent to which the teachers believe in their ability, greatly influences student behavior and academic achievement (Friedman & Kass, 2001). Teacher preparation programs that do not bring this matter to the forefront should provide opportunities for teacher candidates to know the correlation exists and help them develop strategies to overcome them. Similarly, principal leadership programs and professional development initiatives should also raise awareness around the impact, both positive and negative, that leadership practices can have on a teacher’s overall effectiveness in the classroom. With rising expectations of teachers and principals, it is imperative that teachers experience success in the classroom and possess a high level of efficacy to move beyond the many obstacles they may face in teaching.

Recommendations for Future Research

Several recommendations are presented for future research. First, this study should be extended to first year teachers whose level of self-efficacy is compared to the same teacher three years later. The classroom experiences, teaching assignments, school climate, and other factors would need to be considered in the data collection and analysis.

Secondly, student achievement data of teachers who possess a high level of self-efficacy could be compared to that of students of teachers with lower levels of self-efficacy since research has shown a correlation between teacher self-efficacy and student achievement outcomes. Such a study would refute or affirm previous studies with findings pointing to the direct associations between teacher self-efficacy and student achievement.

Another recommended research study focuses on principal leadership practice, in which an instrument such as the PLQ would be applied with principals to gather feedback and promote self-reflection as opposed to using it as an evaluative tool to increase the likelihood of principals learning from the feedback as a means of improving their effectiveness as a leader. Because the PLQ is intended to be completed anonymously and can be used as a 360-feedback tool, principals would gather the unique perspectives of their subordinates, peers, and superiors. In addition, it could be used as self-assessment tool to allow the principal to reflect on the leadership practices observed by others and compare them those completed by the teachers.

Conclusion

The findings of this research study affirm the importance of effective teachers and principals. Every classroom needs a strong teacher. Teacher quality is the single most impactful school characteristic that significantly impacts student achievement. Arguably as important as an effective teacher is an effective principal, for they select and cultivate strong teachers. Principals who are instructional leaders create a school culture that promotes the very qualities teachers are expected to possess - resilience, problem solving, risk taking, lifelong learning, to name a few. They intentionally create opportunities for growth through purposeful interactions among the key stakeholders in the school community. Moreover, such interactions promote teachers' freedom to take risks and learn together, thus, contributing to a positive school culture. Conclusively, the relationship between effective teachers and effective principals is compelling and they are infinitely connected in their associations with overall school effectiveness.

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How Motivating Language Mediates Rural Superintendent Credibility and Impacts their Leadership Effectiveness and Job Satisfaction

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This study focused on the dimensions of source credibility and their impact on superintendent leadership effectiveness and principal job satisfaction when mediated by motivating language as part of rural superintendents' administrative talk and practice. Principal perception survey data was used in this cross-sectional study. Over 40% of the principals from a top-ten ranked state located in a rural western area of United States of America responded to the online survey. In general, the relationships between the dimension, goodwill, competence, and trustworthiness were mediated by motivating language. The path analysis findings suggest that Motivating Language (ML) serves as an important mechanism for superintendent communication effectiveness in achieving the outcomes of principal job satisfaction and superintendent leadership effectiveness. The results are discussed, along with implications for practice and future research.

Keywords: Motivating Language Theory, Motivating Language, Credibility, Superintendent Talk, Rural Superintendent

A superintendent's ability to communicate is vital to the roles of the superintendency, including the leadership and managerial aspects of the position. *Superintendents, in general*, use their talk to accomplish the work of the superintendency in an *intentional* and *strategic* manner known as Motivating Language Theory [MLT] (Holmes & Parker, 2019; Williams, 2017). Other communication theories and models exist within educational leadership, such as communication accommodation theory (see Green, 2010) or relational communication (Kowalski, 2015). We chose to examine Motivating Language Theory because not only what a school or district leader says matters (Hindman, Seiders, & Grant, 2009) but as a leadership communication theory focused on employees' and organizations' motivation and persuasion (Mayfield, Mayfield, & Walker, 2020) Motivating Language Theory is strongly aligned to the definition of leadership espoused by Johnson and Hackman. "Leadership is human communication that modifies the attitudes and behaviors of others in order to meet shared group goals and needs" (2018, p. 12). As educational leaders' discourse and dialogue with various groups and individuals, their leadership talk becomes an effective motivational tool that helps meet school and district outcomes, as well as individual ones (Yildiz, 2016). The purpose of this study is to understand how Motivating Language mediates rural superintendents' credibility (e.g., Goodwill, Competence, and Trustworthiness) to impact their leadership effectiveness and principal job satisfaction.

Rural Superintendents

As rural superintendents communicate their thoughts and ideas orally using the strategic and mindful framework of MLT (Mayfield & Mayfield, 2018; Mayfield, Mayfield & Kopf, 1995; Sullivan, 1988), they exercise a magnified and strengthened form of leadership needed to accomplish the diverse needs and goals of a rural district often within an understaffed and under-resourced district/central office environment that is often overburdened (Forner, Bierlein-Palmer & Reeves, 2012). Henwood (2016, p. 13), in a discussion of rural superintendents in Colorado, identified eight American Association of School Administrators (AASA) superintendent roles as communications and community relations, leadership and district culture, human resource management, organizational management, values and ethics of leadership, instructional management, and policy and governance. Copeland (2013) identified five superintendent roles as manager, planner, listener, communicator, and community involvement for the rural Western superintendent. Wilson (2010) indicated that strong communication was necessary for a rural superintendent to be an effective leader, and Davidson and Butcher (2019) noted that at the managerial level, it was vital for rural superintendents to communicate the importance of resources. In discussing the leadership practices of effective rural superintendents, Forner, Bierlein-Palmer, and Reeves (2012) said, "Leadership practices are the daily actions, activities, and habits the school [and district] leader use to actively pursue leadership priorities" (p. 6).

The Problem Statement

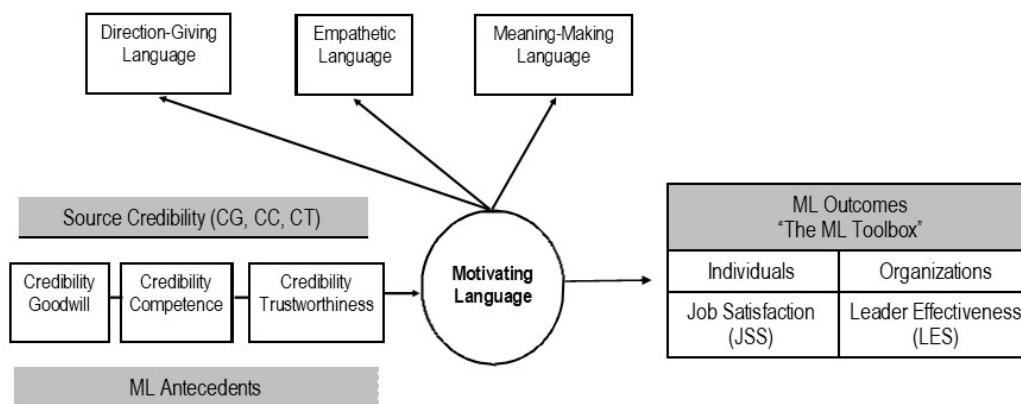
Rural superintendents communicate orally (i.e., talk) over 70% of the time to carry out the roles, leadership, managerial, and leadership priorities of their positions (Holmes, 2021). Thus, superintendent talk is used by a superintendent to perform the leadership roles, leadership, management, and priorities of the superintendency. As superintendents lead with goodwill, competency, and Motivating Language, they address key rural education research priorities (NREA, 2016) such as the rural empathy gap, the rural principal retention/turnover rate, and

employee self-efficacy and well-being, among others (Holmes, Parker, Olsen & Khojasteh, 2021).

Rural superintendents who lack interpersonal skills [communication, listening, reflection, etc.] must create positive relationships or potentially position themselves for nonrenewal (Tekniepe, 2015). Thus, for rural superintendents to be effective, not only must they communicate and talk well, but they must also communicate and talk with Motivating Language Theory (Holmes & Parker, 2019; Holmes, Parker, Olsen & Khojasteh, 2021). However, among rural superintendents, principals’ perceptions of their ML use and influence of credibility (goodwill, competency, and trustworthiness) on two outcomes (1) leadership effectiveness and (2) job satisfaction of principals has yet to be studied. We want to have a better understanding of the role of Motivating Language as a mediator when examining rural superintendents’ credibility (goodwill, competency, and trustworthiness) on the outcomes of (1) superintendent leadership effectiveness and (2) principal job satisfaction. See Figure 1.

Figure 1

Components of Motivating Language Theory Under Study



(See Holmes & Parker, 2019 for Full Model with all Components)

Review of Literature

The literature review covers Superintendent Credibility, Talk, and Effectiveness. Also, it encompasses Source Credibility, Motivating Language Theory, and Leadership Effectiveness, and Job Satisfaction. These topics are discussed in relation to the existing literature on rurality.

Source Credibility and Superintendent Credibility

Source Credibility (McCroskey & Teven, 1999) is composed of three dimensions (a) goodwill [caring], (b) competence [expertness], and (c) trustworthiness [character]. A superintendent who demonstrates behaviors within the dimension of goodwill/caring focuses on empathy, understanding, and responsiveness (Myers & Martin, 2015). Superintendents exhibiting goodwill identify with employee feelings, comprehend employee needs and ideas, and attend and listen to their employees. Competence combines leadership, work knowledge, and expertise (Richmond, McCroskey & McCroskey, 2005) and focuses within a subject area (Myers & Martin, 2015), i.e., the superintendency, instructional leadership, or finance. Trustworthiness or character is made up

of integrity, honesty, and truthfulness and centers on the degree to which a leader is trusted (Myers & Martin, 2015). Myers and Martin (2015) noted that credibility is associated with effectiveness.

In terms of superintendent credibility, Peterson and Short (2001) categorized credibility as expertise (specialized knowledge and skill) and trustworthiness (district stewardship). They stressed that credibility in the form of superintendent influence, particularly in rural districts, was crucial in creating board agendas and supporting board decision-making. Jenkins (2007) expanded the theme of trustworthiness to include ethical standards as well as high standards in financial decision-making, providing the following illustrative example, “Our community expects me to be at least as ethical as the local preachers” (p. 31). This ethical theme was first established by Copeland and Chance (1996), in which they noted that moral attributes contributed to longer-tenured rural superintendents than shorter-tenured ones.

Motivating Language Theory and Superintendent Talk

Motivating Language (ML) is a variable manifested by a superintendent’s skillful and artful orchestration of the three ML constructs: direction-giving language, empathetic language, and meaning-making language. As a superintendent uses these three forms of language fluidly based on situational factors, contextual clues, and employee feedback, they find the maximum influence and impact of these language modes. This is known as ML ability (Mayfield & Mayfield, 2015, 2018). Direction-giving language is not barking orders or issuing decrees from on high, but concrete communication that reduces employee uncertainty (Holmes & Parker, 2019).

Williams (2017) reported that superintendents in the construct of direction-giving language improved principal clarity by focusing on explanations, directions, advice, definitions, and evaluation information. Empathetic language is humanizing language that helps employees feel valued and bring their “whole self” to the workplace (Holmes & Parker, 2019). Williams (2017) found superintendents expressed concern for employee well-being and individual professional development in this area. Additionally, they offered extensive praise and encouragement to help principals feel an ethic of care and support endemic to the construct of empathetic language. Meaning-making language is culture-building, acclimatizing/inducting, and transformational language. Leaders can express it through stories, metaphors, verbal illustrations, or rich language full of examples. Such meaning-making language helps superintendents build sense-making, capacity, and culture within their organizations (Holmes & Parker, 2019). Within meaning-making language, Williams (2017) discovered that superintendents use past events often to help principals learn from past mistakes and prevent their repetition. This finding is consistent with past event simulation (Holmes & Parker, 2019).

In rural settings, superintendent talk enables superintendents to positively influence principal supervision and evaluation (Hvidston & McKim, 2019), student achievement and educational reform (Forner, Bierlein-Palmer & Reeves, 2012), community and public relations (Winand & Edlefsen, 2008), policy (Hall & McHenry-Sorber, 2017), and resource allocation (Davidson & Butcher, 2019). Henwood (2016) stated, “Superintendents of effective rural Colorado school districts perceived communications and community relations as the most critical role and generally perceived the AASA roles related to relationships and interpersonal skills as more important when compared to superintendents from ineffective school districts” (p. 88). Cormier (2004) discussed how rural directors (superintendents) in Saskatchewan used their verbal language in the areas of articulating a vision, providing access to information, being a resource finder, integrating existing and future visions into one, clarifying meaning and improving clarity,

creating a common working vocabulary, and being a facilitative leader.

Leadership Effectiveness and Job Satisfaction and Superintendent Effectiveness

Multiple outcomes are measured as part of the ML “Toolbox” (Holmes & Parker, 2018, 2019) ranging from student achievement and principal retention to leadership effectiveness and job satisfaction. Leadership effectiveness (Sharbrough, Simmons, & Cantrill, 2006) is defined as a leader’s ability to accomplish organizational goals, provide support for subordinate goals, and accomplish their own goals. Therefore, in the K-12 educational setting, a superintendent’s leadership effectiveness is best characterized by their ability to accomplish the district’s goals and objectives, support principals in the accomplishment of their school and professional goals, and the accomplishment of their own professional goals and directives. Employees’ job satisfaction is centered around factors of consideration (Sharbrough, Simmons, & Cantrill, 2006) and heavily impacts mental health and well-being (Mayfield & Mayfield, 2018). Job satisfaction is a measure of a principal’s self-assessment on their importance to the district and how well they like their school/district, work environment, and job tasks as mediated or influenced by their superintendent (Holmes & Parker, 2019; Mayfield & Mayfield, 2018).

Kowalski (2005) noted that superintendents use their talk to maximize their effectiveness. Kowalski (2013) observed that highly effective superintendents used their communications to influence culture, teachers’ behavior, and student achievement at the school level within their districts. Additionally, Parent (2009) pointed out, “Communication is ultimately the way in which a superintendent will get things accomplished – whether it is professional development efforts, high school closings or reorganizations, annual budgeting, or facilities planning” (p. 23-24). It is also clear that an important reason principals and superintendents lose their jobs is due to failures in communication (Davis, 1998; Davila, Holland & Jones, 2012; Kowalski, 2013; Tekniepe, 2015). Davis (1998) reported that administrators’ communication errors appear much earlier than knowledge or practitioner errors. Kowalski (2005, 2015) found that most school and district administrators completed their preservice education without a leadership communications course.

Methodology

Given the importance of communication and the existing literature on Motivating Language (ML), the purpose of this study was to examine the role of ML as a mediator when examining the dimensions of source credibility (goodwill, competency, and trustworthiness) with (1) superintendent leadership effectiveness and (2) principal job satisfaction. The research question, therefore, asks: to what degree does ML (as a mediator) influence the relationship among the dimensions of source credibility (goodwill, competency, and trustworthiness) and (1) superintendent leadership effectiveness and (2) principal job satisfaction? Based on the principal perceptions of Wyoming superintendents, the following hypotheses examine the mediated pathway instead of the direct path for the three dimensions of source credibility on the outcome variables (LES and JSS).

Leadership Effectiveness (LES)

- Hypothesis 1: Credibility Goodwill will have a stronger positive effect on LES when mediated through ML.
- Hypothesis 2: Credibility Competence will have a stronger positive effect on LES when mediated through ML.
- Hypothesis 3: Credibility Trustworthiness will have a stronger positive effect on LES when mediated through ML.

Job Satisfaction (JSS)

- Hypothesis 4: Credibility Goodwill will have a stronger positive effect on JSS when mediated through ML.
- Hypothesis 5: Credibility Competence will have a stronger positive effect on JSS when mediated through ML.
- Hypothesis 6: Credibility Trustworthiness will have a stronger positive effect on JSS when mediated through ML.

Research Context

This study was confined to Wyoming. This state has many Frontier Counties (19 out of 23) (Rural Health Information Hub, Frontier Counties Map, 2010) and associated rural school districts [95.9% of Wyoming Superintendents work in Rural: Remote/Distant/Fringe (58.4%) plus Town: Remote (37.5%) (NCES, 2015-16)]. However, it is worth noting that Wyoming is a state of K-12 excellence, placing in the top ten on many educational rankings such as Quality Counts (“Quality Counts,” 2018).

Participants

In 2017, principals from 47 districts in Wyoming received an email invitation to complete an IRB-approved survey. A total of 113 (out of 284) principals responded, yielding a 40% response rate. The respondents were primarily male (73%), Caucasian (96%), and between 41-55 years of age (59%). See Table 1.

Table 1
Demographic Profile of Survey Respondents

Category	Frequency	%
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	82	72.6
Female	31	27.4
<i>Race</i>		
Caucasian	108	95.6

Category	Frequency	%
American Indian	2	1.8
Asian	1	.9
African American	1	.9
<i>Age (in years)</i>		
26–30	1	.9
31–35	6	5.3
36–40	16	14.3
41–45	21	18.8
46–50	23	20.5
51–55	22	19.6
56–60	17	15.2
61–65	4	3.6
66–70	2	1.8
<i>Level of Education</i>		
Master’s Degree	95	84.1
Ed.S.	13	11.5
Doctorate	4	3.5
<i>Student Count in District</i>		
1–750	23	20.4
751–500	27	23.9
1501+	63	55.8

Online Survey

The data originated from an online survey of Wyoming principals providing perceptions of their superintendent. The survey consisted of four scales from the Motivating Language Toolbox (Sharbrough, Simmons, & Cantrill, 2006) previously administered in educational leadership (Holmes, 2012; Holmes & Parker, 2018, 2019, 2020). First, the Motivating Language scale was developed from three variables (i.e., direction-giving language, empathetic language, and meaning-making language) with 24 items altogether. The Likert scale ranged from one to five. For the sake of this study, the Motivating Language variable (ML) is operationalized as an observed

variable comprised of a summed score of the three variables mentioned. Cronbach's alpha was 0.96.

Secondly, Source Credibility (McCroskey and Teven, 1999) is composed of three variables (a) goodwill [caring] (CG), (b) competence [expertness] (CC), and (c) trustworthiness [character] (CT). For each of these variables, the Likert scale ranged from one to seven. Based on McCroskey and Teven (1999), credibility is not a latent variable comprised of goodwill, competence, and trustworthiness. Hence, these measures were not summed to create a single score. Cronbach's alpha for each of these variables is 0.88, 0.86, and 0.95, respectively.

Third, the Leadership Effectiveness Scale (Sharbrough, Simmons, & Cantrill, 2006) was based on three items. For each item, the Likert scale ranged from one to five. A score was created by summing the ratings for the items. Cronbach's alpha was 0.83.

Fourth, the Job Satisfaction Scale (Mayfield, Mayfield, & Kopf, 1995) comprises four items. The Likert scale for each item ranged from one to seven. The ratings for the four items were summed, and Cronbach's alpha was 0.85.

For additional information about all four scales, see Table 2. In summary, the scales were

- The Motivating Language Scale (Mayfield, Mayfield, & Kopf, 1995)
- The Source Credibility Scale (McCroskey & Teven, 1999)
- The Leadership Effectiveness Scale (Sharbrough, Simmons, & Cantrill, 2006)
- The Job Satisfaction Scale (Mayfield, Mayfield, & Kopf, 1995).

Data Analysis

In this study, indirect effects were evaluated using the Sobel mediation test, sometimes referred to as the delta test and the bootstrap method (Sobel, 1982; Baron & Kenny, 1986; Bollen & Stinte, 1990). The data were analyzed using R version 3.6.1. The distribution (i.e., normality) of the scaled scores for all observed variables in the model was evaluated using R, and there were no major violations of normality. Furthermore, when there are violations of normality, maximum likelihood estimation is robust for these types of data (Kline, 2015). The Sobel test and bootstrap method yielded the same substantial results as the lavaan package (Rosseel, 2012). For brevity, the Sobel test was presented. An alpha level of .05 was used to determine statistical significance.

Results

The descriptive statistics for the constructs are presented in Table 2. The means were high, indicating that most of the principals expressed agreement with the survey's statements.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics and Reliability analyses for the constructs

Construct	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	n of Items	Scale Range	Cronbach's α
ML	73.41	20.04	24	24–120	0.96
CC	36.3	5.94	6	6–42	0.86
CG	33.05	7.51	6	6–42	0.88
CT	35.93	7.25	6	6–42	0.95

LES	11.42	2.59	3	5–15	0.83
JSS	22.04	3.29	4	14–28	0.85

The correlations between constructs are presented in Table 3. The correlations range from $r = .27$ to $r = .81$ and were statistically significant ($p < .001$).

Table 3
Correlations for Each Variable

	ML	CC	CG	CT	LES	JSS
Motivating Language (ML)	1					
Competence (CC)	.59**	1				
Goodwill (CG)	.65**	.66**	1			
Trustworthiness (CT)	.60**	.79**	.81**	1		
Leader Effectiveness Scale (LES)	.78**	.75**	.62**	.71**	1	
Job Satisfaction Scale (JSS)	.46**	.41**	.39**	.27**	.44**	1

Note. ** $p < .001$.

For CG, the direct path on JSS ($b = .252, p > .05$) was not significant while the direct path on LES ($b = -.194, p < .05$) was significant, yet negative. The mediated path between CG and ML, however, was positive, with a stronger relationship and significant at the .01 level ($b = .466, p < .01$). Using the Sobel test, the indirect effects were also significant when mediated through ML to JSS (Sobel test = 2.21, $p < .05$) and when mediated through ML to LES (Sobel test = 4.43, $p < .001$). These findings confirm the hypothesized relationships between CG and JSS and CG and LES concerning the indirect effect of ML on those relationships. The direct relationship between CG and JSS, while positive, was not significant, and the direct relationship between CG and LES was statistically significant, albeit negative. Yet, when mediated through ML, the relationship was positive, stronger, and significant as hypothesized (H1 and H4).

For CC, the direct paths on JSS ($b = .359, p < .01$) and on LES ($b = .288, p < .05$) were both positive and significant. The mediated path between CC and ML was also positive and significant ($b = .299, p < .01$). In addition, the indirect effects were significant when mediated through ML to JSS (Sobel test = 1.97, $p < .05$) and when mediated through ML to LES (Sobel test = 3.10, $p < .01$). Again, these findings are consistent with the hypothesized relationships between CC on JSS and LES and confirm the strength of the effect of the mediation through ML (H2 and H5). Even though the direct path between CC and JSS was slightly stronger than the mediated path from CC to ML, the direct path between CC and LES was less strong than the mediated path. Further, the significance of the indirect effects from the Sobel mediation test support the hypothesized strength of the mediation through ML on the outcome variables.

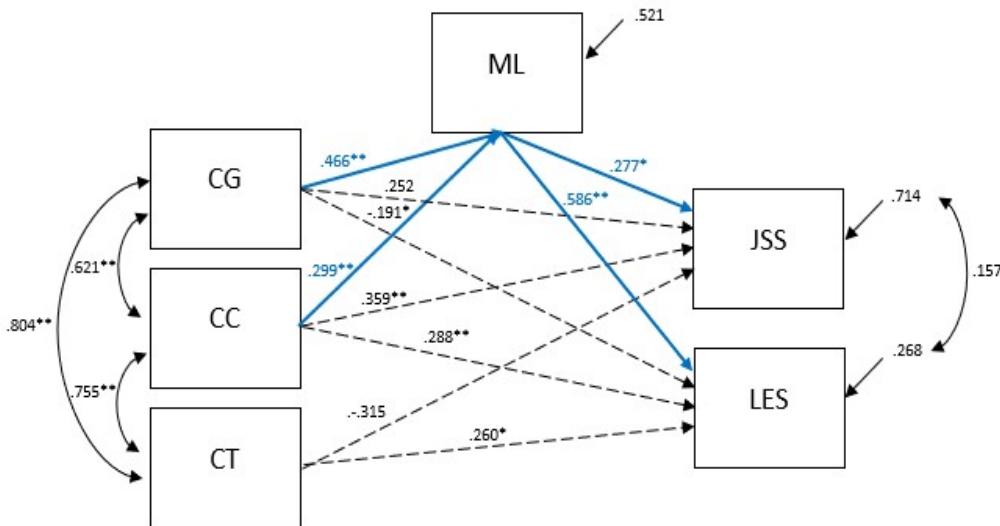
As for CT, the direct path between CT on JSS ($b = -.315, p > .05$) was negative and not significant while the direct path between CT on LES ($b = .260, p < .05$) was positive and significant

to the .05 level. The mediated path, however, through ML was insignificant and negative. These results were inconsistent with the hypothesized relationship between CT and JSS and LES when mediated through ML (H3 and H6). For the sake of parsimony in the model, the mediated pathway was eliminated in the final model. Trustworthiness is a critical dimension of source credibility and difficult to separate from goodwill and competency as all three are ultimately vital to the initial establishment of leader credibility and believability (Myers & Myers, 2015). Additionally, the authors assert that trust and trustworthiness are so commingled and intertwined, sharing both antecedent and outcome positionalities that for clarity in this study, it is better to address the issue of trustworthiness later with a more focused study and larger sample.

Further evidence of the strength of the mediation through ML is found in the significant amount of variance explained in the current mediation model. Collectively, CG and CC explained 47.9% of the variance in ML. As for the outcome variables, ML explained 28.6% of the variance in JSS and, more significantly, 73.2% of the variance in LES. Given the substantial amount of variance explained, these findings suggest that Motivating Language (ML) serves as an essential mechanism for leader communication effectiveness in achieving the outcomes of job satisfaction (JSS) and leadership effectiveness (LES). Lastly, the model yielded fit statistics to be expected with a saturated model, as seen in Figure 2. With only one degree of freedom, we are cautious to over-interpret model fit due to the model being just barely over-identified. For this reason, the analysis of this study focuses solely on the parameters (i.e., path coefficients) of the model and not model fit. An alternative model, removing JSS as an outcome variable, was estimated to examine its effect on the model. However, the parameters remained constant, and the alternative model was also considered saturated (i.e., 1 degree of freedom). Thus, because the outcome variable JSS was important to the overall discussion of Motivating Language, we kept the original model. Additionally, keeping JSS in the model allowed for more utility and relatedness of the current study to prior studies conducted using Motivating Language Theory.

Figure 2

Path analysis displaying the standardized regression coefficients of CG, CC, and CT on JSS & LES mediated through ML. $\chi^2(1) = .000, p = .987$; CFI = 1, RMSEA = .000, SRMR = .000.



Note: ($p < .05$; ** $p < .01$)*

Discussion

Wyoming principals indicated the superintendent's credibility dimensions of goodwill and competence were the most impactful of the three source credibility dimensions in assisting superintendents with their leadership effectiveness and helping principals have positive job satisfaction feelings and dispositions (H1, H2, H3, and H4). According to principals, the key to this impact was the strategic use of Motivating Language by superintendents and how this facilitated superintendent leadership effectiveness and principal job satisfaction. These results indicate the importance of Motivating Language as part of rural superintendent talk and a reorientation of rural superintendent credibility from previously held scholarship and practice.

Motivating Language [ML] is formed by three manifest variables direction-giving language, empathetic language, and meaning-making language, known as the ML constructs. Interestingly, Mayfield and Mayfield (2015) noted, "While conceptually ML is *composed* (emphasis added by original authors) of the three constructs, it is a leader's ML ability that gives rise to three constructs rather than the converse, and thus it is that latent variable that is causing changes in the manifest variables" (p. 7-8). Therefore, as superintendents talk, they assess the situation and context and strategically and artfully move in and out of the three ML constructs with high levels of effectiveness (think statistical significance), blending their leadership words and actions to maximize outcomes as their language in use is enhanced by their ML ability. Moreover, this ML ability distinguishes highly effective superintendents who accomplish goals and objectives from less effective superintendents who struggle with achieving goals and objectives.

The use of ML and the ML constructs by the superintendents of this study not only builds upon the results of Williams (2017) that superintendent ML use positively impacts principal retention/intent-to-stay, it leverages empathy consistent with Empathetic Leadership (Kock, Mayfield, Mayfield, Sexton & De La Garza, 2019) and assists in helping employees feel valued, engaged, and supported by their leaders and organizations (Holmes & Parker, 2019). It is crucial to provide preservice and ongoing in-service education to superintendents in these areas as most superintendents, if they receive any education or training in leadership communications at all, it is in relational communication (Kowalski, 2015).

In terms of credibility, the principals of this study indicated that superintendents leading with empathy and understanding and serving with responsiveness were more important to them than a competent and trustworthy superintendent. This is a critical takeaway from this study, as it calls for successful superintendents to possess specific characteristics and leadership qualities. These characteristics and leadership qualities are congruent with Empathetic Leadership (Kock et al., 2019), the human resources frame (Bolman & Deal, 2020; Holmes & Scull, 2018), and seeking first to understand before being understood (Covey, 2006). These contrast with leadership qualities such as coercive or pacesetter leadership styles (Goleman, 2000) or low consideration and low initiating structure environments (Robbins & Judge, 2017). The prioritization of goodwill and caring before competency and trustworthiness is no surprise, as Hansen (2018) noted that rural principals lacked principal colleagues and other forms of principal support resulting in feelings of isolation, lack of appreciation, and concerns of micromanagement. Finally, the reframing of superintendent credibility towards goodwill and away from traditional notions of knowledge, skill, and stewardship (Peterson & Short, 2001); ethics (Jenkins, 2007); and moral character (Copeland & Chance, 1996), as well as Kowalski's (2013) claim that credibility is say and do agreement, are timely in this age of multiple pandemics impacting rural America and should be part of superintendent education and training programs.

The study results indicate that goodwill, competence, and Motivating Language play an essential role in assisting superintendents with their leadership effectiveness. This is consistent with Kowalski's (2005) assertion that superintendent communication supports superintendent effectiveness. An example of this is found in Hvidston and McKim (2019), who asserted:

Today's rural superintendents need to build and develop instructional leadership capacity within their principals by providing them with effective supervision and evaluation. Important elements in this process include developing trusting relations based on strong communication and emphasizing formative supervision (p. 20).

Knowing that superintendent talk in the form of Motivating Language supported by the credibility dimensions of goodwill and competence leads to accomplishing superintendent professional goals, district goals, and principal goals is a powerful formula for success. Based on South Dakota principals, Yates and DeJong (2018) concluded:

Relationships are perceived as the driving force behind success in the superintendent position. The qualities intricately linked to the relationship were ranked among the most crucial qualities of successful superintendents. The only essential rewarding aspect of the superintendent position was relational in helping students to succeed, closely followed by helping staff achieve their goals (p. 29).

Finally, Mayfield and Mayfield (2018) noted, "When employees see their leader as effective, they have higher motivation, trust in their leader, and accept changes more readily. As such, *perceived* (emphasis by original authors) leader effectiveness can lead to increased *actual* (emphasis by original authors) leader effectiveness" (p. 80). Thus, as principals see their superintendent be effective, they have higher levels of motivation, greater trust levels, and accept changes proposed and led by superintendents more readily. This cycle propels superintendents to higher levels of success and effectiveness. Therefore, it is critical to explicitly educate current and future superintendents on how superintendent talk, Motivating Language, goodwill, competence, and superintendent leadership effectiveness can improve outcomes for superintendent's internal and external stakeholders and their organizations.

Regarding principal job satisfaction, the results of this study were significant, and while at a lower level compared to leadership effectiveness, still important. Goodwill, competence, and Motivating Language played a substantial role in principal job satisfaction. Hvidston, McKim, and Holmes (2018) noted requests from rural new principals for more support from superintendents in their supervision and early career mentoring. Additionally, they noted the principals' call for an intense focus on communications between the superintendent and novice principal to develop trust, relationships, and better principal practice, leading to improved levels of principal job satisfaction. Consistent with improvements in principal job satisfaction are improvements in job involvement, psychological empowerment, and job conditions driven by the nature of the principalship, interactions between the parties, and supervision [feedback and support] (Robbins and Judge, 2017). Hansen (2018) further noted that rural principal workload was a persistent theme that impacted principal satisfaction and retention and:

...superintendents can take a leadership role in expressing appreciation for the tireless work that rural principals perform, whether through fair and transparent conversations at the negotiating table or through casual conversations with community members at the local coffee shop table (p. 50).

Thus, as rural superintendents build positive relationships with principals; demonstrate understanding and responsiveness to the needs of principals; model instructional leadership expectations and provide for professional development for principals; and give principals feedback, information, praise and encouragement, and past-event debriefing, they: (1) extend consideration, (2) support principal mental and well-being, and (3) improve principal working conditions and task effectiveness as well as reinforce principals self-assessment of their key role in district success and processes. Given the feedback from principals in this study, it would behoove superintendents to increase their awareness of how their words and actions as leaders impact those they lead and distribute leadership to.

Future Research

There is limited research in educational leadership and Motivating Language Theory, particularly in the superintendency and rural educational leadership. Therefore, suggested next steps in this area include studies that examine rural superintendent Motivating Language use on a set of expanded outcomes such as organizational trust, trustworthiness, student achievement, collective efficacy, climate, and instructional leadership as part of an expanded Motivating Language “Toolbox” (Holmes & Parker, 2018, 2019). Additional studies could compare how rural, suburban, and urban superintendents engage in Motivating Language and seek to understand if there are any fundamental differences between the three settings. Additional research in the field of Motivating Language Theory should examine the yet undefined and uncontextualized area of ML Ability (Mayfield & Mayfield, 2015, 2018). Finally, future research should thoroughly examine the nature of source credibility within the superintendency, emphasizing trustworthiness.

Limitations and Context of the Study

While there are methodological approaches toward addressing smaller sample sizes (e.g., Bayesian analysis) for ease of interpretation and presentation, the parameters from the maximum likelihood estimation were presented. This study is subject to concerns regarding perception data and survey research limitations such as honesty and thoughtfulness in responses (Franekel & Wallen, 2009). Given the perception data of the principals, the model might not accurately predict the effect of ML on mediating the other constructs for superintendents who do not score high on the ML scale. While a larger sample size is to be desired, our sample pool was constrained by the limited nature of school Districts and superintendents in the state of Wyoming. Furthermore, the rural superintendents (Lamkin, 2006) in this study work as *jacks of all trades* to help make educational excellence possible instead of rural superintendents located in the eastern U.S. who are more specialized in their positions (Howley et al., 2014).

Implications

The results of this study have implications for the scholar and practitioner that connect directly to rural education priorities:

1. As superintendents use goodwill, competency, and Motivating Language to enhance and maximize their leadership effectiveness, they increase the accomplishment of critical rural superintendent roles and tasks while decreasing superintendent communication errors and

missteps such as poor language skills, lack of believability, lack of trust, inaccessibility, and elitism (Kowalski, 2015) as part of their daily administrative practice.

2. As superintendents use goodwill, competency, and Motivating Language to impact rural principal job satisfaction positively, they can take actions such as establishing mentoring programs for novice principals and engaging principals in supervision cycles (Hvidston et al., 2018), addressing workload and relationship concerns (Hansen, 2018), and providing support with new initiatives and communicating continuously with principals (Derrington et al., 2015) as part of their ongoing practice.

Thus, given concerns surrounding novice and rural principals retention, well-being, and quality (Cray & Millen, 2010; Hansen, 2018) and superintendent effectiveness (Lamkin, 2006), rural superintendents need to receive preservice education and in-service education in Motivating Language Theory (Holmes & Parker, 2019); the importance of superintendent talk (Holmes & Parker, 2019; Kowalski, 2015); and into a new and reframed framework of superintendent credibility that is more inclusive, empathetic, and human-centered than managerial or walk and talk aligned. Given the amount of time superintendents talk to do their job [over 70% of the time] (Holmes, 2021) and the importance of superintendent talk, Motivating Language, and a reframed notion of superintendent credibility found in this study, it is necessary to, additionally, remember that most superintendents are not academically trained in leadership communications (Kowalski, 2005, 2015). Therefore, it is essential for those who hire and supervise superintendents to consider the issues of superintendent talk, Motivating Language Ability, and superintendent credibility as part of the superintendent recruitment and hiring process. Recruitment processes should focus on superintendent communication and credibility through focused questions, role plays, and rubrics. Part of superintendent evaluation should occur through a focused communication strand or standard. This study can serve as an initial information resource as part of the superintendent evaluation process.

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Public and Private Schools: A Study of Teacher Job Satisfaction

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This study aimed to contribute to the empirical literature concerning the factors that contribute to the job satisfaction levels of public and private school teachers. Furthermore, an emphasis was placed on how governmental accountability, school procedures, and workplace characteristics affected levels of job satisfaction. This study focused on other contributing factors of job satisfaction: personal attributes, human capital, occupational characteristics, and school characteristics. Inferential statistics concluded that there was a statistically significant difference between public and private school teachers' job satisfaction levels. Specifically, private school teachers had higher levels of job satisfaction than public school teachers.

Education stakeholders (e.g., students, parents, administrators) are dependent on teachers to provide quality instruction and produce student learning (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Guarino et al., 2006). However, teachers are changing jobs each year or moving to a different school at an alarming rate (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). For instance, in 2011-2012, the U.S. Department of Education reported that approximately 270,000 public school teachers turned over via school change or chose a different career (Goldring et al., 2014). More pointedly, Georgia reported a teacher attrition rate of roughly 10% (Aleshina, 2019) and indicated that 44% of public school teachers left the teaching profession within the first five years of teaching (Owens & GADOE, 2015).

The Georgia Department of Education specified that public school teachers identified mandated high stakes assessment as a significant contributor to their decision to leave the profession (Owens & GADOE, 2015). Public school teachers also indicated their propensity to leave the profession corresponded with the public education evaluation system being too reliant on test scores and not subject to other job factors. In addition to the accountability measures such as testing, Georgia public school teachers who left the profession also noted their negative perceptions of the profession were due to a lack of teacher input in educational policy (Owens & GADOE, 2015). From the public school teacher turnover data above and the attributed causes of teacher turnover, maintaining a high-quality teaching workforce is not an easy task for education agencies as long as public school teachers are at the mercy of political influences that control curriculum and assessment (Jennings & Rentner, 2006; Murnane & Papay, 2010).

Although national reports heavily document public school teacher attrition, very few studies have analyzed the attrition rates of educational agencies that do not receive heavy state and national educational oversight and accountability, such as private schools. Data provided by the National Center of Educational Statistics (NCES) identified in their 2008-2009 data that private school teachers reported a teacher attrition rate of 15.9%. In the same data set, the public school teacher attrition rate was 8%, indicating a considerable difference in the rate at which teachers of public and private schools turned over. In short, teachers at private schools turned over more than teachers in public schools. Schmitz (2017) highlighted that early-career teachers in private schools had seen dramatic increases in turnover, while early-career teachers in public schools had shown to be more likely to stay. The report also illustrated how private school turnover rates had increased faster than public school rates in each age group except those with 20 or more years of experience despite the implementation of federal school accountability initiatives (e.g., No Child Left Behind; Race to the Top) (Schmitz, 2017).

The academic culture of public schools has focused chiefly on accountability measures (i.e., school improvement plans and standardized tests) for decades ("Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) | U.S. Department of Education," 2018; "Helping America Reach High Standards," 1997; No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, 2002). Due to the increased accountability measures, school leaders (i.e., principals) have experienced pressures that influence the management of teachers. Berryhill et al. (2009) indicated that educators are overly concerned with getting inadequate evaluations because principals heavily emphasize test results, and therefore, only focus on achievement and not other job components when evaluating.

Likewise, Crum and Sherman (2008) posited that the post-NCLB era led to school principals' accountability changes. For example, politicians have added increased pressure on principals to construct school improvement plans that increase student achievement to meet the state's prescribed achievement metrics (Crum & Sherman, 2008; Gonzalez & Firestone, 2013). Therefore, the responsibilities of leading change to increase academic achievement have increased

the work-related stressors associated with being an administrator (i.e., instructional leader) and have resulted in changes in principal behaviors that affect teachers job satisfaction (Balyer, 2012; Gonzalez & Firestone, 2013; Malloy & Allen, 2007). For example, researchers have indicated a principal's attitude when providing teacher feedback, support, and management can significantly impact a teacher's perception of their job or job satisfaction (Aydin et al., 2013; Balyer, 2012; Malloy & Allen, 2007).

Factors that influence job satisfaction are the same in both public and private school settings. However, public and private school teachers perceive the factors that lead to job satisfaction differently. Kennedy (2004) explains that private schools can be more attractive to teachers or aspiring teachers because of the freedom in decision-making in the classroom and the administration's support. McGrath and Princiotta (2005) highlight that teachers refrained from quitting in the private school setting because of their positive working environment and shared values and beliefs. Despite the NCES data indicating that teachers of private schools turnover more than public school teachers, with the academic controls and freedoms possessed by private schools, one would expect private school teachers to display higher job satisfaction levels than their public school teacher counterparts.

Review of Literature

This literature review provides context to the study's variables to better understand whether or not being employed in private or public school settings influences teachers' job satisfaction. The literature review begins by providing briefs on the fundamental differences between public schools and private schools and culminates with how public and private schools potentially influence teacher job satisfaction.

Private Schools and Public Schools

There is a paucity of empirical research on private school teachers and private school education systems. Nevertheless, just as in public schools, private school settings serve as significant sources of educational opportunity ("CAPE | Private School Facts," 2018). Researchers identify private schools as non-public (i.e., receives no governmental funding) educational agencies governed by a single entity or board (Balossi & Hernandez, 2016). The literature also indicates that private schools can fall into three categories: 1) religious schools, 2) schools for certain populations, and 3) schools for specific pedagogy and curriculum experiences ("CAPE | Private School Facts," 2018). In terms of the percentage of Americans who attend private or public schools, attendance numbers have remained consistent over several decades. Ninety percent of school-aged students attend public schools, while the remaining 10 percent attend private schools ("CAPE | Private School Facts," 2018; Jones, 2008; Murphy et al., 1999).

Private School Overview

Private education is rooted in parents' autonomy and rights to exercise the freedom to choose the type of schooling they want for their child. The federal courts established this right in 1925 with the federal court case *Pierce v. Society of Sisters*. In *Pierce v. Society of Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary*, the Supreme Court ruled that all children of the state attend school according to the compulsory school attendance law; nonetheless, the choice lies in the decision of the parents

in determining whom they want to teach their child and where they want their child educated (Abrams, 2009).

Like parents when deciding the type of schooling to which they would like their child to attend, teachers make employment choices each year concerning their employment options and evaluate a host of job factors, core values, and personal beliefs when considering the type of school they would like to work (Gamoran, 1996). For instance, Gamoran (1996) explains that one considerable area that separates the public school setting from a private school setting is an overarching theme or belief system. Private schools, specifically religious-based schools, provide a culture of shared beliefs among administration, teachers, students, and parents, motivating teachers to pursue careers in private schools. Gamoran (1996) also indicated that through the shared belief system associated with private schools, social capital (e.g., network of people and relationships) among personnel and students increases, promoting a positive academic environment.

A fundamental difference between public and private school operations is that private schools exercise autonomy in many of their policies and procedures; however, like public schools, there are specific guidelines and information private schools must document and share with their particular state ("Home | U.S. Department of Education," 2018). For example, states may require private schools to report the following: a) accreditation, b) licensing, c) teacher certification, d) length of the school day, e) length of the school year, f) curriculum, g) health and safety requirements, H) tax exemption, I) public aid for private education ("Home | U.S. Department of Education," 2018). It is important to note that private schools report information to their respective state to ensure the school adheres to constitutional law or parameters set by any federal or state grant it receives. In contrast, public schools report information to the state for regular evaluation, oversight, and adherence to state and national education policy (Sun et al., 2020).

Public School Overview

Several factors contribute to private school employment preferences (e.g., autonomy, administrative support, student population, mission/beliefs, workplace environment, and the number of students in a class; Akhtar et al., 2010; Kennedy, 2004). These factors are more controllable in the private school setting due to the small hierarchical structure and minimal bureaucratic layers than public schools (Kennedy, 2004; Shakeel & DeAngelis, 2016).

Unlike private schools, public schools are provided funds from the state and the federal government to increase student achievement; however, by receiving the funds, public schools are obligated to adhere to mandated standards (Diamond, 2007; Heck & Chang, 2017; Jennings & Rentner, 2006). Through standards-based reform, the government has raised expectations for public education, but at the expense of increased stress levels for teachers (von der Embse et al., 2019). Although the federal and state governments often divert public monies (i.e., tax deductions/credits, vouchers; Fiddiman & Yin, 2019) to private schools, states do not obligate private schools to adhere to the state curriculum standards enforced on public schools.

For the past three decades, public schools have predominately focused on strong accountability measures (i.e., standardized tests, school improvement plans) ("Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) | U.S. Department of Education," 2018; "Helping America Reach High Standards," 1997 "; No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, 2002). Teachers have demonstrated concern for the overemphasis on student test results instead of other important teacher job performance metrics (i.e., teacher supervision, pedagogical practices, student engagement)

(Berryhill et al., 2009). In brief, teachers feel confined by the limitations of their ability to utilize what they have learned through their own experiences, training, and educational achievements (i.e., education degrees) (Murnane & Papay, 2010) because of the restrictions associated with state standardized curriculum and high-stakes accountability metrics.

Job Satisfaction in Public and Private Education

As the student population continues to increase in the United States, the demand for quality teachers in public and private schools will also increase. Unfortunately, many schools and school districts struggle with supplying and maintaining a quality teacher force (García & Weiss, 2019). Some assign teacher job satisfaction and the overall perception of the teaching profession (Toropova et al., 2021) as the culprit of the national teacher shortage crisis. Therefore, it is imperative that researchers better understand the job satisfaction construct to inform school leaders in public and private school settings.

Strategies employed to manage and improve schools can positively or negatively affect the teacher workforce's job satisfaction levels (Grissom et al., 2014). Education policy (i.e., NDEA, 1958; ESEA, 1965; ECIA, 1981; IASA, 1994; NCLB, 2001; and ESSA, 2015) sought to create opportunities for teachers to better prepare students for post-high school graduation opportunities (Jennings & Rentner, 2006; Pepper, 2010). Like public schools, private schools create policies and procedures for similar purposes (i.e., quality education for students) (Labaree, 1997). In both school types, teachers are the primary contributor to a school's day-to-day operations (Berryhill et al., 2009).

Teacher attributes or characteristics, school demographics, and human capital have served as standard variables (i.e., ethnicity, gender, age, years of experience, education, region, and student enrollment) in research used to analyze job satisfaction levels (Buckman, 2017; Crossman & Harris, 2006; Perie & Baker, 1997). However, the variables found to be the most significant predictors of job satisfaction were administrative support and teacher autonomy in decision making (Kim & Loadman, 1994; Moore, 2012; Perie & Baker, 1997).

Master et al. (2016) studied the teaching profession, specifically in overall job satisfaction, pay satisfaction, and job security. The study utilized data collected by the U.S. Department of Education's Common Core of Data from 1994 to 2008. This period is significant because of the economic change in the U.S. (i.e., the great recession) and the substantial advances in education policy (i.e., NCLB).

The study concluded that overall job satisfaction in the year 2000 decreased for teachers and non-teaching occupations (i.e., private industry, non-profit organizations). Explicitly, private school teachers had a slight decrease in their job and pay satisfaction levels (Master et al., 2016). The study also indicated that teachers in public schools had less job security satisfaction than teachers working in private schools. Master et al. (2016) highlight that public school teachers during the NCLB era showed concern about job security because of the increased emphasis on school and student accountability.

However, in 2008, the teacher workforce showed a slight increase in job satisfaction (87.4%) than non-teacher occupations (71%). Master et al. (2016) assert that the slight increase was associated with the economy's changes. During this period, private industries were reducing jobs and cutting pay because of the 2008 economic recession, while many schools and school districts were able to keep teachers employed and maintain paying teachers their current salaries.

In public and private teaching settings, teachers are the bedrock of student achievement, and a teacher's impact on student learning is substantive (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Sanders & Rivers, 1996). Historical literature dating back to 1966 concluded that teachers' quality accounted for more student achievement variance than any other school factor (Coleman, 1968). For these reasons, teachers' satisfaction is of great importance, and schools and districts should invest in their teaching force in the form of leadership actions, policies, and compensation that encourage teachers to enter the profession and remain in the profession.

Theoretical Framework

For readers to interpret public and private school's potential relationship with job satisfaction, this study utilized Locke's (1976) Value Percept Theory for its theoretical framing. Locke (1976) theorized that an individual is satisfied with a job when the job meets their personal values, and conversely, an individual is dissatisfied when the job does not fulfill their personal values. Researchers use this theory to quantify satisfaction through the formula $[S = (V^e - P) \times V_i]$ explained as [satisfaction = (want – have) x importance] (Judge et al., 2001). This theory supports the idea that intrinsic needs aid in one's satisfaction. A job fulfilling or exceeding one's needs determines the directionality (i.e., positive or negative) of satisfaction; however, the importance of the intrinsic need determines the level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

Purpose and Significance

This study aimed to analyze the effects of the public and private school setting on teacher job satisfaction. Job satisfaction literature has supported that satisfied employees have more significant performance outputs and are less like to turnover (Hackman & Oldman, 1975; Locke, 1976). To better understand the nuances of the different schooling systems and their impact on teachers, this study seeks to shed light on factors that influence teacher job satisfaction, such as school type vis-à-vis public and private schools. The literature on private school operations, better yet, private school job satisfaction, is scant. As such, this study is significant because it will provide valuable, current insight into an area seldomly studied in the educational community. This study differs from past research because it provides a comparative analysis using teacher survey data to determine job satisfaction on both private and public school samples. Ultimately, teacher job satisfaction and the contribution of this study can help public school districts and private schools identify strategies to maintain a quality teaching force and aid in decision-making. The following research question guided this study:

Is there a statistically significant difference between public school and private school teacher job satisfaction when controlling for potential covariates?

Methodology

The researchers selected Georgia as the sample state to analyze public and private school teachers' job satisfaction because of its growing need to recruit and retain teachers and the state's teacher turnover rate (44%; Owens & GADOE, 2015). To underscore the population size of the Georgia public and private school workforce, the Georgia Department of Education (GADOE) indicates there are over 550 private schools and 2,263 public schools in Georgia ("FY2016 Private School Data Collection," 2018). GADOE disaggregates public school data into four

different school types (e.g., elementary schools - 1,319; middle schools - 481; high schools - 448; and kindergarten thru twelfth-grade schools - 15) ("GADOE – school count type," 2018).

Procedure

To acquire the sample of Georgia public and private school teachers, the researcher used MCH Strategic Data (i.e., a data retrieval company) for teacher contact information. The data retrieval company randomly selected the teachers from the state's total population and stratified them into two groups (public and private schools). The researchers then provided the sample with electronic surveys to acquire information pertaining to 1) personal information, 2) curriculum oversight perceptions via the curriculum control and professional discretion questionnaire, and 3) job satisfaction data acquired from the Job Descriptive Index.

To avoid statistical type-1 and type-2 errors, the researchers utilized Cohen's (1988) power analysis to identify the sample size necessary to have adequate statistical power to detect the statistical significance of variables within the regression analysis. A power analysis considers the number of independent variables, covariates, level of significance, the effect size, and the specific power to determine the required sample size for the study. Eleven covariates, one independent variable, a medium effect size ($f^2 = .15$), a defined level of significance set at ($\alpha = .05$), and a specific power level ($\beta = .80$) determined the recommended sample size was 127 participants ($n = 127$).

On the initial delivery, 282 teachers opened the survey, 230 started the survey, and 160 completed the survey. To achieve data normality, the researchers removed extreme outliers and randomly removed participants to balance both strata. After removing participants, the final sample maintained the necessary statistical power to avoid statistical error and improve the likelihood of accurate findings. The final sample groups consisted of 64 public school teachers and 64 private school teachers ($n = 128$).

Variables

To determine statistical relationships between the independent variable school type (i.e., public school teacher and private school teacher) and the dependent variable (i.e., job satisfaction), the researchers used control variables to account for the variance of factors that affect teacher job satisfaction outside of the dependent variable.

Covariates

Personal attributes (i.e., age, gender, and race), human capital (education level, years of experience), and work characteristics (workdays, salary, curriculum control, student enrollment, school location) served as covariates because of the large amount of research documented in empirical literature supporting their relationships with job satisfaction (Buckman, 2017; Crossman & Harris, 2006; Perie & Baker, 1997).

Perie and Baker (1997) specify that younger and less experienced teachers in public schools were more satisfied with the profession when compared to teachers in the later stages of their careers. Comparatively, young private school teachers indicate low job satisfaction levels compared to more experienced private school teachers. Because of Perie and Baker's (1997)

findings, the researchers included age in their analysis. The average age of the sample was 46.5 years (See Table 1).

In terms of gender and its relationship with job satisfaction, research has reported mixed results. Some researchers have indicated that there is no relationship between gender and job satisfaction (Klecker, 1997; Nestor & Leary, 2000), while other researchers have purported that female teachers were more satisfied with the teaching profession than male teachers (Bogler, 2002; Perie & Baker, 1997). Table 1 indicates the sample consisted of roughly 22% males and 77% females (see Table 1). Considering the disproportionate number of females to males in the profession whereby females significantly outnumber males, this finding is not abnormal.

Race is also a factor that contributes to the prediction of job satisfaction. Recent research concluded that non-white teachers were less satisfied with teaching as a profession (Master et al., 2016). Other research on race and its association with job satisfaction indicated that when school staff and student population align racially, teachers report being more satisfied with their work (Fairchild et al., 2012). Because of the low participation of races other than white, the researchers categorized the race variable into two groups (i.e., white and non-white). White participants accounted for 82.0% of the total sample, while non-white participants accounted for 18.0% (see Table 1).

In K-12 education, a teacher's level of education may affect their salary, influencing their level of satisfaction with pay and inadvertently influencing their overall job satisfaction. Traditionally, a teacher's salary will increase when they earn an advanced degree (e.g., Master's Degree, Educational Specialist Degree, Doctoral Degree) (GADOE, 2019). The data indicated that 31.3% of the participants had at least a Bachelor's Degree, 45.3% of the teachers earned a Master's Degree, 18.8% of participants earned a Specialist Degree or credits above a Master's Degree, and 4.7% earned a Doctorate Degree (see Table 1). In addition, years of experience can also serve as a factor that allows a teacher to earn an additional step increase on a traditional fixed-rate salary schedule. The average years of experience for the sample was 17.18 years.

In Georgia, according to the public school teacher salary schedule, pay is increased by two factors: 1) educational level and 2) years of experience defined by each service year completed (GADOE, 2019); however, private schools have more autonomy in determining how they pay teachers (e.g., fixed-rate salary schedule, merit pay) (Ballou, 2001). Researchers have determined that pay affects one's financial needs, and it influences the perception of satisfaction with work (Milkovich & Newman, 2008). Pay satisfaction has been such a potent factor of job satisfaction that it has served as a standalone dependent variable in past research (Buckman et al., 2016; Currall et al., 2005; Vandenberghe & Tremblay, 2008). Table 1 indicates the average salary of the sample was \$50,632.

Research also indicates that workload is a significant factor when considering job satisfaction (Spector, 1997). The annual contracts for both settings are typically 180 to 190 workdays and are directly associated with teacher pay. Therefore, as defined by annual contracts, workload is a necessary covariate that can influence teacher job satisfaction. The average number of contractual workdays for the sample was roughly 185 days (see Table 1).

School characteristics are also a consistent variable used in empirical educational research (Goldring et al., 2014; Moore, 2012). The school environment has shown to have significant effects on teachers deciding to stay in the profession or migrate to a different school or different career. Therefore, average student enrollment ($\bar{x} = 765.94$) and location of the school (i.e., rural, urban, suburban; 21.9%, 21.8%, 56.3%, respectively) provided data used to assist in determining the relationship between the job satisfaction level of public and private school teachers.

The researchers utilized a curriculum control and professional discretion survey to capture the perception of control of curriculum and teacher autonomy. The survey provided to participants measured two categories associated with control of curriculum (i.e., external and internal) and teacher's professional discretion in the classroom. The two portions of the survey required participants to evaluate their perspectives of the previous topic using a 6-point Likert scale. The researchers converted the data from the curriculum control and teacher's perception of professional discretion to composite scores.

Teachers in public and private schools experience curriculum control from external governmental and administrative sources. In the public school setting, policy and procedures are mandated by federal, state, and local school boards (Bozeman et al., 2013; Kauffman et al., 2002). Private schools, while independent, also have external factors of control from school leaders and local governing boards (Coleman et al., 1982; Shakeel & DeAngelis, 2016).

Teachers value school leaders that provide opportunities for shared educational decisions (i.e., policy development) (McGrath & Princiotta, 2005; Murnane & Papay, 2010). Additionally, teachers value discretion in the planning and implementation of the instructional process. When provided with empowerment, teachers will perceive the working environment as satisfying (Chalofsky & Krishna, 2009). Therefore, the two covariates, curriculum control and professional discretion in the classroom, supported the examination of public and private school teachers' job satisfaction. For the sample populations, the curriculum control survey provided an average composite score of 2.44, while the teacher's perception of professional discretion provided an average composite score of 3.59 (see Table 1).

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics: Central Tendency and Frequency Metrics

Variable	Mean	Range	SD	n	Frequency	Percent
<i>Continuous Variables</i>						
Enrollment ^d	765.94	3659	543.71	128	—	—
Experience ^a	17.18	51	10.45	128	—	—
Work Days ^b	185.03	280	23.26	128	—	—
Salary ^c	50,632	102000	19392	128	—	—
Age ^a	46.55	51	10.68	128	—	—
Curriculum Control ^e	2.44	3.93	.841	128	—	—
Teachers Prof. Discr. ^e	3.59	4.50	1.15	128	—	—
Job Satisfaction ^f	199.83	162	39.80	128	—	—
<i>Categorical Variables</i>						
Bachelors	—	—	—	128	40	31.3
Masters	—	—	—	128	58	45.3
Specialist	—	—	—	128	24	18.8
Doctorate	—	—	—	128	6	4.7
Male	—	—	—	128	29	22.7
Female	—	—	—	128	99	77.3
White	—	—	—	128	105	82.0
Non-White	—	—	—	128	23	18.0
Urban	—	—	—	128	28	21.8

Suburban	—	—	—	128	72	56.3
Rural	—	—	—	128	28	21.9
Public School	—	—	—	128	64	50
Private School	—	—	—	128	64	50

Note. ^aYears. ^bDays. ^cU.S. Dollars. ^dStudents. ^eLikert Scale. ^fJDI Scale.

Independent Variable

The independent variable for this study was Georgia public and private school teachers. Using a dummy coding system, the researchers coded Georgia public school teachers as (1) and private school teachers (0). To address the assumption of normality, the researchers identified extreme values and removed outliers. The researchers removed three outliers for public schools and three outliers for private schools (i.e., public schools, $n = 64$; private schools, $n = 64$) and conducted data transformation procedures. After the adjustments, the dependent variable rendered a Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test that was not significant (Kolmogorov-Smirnov = .200, $p > .05$; Shapiro-Wilk = .130, $p > .05$), indicating the data met the assumptions for normality.

Dependent Variable

Teacher job satisfaction served as the dependent variable for the study, and the researchers quantified the variable using the Job Descriptive Index. The Job Descriptive Index (JDI) is a 72-item survey that measures five facets of job satisfaction and provides a cumulative job satisfaction score (Smith et al., 1969). The instrument captures five facets of job satisfaction: 1) work itself, 2) pay, 3) promotion, 4) supervision, and 5) co-workers.

Tasios and Giannouli (2017) describe that researchers measure each of the five facet areas using participants' responses to a list of words (i.e., adjectives or adjective phrases). Participants answer each word or phrase with: (Y) for yes, (N) for no, and a (?) question mark for cannot decide. To score responses, worded items are scored 3, 1, and 0 (e.g., Y = 3, ? = 1, N = 0).

This study utilized the JDI because it is one of the most globally used surveys to measure job satisfaction. Moreover, researchers have translated the JDI into several different languages to measure job satisfaction in countries outside of the United States (i.e., Spanish, Hebrew, French) (Hulin et al., 1982; Hulin & Mayer, 1986; McCabe et al., 1980).

Because of its consistent reliability and validity, the researchers chose the JDI as the source of measuring overall job satisfaction (i.e., summative score) (Ironson et al., 1989). In terms of measuring the JDI for reliability, the facets of the JDI have the following measures when psychometrically analyzed for internal consistency: work .90, pay .88, promotion .91, supervision .92, co-workers .92, and JIG .92 (Brodke et al., 2009).

Researchers used Pearson's correlations to validate the instrument by correlating it with other scaled instruments (i.e., intent to quit scale, feelings of stress scale, and single-item measures of overall job satisfaction). When researchers tested the JIG against the intent to quit scale, feelings of stress scale, and single-item measure of overall job satisfaction, the scores were as follows - 0.61, -0.30, and 0.79, respectively. For the population in this study, this particular instrument aligns with school characteristic constructs and provides the needed reliability and validity across different populations (Gillet & Schwab, 1975; Johnson et al., 1982; Kinicki et al., 2002). For this particular study, that average JDI score was 199.83 (see Table 1 above).

Results

The researchers utilized an Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) multiple regression to analyze the dependent variable, independent variable, and covariates. The statistical procedure regressed Job satisfaction (i.e., dependent variable) on the independent variable (i.e., school type) and all covariates. An alpha of .05 ($\alpha = 0.05$) determined the criterion used to accept or reject the null hypothesis. Before conducting the analysis, the researchers tested the statistical assumptions for multiple regression (i.e., linear relationship, multivariate normality, homoscedasticity, no multicollinearity). As noted, when discussing the independent variable, the data did not meet the assumption of normality; however, addressing the outliers, extreme values and employing a reflection log10 data transformation normalized the data.

The researchers also set the acceptable Variance of Inflation Rate (VIF) at 3.0 or less to identify multicollinear variables. The only variable that exceeded the 3.0 threshold was years of teaching (VIF = 3.123) which correlated with teacher's age. Historically, the literature has supported years of teaching as a significant variable when considering teacher's job satisfaction, so the researchers decided to retain the variable in the multiple regression analysis (Crossman & Harris, 2006; Perie & Baker, 1997). The researchers removed age from the analysis because they found that age correlated with years of teaching ($r = .753$), exceeding the recommended statistical threshold (i.e., .700). With the removal of age from the analysis, all variables meet the acceptable VIF for multiple regression (see Table 2). Normality and Multicollinearity were the only assumptions not met, and preliminary testing found that all other regression assumptions met the statistical recommendations.

Table 2
OLS Multiple Regression of Teacher Job Satisfaction and School Type

	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	VIF
Constant	1.803	.229		7.870	.000**	
Enrollment	-4.819E-6	.000	-.011	.111	-.912	1.295
Degree Level	.038	.030	.128	1.258	.211	1.447
Teaching Exp.	.000	.002	-.014	-.137	.891	1.502
Gender	.010	.055	.017	.178	.859	1.215
Race	-.015	.059	-.023	-.247	.805	1.216
Salary	8.758E-7	.000	.069	.559	.577	2.131
Work Days	.000	.001	-.016	-.180	.857	1.139
Location	-.028	.034	-.077	-.841	.402	1.167
Curriculum Cont.	-.082	.036	-.283	-2.292	.024*	2.116
Professional Discr.	.060	.023	.284	2.593	.011*	1.670
Public Schools	-.153	.068	-.314	-2.240	.027*	2.726

n= 128
R²= .166

Note. Dependent Variable: Job Satisfaction.

* $p \leq 0.05$, ** $p \leq 0.01$,

In analyzing the data, the statistical software entered all control variables and the independent variable simultaneously into the multiple linear regression equation, which accounted for approximately 16% of the model's variance (see Table 2). The effects of the multiple linear regression on the independent variable (i.e., school type) indicate that this variable significantly correlates with teacher job satisfaction ($b = -.314, p < 0.05$; see Table 2). More specifically, private school teachers in the sample displayed higher levels of job satisfaction than public school teachers. Other variables found to be statistically significant were professional discretion in the classroom ($b = .284, p < 0.05$) and curriculum control ($b = -.283, p < 0.05$).

Conclusion

To further explain the findings in this study, in addition to the main finding indicating private schools had higher levels of job satisfaction than public schools ($b = -.314, p < 0.05$), the analysis indicated there were two statistically significant covariates (i.e., curriculum control and teacher's professional discretion in the classroom). The covariate curriculum control ($b = -.283, p < 0.05$) indicated that overall teachers' job satisfaction decreased when teachers had more control over the curriculum (e.g., content taught and assessments). Similarly, teachers' perception of professional discretion in the classroom was statistically significant ($b = .284, p < 0.05$), suggesting that when teachers perceive more independence in decision-making in the classroom, their job satisfaction levels increased.

Literature highlights that private school teachers seek employment at private schools because of the independent working environment and a culture of shared beliefs among staff members, parents, and students (Gamoran, 1996; McGrath & Princiotta, 2005). Moreover, in private education, parents choose to send their children to school based on shared beliefs, which private school leaders cultivate and maintain. Contrary to public school leaders, private school leaders are allowed to strategically select who attends their school, which further controls the school's culture (Coleman et al., 1982; Shakeel & DeAngelis, 2016). As such, one may also assume that private school teachers have a higher level of job satisfaction because of the characteristics of their work environment (e.g., shared belief system, private school culture, and student dynamic).

The Value Percept theory supports the shared belief assumption. Locke's Value Percept Theory (1976) purports, one achieves job satisfaction when the job fulfills a personal value. Therefore, a specific school type may fulfill a teacher's values when employed at a public or private school because both settings provide a unique culture and environment.

In terms of the study's findings, research indicates private schools have increased autonomy in recruiting and hiring teachers (Balossi & Hernandez, 2016). To add, they can experience autonomy within their work because of the decreased level of bureaucracy (i.e., federal and state government) (Balossi & Hernandez 2016; Shakeel & DeAngelis, 2016). On the other hand, empirical research on the job satisfaction of public school teachers has purported that standards-based reform has contributed to less autonomy in the classroom and loss of skill variety because of prescribed instructional strategies to increase standardized test results (Crum & Sherman, 2008; Diamond, 2007; Murnane & Papay, 2010).

For example, during the time of standards-based reform, teachers experienced role conflict and lacked the autonomy to use an assortment of skills within their planning and

instruction (Farber, 1991; Friedman, 1991; McNeil, 2000; Smith 1991). In accordance, the findings of this study indicate that private school teachers perceive a higher level of job satisfaction than public school teachers. As such, one can assume, based on the literature and the distinctly different educational environments, public school teachers' lack of autonomy and skill variety in their work, associated with governmental oversight, and the working environment of public schools contributed to lower job satisfaction.

Over the past two decades, robust measures of accountability provided by federal legislation (e.g., NCLB) have influenced public school teachers (Berryhill et al., 2009; Murane & Papay, 2010; Jennings & Rentner, 2006). Additionally, these strong measures increased stress and role conflict in public school teachers. For example, Berryhill et al.'s (2009) research noted how the sample of teachers lost autonomy in their instructional practices because they were teaching only for results of standardized tests.

Considering the findings in this study, school leaders should bear in mind that teachers value the culture of their place of employment (i.e., public school or private school), and it influences their job satisfaction. Also, teachers value the opportunity to choose content, assessment, and instructional strategies in their classroom (Jennings & Rentner, 2006; Murnane & Papay, 2010). For these reasons, to potentially increase teacher job satisfaction levels, school leaders (e.g., principals) should provide an environment that promotes their teachers' values and an opportunity to collaborate with the development of policies and procedures.

As with all research, readers should interpret the findings through the study's limitations. The limitations identified in this study are the use of a summative score for the job satisfaction survey (i.e., JDI), the curriculum control and teacher's professional discretion survey as covariates, and the independent variable private and public school teachers. Identifying the limitations of this study helps to make suggestions for future research opportunities in teacher job satisfaction.

The use of the summative score for the JDI limits the generalization of job satisfaction even though it had a high Cronbach' Alpha reliability rating of .947. Facets assist in explaining individual components of the job. For example, the JDI is sub-categorized into six facets: 1) co-workers, 2) job in general, 3) work itself, 4) pay, 5) opportunities for promotion, and 6) supervision. Therefore, future researchers should consider analyzing specific facets to determine certain job-specific attributes influencing teacher job satisfaction.

Public and private school teachers were also a limitation. The researchers sampled a broad group of teachers chosen from teachers that worked at elementary, middle, and high schools. Additionally, these teachers could be teaching subjects that high stakes accountability assessment do not influence, such as elective courses (e.g., physical education, art, music), and maybe more satisfied. Future researchers could sample specific school levels (e.g., public high school teachers and private high school teachers) and subject areas. Also, future research could look at the job satisfaction levels of teachers that teach only the core subject areas of math, science, social studies, and reading/language arts.

A focus of this study was the effects of policy and procedures on teacher's perception of curriculum control and instructional decisions in the classroom. To assist in operationalizing these two covariates, the researchers used a two-part survey (Archbald & Porter, 1994; May, 2010). Within the analysis, the results determined that curriculum control and teacher's professional discretion in the classroom were statistically significant; however, these significant findings in the regression did not make a distinction between public and private schools. As such, a recommendation for future research could be using the curriculum control and teacher's professional discretion survey as the dependent variable.

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Charter School Authorizing: Understanding the Differences Among Authorizers and School Performance

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Charter schools are an integral part of the public school systems across America, but understanding these complex organizations has proved challenging. One unique attribute of charter school organizational structure is the charter school authorizer. These oversight agencies have a unique role in overseeing, and holding accountable, the schools they authorize. Yet, there is limited empirical research around charter school authorizing practices and their outcomes. In this study, I examined the differences between Michigan charter school outcomes, both academic and operational, by authorizer type. The results of this study indicate a statistically significant difference among authorizers, based on student proficiency, growth, overall performance, and fiscal performance, and student demand. Moreover, the findings suggest that schools authorized by intermediate school districts had the highest student performance of all charter schools in Michigan, followed by schools authorized by higher education institutions (e.g., colleges and universities). Local education authorities (LEA) had consistently, and significantly, lower student performance than schools authorized by other types. Conversely, schools authorized by LEAs had the highest Demand and overall fiscal performance.

Keywords: Charter schools, authorizing, authorizer, school performance, student outcomes

Charter schools began as an experiment to improve public education in the United States of America (Weil, 2000). The theory was that these schools would operate outside of conventional public schools and free of the oversight and regulatory requirements constraining the current educational systems in exchange for increased accountability and performance (Weil, 2009; Roland, 2014). These new educational programs would become incubators of innovation and spawn new educational methods, addressing conventional public schools' challenges (Fryer, 2014; Wilson, 2016; Gleason, 2019).

While charter school enrollment nationally is still a small fraction of all students who attend public schools (4.6%), their influence on the broader conversation about education is paramount (NCES, 2016). Communities such as Detroit, Michigan, now have more than 50% of their student population attending charter schools, putting them in the spotlight. Various stakeholders are interested in charter school performance and whether students attending charter schools benefit from their programs (Gleason, 2019; Wilson, 2016; Buckley & Schneider, 2009). Over the years, numerous studies on charter school performance sought to determine whether charter schools perform better or worse than conventional public school districts (Betts & Hill, 2006; Abdulkadiroglu et al., 2009; Ash, 2013). Some research purports that charter schools are a failed experiment and should be closed, suggesting that they are not performing and instead siphoning necessary resources away from the traditional education system (Miron, 2010; Buddin, 2012). Other studies show promise – that charter schools address decades of systemic underperformance in urban and high poverty communities, essentially serving the neediest of the neediest students (Merseth & Copper, 2009; Scollo, 2015).

Overall, however, researchers have been unable to isolate a singular conclusion about charter school performance; the determination of whether charter schools are successful is largely dependent upon one's ideological stance on the matter (Clark et al., 2011). Nevertheless, a reasonable conclusion from the current literature is that some charter schools perform better, others perform worse, and most perform similar to their conventional school counterparts (Jankens & Weiss, 2016).

Consequently, additional research around charter school performance and its impact on the greater educational field is necessary. Current studies that compare charter schools to regular public schools through common approaches fail to consider the uniqueness and complexity of the charter school phenomena (Davis, 2013; Duffy, 2014). More specifically, there is a gap in the research that looks at the distinctiveness of these quasi-public/private organizations and teases out variables that help illustrate the complete picture when evaluating them. Rarely is charter school performance associated directly with authorizers (Roch, 2015). Additionally, charter school authorizers have come under scrutiny in the past few years as contributing to the lack of performance and harboring failing schools (The Education Trust-Midwest, 2016).

While charter schools are generally associated with their authorizing agency (per the charter contract), there is a lack of literature that looks explicitly at charter authorizer performance and connects the authorizer to the performance of schools within their portfolio. Authorizers are in a unique position as they are not accountable to the oversight of the state boards of education or state education agencies. Therefore, they are autonomous and able to operate as they see fit under the law. Charter school opponents contend that this autonomy leads to a lack of oversight and, ultimately, low-performing schools (Buckley & Schneider, 2009).

Although charter schools must follow much of the same regulations of conventional public schools, including state and federal requirements, authorizers have no direct oversight; they are essentially, self-regulated. Charter school proponents argue that this autonomy provides the

flexibility needed to oversee these new and unique educational programs without intrusion from the traditional educational systems (Finn et al., 2000). In addition, they contend that the political pressures from state associations and agencies would undermine authorizer authority and limit their ability to be effective at chartering and overseeing the schools. Yet, there is no uniformity in the way they operate, implement their oversight and accountability practices, and authorizing activities – including granting charter contracts, reauthorizing practices, and closing of schools.

These differences make comparing charter schools to conventional schools problematic. To truly understand charter schools and hold the appropriate parties accountable for their performance, additional research is needed that looks at the uniqueness of these schools and accounts for the variations in organizational structure. Ultimately, there is a lack of literature on authorizers' performance in connection to charter school performance.

This research aims to explore charter school performance by looking closer at the organizations that oversee them, the authorizer. By isolating these organizations separately from the charter school districts themselves, this researcher seeks to draw additional conclusions and gain further insight into influences that impact charter school performance. This study will address the generalized approach most researchers on charter schools take when looking at whether these schools are performing, as well as the inconclusive results of most current research (Davis et al., 2013; Lake, 2013). Although charter schools are public schools, state legislation allows for some uniqueness that creates challenges when looking at their performance compared to other schools, specifically conventional public schools. Looking at the authorizer as a direct or indirect influence on student performance provides insight into the larger educational system and its impact on charter schools (Carlson, 2012).

In addition to student achievement, this research will also include student growth, graduation rates, and overall school performance through Michigan's school accountability system. Financial comparisons and enrollment trends were also part of the data collection and analysis. This approach is unique to this research and will provide a holistic view of the broader activities around charter schools lacking in the literature.

Background

Charter schools, or Public School Academies (PSA) as they are formally known, are publicly funded independent schools serving primary and secondary students (kindergarten through grade 12). Across the United States, there are 3.3 million students attending 7,300 charter schools in 46 states and the District of Columbia (CER *a*, n.d.). In Michigan, charter schools account for approximately 10% of the state's student enrollment. During the 2018-2019 academic year, there were a total of 296 charter school organizations (classified as districts), operating 376 school buildings—two hundred forty-two of those operated a K-8 grade configuration, with 149 offering grades 9 through 12. Although charter schools operate across the state, in both the lower and upper peninsulas of Michigan, the predominant number are in urban areas like Detroit, Lansing, and Grand Rapids. For example, the three counties that occupy metro Detroit – Wayne, Oakland, and Macomb – represent 59% of all charter students (MDE, 2020). Additionally, the City of Detroit has the highest percentage of students attending charter schools, with 47% of all public school students enrolled in a charter school.

Charter School Funding

Charter schools vary in legislation and operation across the U.S., though they hold similar conceptual and practical constraints across all formats (Schwallie, 2015). Namely, charter schools are classified by law as being "public" entities. This means that they receive public resources and have restrictions on their organizational structure, operations, and accountability. The key benefit of being a public entity is financial support. Although most charter schools across the U.S. do not receive the same per-pupil funding as their conventional public-school counterparts, it is comparable and substantial compared to the average tuition private schools receive.

Additionally, being a public school also qualifies the charter school for federal assistance through title grants (e.g., Title I, Title II). These can increase revenue for additional services for special populations. The average operating revenue for Michigan charter schools was \$9,560 per pupil as of 2018 (MDE, 2020). As a comparison, the average total operating revenue for conventional district schools was \$10,097 per pupil. Nationally, the amount charters receive is considerably lower. On average, charter schools receive \$6,585 per pupil compared to conventional district schools that receive \$10,771 per pupil (CER *b*, n.d.).

Charter School Students

The students who attend these programs are diverse, with twice the minorities attending charter schools than conventional schools. In the U.S., 60% of charter school students were minority in 2018, with only 42% of all public school enrollment being minority (NCESa, 2021; NCESb, 2021). In Michigan, minorities made up 67% of the charter school's student enrollment in 2018-2019 compared to the state-wide average of 34% (MDE, 2020). Of the total charter school population, 50% of Michigan students were African-American, with only 25% nationally. Charter schools also serve a more significant low-income population, with 75% of charter school students qualifying for Free and Reduced-Price Lunch compared to the 50% state-wide average.

Authorizers

Charter schools are unique public schools in that they have an additional layer of oversight in a chartering agency (or authorizer). Unlike conventional public-school districts, charter schools need a sponsor to exist (Lubienski & Weitzel, 2010). An applicant must first secure a "charter" from an approved charter school authorizer to operate a charter school. The authorizer is not responsible for and does not participate in the school's operations but is responsible for oversight and accountability of the school they authorize. This additional component is intended to help ensure charter schools comply with all applicable laws and meet set educational goals. Which organizations can serve as a charter authorizer also varies by state. The typical organization may include a local education agency (LEA or conventional school district), intermediate school district (ISD) or regional school district (RESA), and higher education institution (HEI), which includes colleges and universities. Additionally, some states also allow designated nonprofit organizations, or Independent Chartering Boards (ICB), to issue charter school contracts typically established by a state or local government agency or state education agency (Weil, 2016).

In the State of Michigan, where this research is focused, state legislation has empowered educational organizations to charter or provide a license to an applicant to operate a school using public funds (Finn, Manno & Vanourek, 2000). The following entities can serve as a charter school

authorizer in Michigan (RSC §380.501(1)): Local Education Agency (LEA); Intermediate School District (ISD); Community College; State Public University; or a jointly through an interlocal agreement. In addition, 86% of charter schools are authorized by state universities, with the total student population in charter schools making up approximately 10% of all student enrollment (Price & Jankens, 2016).

Conceptual Framework

Although they vary state-by-state, most state charter school laws are materially similar, or the same, as what conventional public schools follow. Some exceptions may include different regulations on teacher or administrator certification and licensure (either increased or lessened restrictions), the ability to contract for educational services (most conventional public schools cannot outsource teachers or administrators), charter school boards are often appointed, not elected (most states require charter school board members to be public officials), and the ability to limit enrollment.

Therefore, the operations of charter schools look similar to that of conventional public schools. From their physical facilities and operations to their day/school year schedule and teaching and learning, charter schools are reasonably indistinguishable from conventional public schools. However, much of the practical differences are in the unique character of each charter school program. Unlike traditional districts, rooted in long-standing communities and their cultures, charter schools are novel, unique to their mission, vision, and educational model.

Each charter school is distinctive in its approach to the organizational structure, which is driven by a combination of the board and the administration, whether self-managed or supported through a management company or educational service provider (ESP). Whether it is a single site program that is autonomous in design (management company), or a multi-site corporate structure, such as *Academica* (a for-profit management organization), the *KIPP Foundation* (a not-for-profit educational management organization), or *K12, inc.* (a for-profit online educational management organization), each organizational style defines the experience students receive.

Before charter schools, public schools across the U.S. all operated under the same operational structure, a stand-alone autonomous school district. Though the size and specific staffing structures differed among districts and states, they were based on a direct employment structure. The board of education was the employer for all teachers, administration, and staff. If the district contracted for services, they were limited to non-academic activities, such as transportation, food, or janitorial services. This model connects the academic outcomes directly to the school board through the teachers, administrators, and school staff.

In contrast, charter schools can contract academic services, which creates an indirect path from the board to the academic outcomes. Because most charter schools elect to contract educational services, they transfer some responsibility through the contract to the management company. Therefore, the management company is responsible, at least in part, for the academic outcomes of the program. Additionally, a third component to the charter school structure is the relationship between the school board and the charter authorizer. This relationship is codified through the charter contract, which is the document that officially documents the authorizer's expectations and educational goals for the school.

Because the charter school model has two additional elements that conventional districts don't have – the authorizer and management company – their organizational structure is unique to conventional public schools. Rather than all the accountability placed on the shoulders of the

school and district administrators and board members of a conventional district, charter school accountability extends to the management companies and authorizers. The field of charter schools is still working this out in practice, as most of the accountability is still shouldered by the school itself (the board, students, and families). However, the outcomes of these programs are linked to the activities surrounding the authorizers and the school's management (Lubienski & Weitzel, 2010). Although authorizers do not directly operate the schools, they play a critical role in initial charter contract approval, continual oversight, and re-authorization.

Authorizer Performance

Since authorizers are not involved in the day-to-day operations of the charter schools they authorize, they have a limited connection to the specific performance outcomes of the program. They are not engaged in the teaching and learning process, hiring faculty or staff, or any of the school activities. However, they are involved in the key elements of approving the school's charter contract, which contains the educational approach, school design, operational and management structure, and the assessment plan, and the specific educational goals. Furthermore, they are responsible for evaluating the school's performance and responding to any lack of performance. Authorizers have the oversight responsibility that requires them to hold the charter school (specifically the board) accountable for their performance (Vergari, 2001). However, few management companies address low school performance or only do for egregious or long-standing offenders of low performance. As a result, many authorizers have low-performing schools in their portfolios (Vergari, 2001) habitually.

Most of the decision of when and how to address low performance is based on the authorizer staff's decision. Unless pressed by either state officials, parents or community members, or sometimes the media, they typically don't act on the low performance. When they do, it typically translates into school closure. Because authorizers cannot directly interact with the school's teachers and staff, their recourse is either influence through the board (who their contract is with), or closure. A review of school closure in Michigan found that the typical reason for charter schools closing is either financial or non-renewal of the charter contract, not for academic performance (MDE, 2020). Interestingly, most of the closures were initiated by the boards of those charter schools, not the authorizer. Additionally, Alison Consoletti (2011) study from the Center of Education Reform noted that 66% of charter school closures are due to financial reasons, a lack of funds, or mismanagement.

Overall, more research is needed to inform how authorizers are connected to charter school performance and if individual authorizer practices impact charter school performance. Though authorizers do not directly operate the schools they charter, they are the most significant outside influence on their decisions and actions. Understanding this relationship will assist educators, authorizers, charter schools, and legislators who shape policy and practice to continue maximizing public resources in the quest for improved performance.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of authorizing practices on charter school performance. Using Michigan charter schools as the unit of analysis, this research examined charter school performance by authorizer type. By looking specifically at authorizers, new conclusions were made about performance patterns and how charter schools are doing across

various authorizers. To fully explore the variables around the topic of charter school performance in relation to their authorizers, the following questions were used to guide this research project:

Research Question 1: What effect does Authorizer type have on student and school performance?

Sub-questions:

1. Is there a statistically significant difference between authorizer type and student achievement, as measured by the Proficiency Index?
2. Is there a statistically significant difference between authorizer type and student growth in English Language Arts?
3. Is there a statistically significant difference between authorizer type and student growth in Math?
4. Is there a statistically significant difference between authorizer type and the Growth Index?
5. Is there a statistically significant difference between authorizer type and graduation rate?
6. Is there a statistically significant difference between authorizer type and the Overall Index?

Research Question 2: What effect does Authorizer type have on fiscal and operational performance?

Sub-questions:

1. Is there a statistically significant difference between authorizer type and Financial Performance, as measured by the fund balance as a percent of expenditures?
2. Is there a statistically significant difference between authorizer type and Demand, as measured by enrollment trend?

Research Question 3: How do charter schools authorized by an LEA compare to their authorizer district (conventional public schools)?

The following null hypotheses were used to further test Research Question 1:

Hypotheses (Null):

- H₁ There is no statistically significant difference between authorizer type and student achievement, as measured by the Proficiency Index.
- H₂: There is no statistically significant difference between authorizer type and student growth in English Language Arts.
- H₃: There is no statistically significant difference between authorizer type and student growth in Math.
- H₄: There is no statistically significant difference between authorizer type and the Growth Index.
- H₅: There is no statistically significant difference between authorizer type and graduation rate.
- H₆: There is no statistically significant difference between authorizer type and the Overall (composite) Index.

The following null hypotheses were used to test Research Question 2 further:

Hypotheses (Null):

- H₇ There is no statistically significant difference between authorizer type and financial performance, as measured by the fund balance as a percent of expenditures?

H₈ There is no statistically significant difference between authorizer type and Demand, as measured by enrollment trend?

Methods

Research Approach

Charter schools are complex organizations that are in partnership with their authorizer. To understand the factors contributing to charter school performance, a review of authorizing and its impact on charter schools is appropriate. This study used a quantitative research design to examine the authorizer type variables associated with charter school performance. These variables included student performance outcomes (achievement and growth), comparison data (state and district), and operational performance (fund balance and enrollment). Data was collected from the Michigan Department of Education's public database www.mischooldata.org; Michigan's official education data source. Descriptive statistics were used to provide an overview of the schools and management companies, with specific inferential statistics used to test stated research questions and hypotheses. Specifically, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to analyze the variables in Research Question 1 and 2 and associated null hypotheses. An additional Research Question explored the performance of LEA authorizers and their charter schools and compared index scores.

Data and Sample

Only schools designated as "general education" by the Michigan Department of Education were used in this study, including Schools of Excellence (SOE) and cyber schools. Although cyber schools are unique to brick-and-mortar charter schools, they were included in this study as they follow the exact schooling requirements and assessment administration, and thus the data is comparable. Schools designated as Alternative Education, Special Education, and Vocational/CTE programs were removed. Schools designated as Strict Discipline Academies (SDA) were also removed from the study.

There were 279 charter school organizations (classified as a district), with a total of 365 individual school sites in operation in Michigan for the 2018-2019 academic year. Therefore, a total of 314 schools met the criteria for a general education charter school, with 295 schools offering grades 3, 8, or 11, having posted scores, and were in operation for at least two years. Below is a breakdown of the sample:

- 42 authorizers
- 42 ISD/RESAs
- 15 Cyber Schools
- 206 Elementary (K-8)
- 59 Elementary and high schools (some configuration of both primary and secondary)
- 30 High school only (grades 9-12)

Forty-two different authorizers authorized the schools in this study: 14 LEA districts authorized 23 schools, six intermediate school districts authorized seven schools, and 11 community colleges or universities authorized the remaining 252 schools.

Table 1*Sample by Authorizer Type*

Authorizer Type	Schools	Enrollment
University and Community College (HEI)	256	64,234
Intermediate School Districts (ISD)	7	1,356
Local Education Authority (LEA)	23	7,269

Variables

The independent variable used for Research Questions 1 and 2 was authorizer type, including LEA, ISD, HEA. The dependent variables for Research Question 1 included the Proficiency Index, ELA Growth scores, Math Growth scores, the Composite Index, Growth Index, Graduation Index, and the School Quality Index. The dependent variables for Research Question 2 included Financial Performance, as measured by fund balance as a percent of expenditures, and the variable of Demand, which was measured by the percent of enrollment change (MDE designated).

Table 2*Breakdown of Variables*

Variable	Independent or Dependent	Variable Type
Authorizer Type	Independent	Categorical
Proficiency Index	Dependent	Continuous
ELA Growth	Dependent	Continuous
Math Growth	Dependent	Continuous
Composite Index	Dependent	Continuous
Growth Index	Dependent	Continuous
Graduation Index	Dependent	Continuous
School Quality Index	Dependent	Continuous
Financial Performance	Dependent	Continuous
Demand	Dependent	Continuous

Data Analyses

First, I organized the data for schools around the various authorizers to compare school performance across the dependent variables. This provided a clearer picture of how the schools fell by authorizer type. Next, a series of one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was performed to assess group differences among the various hypotheses. Research Question 1 was investigated through six subsequent hypotheses, with each focusing on the difference between authorizer type and a specific student or school performance measure. An ANOVA was performed on each null hypothesis to determine the variance between the independent variable authorizer (LEA, ISD, or HEI), and student performance, serving as the dependent variable. Research Question 2 investigated an additional two hypotheses, with each focusing on the difference between authorizer

type and operational performance. An ANOVA was performed on each null hypothesis to determine the variance between the independent variable authorizer (LEA, ISD, or HEI), and fiscal performance and student demand, serving as the dependent variables.

Research Question 3 was analyzed through descriptive statistics, as an adequate sample was unavailable for inferential statistics. A review of data was performed to provide context for comparing charter schools authorized by an LEA to their associated LEA district's performance. Additional data and analysis are needed to perform statistically significant results.

Results

Descriptive Results

Table 3 presents the results of descriptive statistics for Research Questions 1 and 2. The n size and mean, standards deviation, and minimum and maximum scores were calculated. The mean results for the four dependent variables of Proficiency, Growth Index, Graduation Index, and overall School Quality Index were highest among ISD authorized schools, except the Graduation Index, which was highest for HEI. Higher education institution authorizers followed on the other three variables, with LEAs trailing in overall performance on all variables. Although ISDs did not have the highest Graduation Index, the minimum score was significantly higher than that of other authorizers.

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics

	n	Mean	SD	Min	Max
<i>Proficiency Score</i>					
HEI	265	47.02	25.68	3.20	100.00
ISD	7	62.92	30.57	8.34	100.00
LEA	23	29.94	23.82	3.91	98.93
Conv.		65.92	25.59	0.00	100.00
<i>Growth Index</i>					
HEI	265	48.84	24.76	2.37	100.00
ISD	7	52.61	29.40	13.29	100.00
LEA	23	30.05	23.64	3.31	92.71
Conv.		64.85	26.01	0.00	100.00
<i>Graduation Index</i>					
HEI	65	87.67	16.65	12.95	100.00
ISD	5	77.72	19.28	55.10	98.83
LEA	6	56.13	27.21	27.05	97.79
Conv.		85.17	22.26	0.00	100.00
<i>Overall Index</i>					
HEI	265	55.04	22.15	22.50	99.06
ISD	7	63.31	25.21	22.13	99.31
LEA	23	38.93	19.93	16.98	94.34
Conv.		70.25	22.15	1.48	100.00

Research Question 1

Hypothesis 1 investigated the difference between authorizer type and student achievement, as measured by the Michigan Proficiency Index. A statistically significant difference between the means of the three authorizer types was found, $F(2,288)=5.87$, $p=0.00$ ($r=.04$). Student achievement was highest for schools authorized by ISDs ($M = 61.16$, $SD = 10.16$), followed by schools authorized by HEI ($M = 47.02$, $SD = 1.58$), with schools being authorized by LEA's having the lowest student achievement ($M = 29.94$, $SD = 4.97$). Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 4.

Table 4
Achievement Index

<i>Source of Variation</i>	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	8044.40	2.00	4022.20	6.03***	0.00	3.03
Within Groups	192328.28	293.00	656.41			
Total	200372.67	295.00				

*** $p < 0.01$

Hypothesis 2 investigated the difference between authorizer type and student growth in English Language Arts, as measured by the Michigan ELA Growth Index. The results show a statistically significant difference between the means of the three authorizer types, $F(2,293)=6.13$, $p=0.00$ ($r=.04$). Student's ELA growth was highest for schools authorized by ISDs ($M = 64.26$, $SD = 9.09$), followed by schools authorized by HEI ($M = 54.97$, $SD = 1.51$), with schools being authorized by LEA's having the lowest student ELA growth ($M = 37.83$, $SD = 5.23$). Subsequently, the null hypothesis was rejected. Results of the analysis are presented in Table 5.

Table 5
ELA Growth Index

<i>Source of Variation</i>	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	6994.22	2.00	3497.11	5.86***	0.00	3.03
Within Groups	171720.58	288.00	596.25			
Total	178714.80	290.00				

*** $p < 0.01$

Hypothesis 3 investigated the difference between authorizer type and student growth in Mathematics, as measured by the Michigan Math Growth Index. A statistically significant difference between the means of the three authorizer types was also found, $F(2,122)=4.18$, $p=0.02$ ($r=.06$). Student's Math growth was highest for schools authorized by ISDs ($M = 40.97$, $SD = 13.41$) and schools authorized by HEI ($M = 40.80$, $SD = 2.85$), with schools being authorized by

LEA's having about half the Math growth ($M = 22.49$, $SD = 4.83$). Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. Results of the analysis are presented in Table 6.

Table 6
Math Index

<i>Source of Variation</i>	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	6299.79	2.00	3149.89	4.18***	0.02	3.07
Within Groups	92027.23	122.00	754.32			
Total	98327.02	124.00				

*** $p < 0.05$

Hypothesis 4 investigated the overall differences in School Growth Indexes between authorizer types, as measured by the Michigan Growth Index. A statistically significant difference between the means of the three authorizer types was found, $F(2,292)=6.24$, $p=0.00$ ($r=.04$). Similar to that of the subject matter growth results, the Growth Index scores were highest for schools authorized by ISDs ($M = 52.61$, $SD = 11.11$) and schools authorized by HEI ($M = 50.69$, $SD = 3.15$), with schools being authorized by LEA's having a lower overall index ($M = 30.05$, $SD = 4.93$). The null hypothesis was rejected. Results of the analysis are presented in Table 7.

Table 7
Composite Growth Index

<i>Source of Variation</i>	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	7663.53	2.00	3831.77	6.24***	0.00	3.03
Within Groups	179267.57	292.00	613.93			
Total	186931.10	294.00				

*** $p < 0.01$

Looking specifically at charter schools with high school programs, Hypothesis 5 investigated the difference between authorizer types and graduation rate, as measured by the Michigan Graduation Index. The results show a statistically significant difference between the means of the three authorizer types, $F(2,73)=9.09$, $p=0.00$ ($r=.20$). Schools authorized by HEI had the highest graduation rates ($M = 87.67$, $SD = 2.07$), followed by schools authorized by ISDs ($M = 77.72$, $SD = 8.62$), with schools being authorized by LEA's having the lowest graduation rate ($M = 56.13$, $SD = 11.11$). Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 8.

Table 8*Graduation Index*

<i>Source of Variation</i>	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	5713.03	2.00	2856.52	9.09***	0.00	3.12
Within Groups	22936.31	73.00	314.20			
Total	28649.35	75.00				

***p < 0.01

Hypothesis 6 investigated the overall composite index scores between the authorizer type and the Michigan overall School Quality Index. The analysis shows a statistically significant difference between the means of the three authorizer types, $F(2,292)=6.90$, $p=0.00$ ($r=.05$). The School Quality Index was highest for schools authorized by ISDs ($M = 63.31$, $SD = 9.53$) and schools authorized by HEI ($M = 56.92$, $SD = 2.75$), with schools being authorized by LEA's having a considerably lower Overall Index ($M = 38.93$, $SD = 4.16$). This null hypothesis was also rejected. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 9.

Table 9*Overall Index*

<i>Source of Variation</i>	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	6115.68	2.00	3057.84	6.90***	0.00	3.03
Within Groups	129323.69	292.00	442.89			
Total	135439.37	294.00				

***p < 0.01

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 investigated the financial and operational elements of charter school performance by authorizer. Specifically, Hypothesis 7 analyzed Fiscal Performance between authorizer type and fund balance as a percent of expenditures. An analysis was conducted with results showing a statistically significant difference between the means of the three authorizer types was found, $F(2,232)=3.50$, $p=0.03$ ($r=.03$). The fund balances as a percent of expenditures were highest for LEA authorized schools ($M = 38.25$, $SD = 50.22$), with schools authorized by ISDs ($M = 21.80$, $SD = 10.08$) and schools authorized by HEI ($M = 19.24$, $SD = 26.49$) having a much lower, but similar fund balance percentages. It should be noted that the variability of this measure was severe for both LEA and HEI authorized programs, with the greatest variability for LEA authorized schools (minimum = -2.54, maximum 167.21, $n=17$), followed by HEI authorized schools (minimum = -132.61, maximum 173.81, $n=212$). The results of the null hypothesis were rejected. A presentation of the analysis is presented in Table 10.

Table 10
Fiscal Performance

<i>Source of Variation</i>	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	5694.06	2.00	2847.03	3.50***	0.03	3.03
Within Groups	188924.45	232.00	814.33			
Total	194618.50	234.00				

***p < 0.05

Hypothesis 8 analyzed the variable of Demand between authorizer type, as measured by student enrollment trend. The results show a statistically significant difference between the means of the three authorizer types was found, $F(2,232)=3.61$, $p=0.03$ ($r=.03$). The enrollment trend (positive) was the greatest for LEA-authorized schools ($M = 16.98$, $SD = 40.19$), with schools authorized by HEI ($M = 2.48$, $SD = 20.82$) having a much lower but positive enrollment trend. Schools authorized by ISDs saw a negative enrollment trend ($M = -4.65$, $SD = 3.79$). Therefore, the null hypothesis was also rejected. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 11.

Table 11
Demand

<i>Source of Variation</i>	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	3698.09	2.00	1849.05	3.61***	0.03	3.03
Within Groups	118733.24	232.00	511.78			
Total	122431.34	234.00				

***p < 0.01

Research Question 3

To analyze the comparison between charter schools that are authorized by an LEA and the LEA's own performance, additional descriptive statistics were used. First, an average index score was calculated for each LEA, using the associated measures for all schools in operation for that LEA district. This score was then compared to the average index score for the charter schools authorized by that LEA. A difference in the index scores was also calculated.

Table 12*Comparison between LEA Authorizers and the Schools they Charter*

	Proficiency Index			Growth Index			Graduation Index			School Quality Index		
	LEA	Chart.	Diff.	LEA	Chart.	Diff.	LEA	Chart.	Diff.	LEA	Chart.	Diff.
LEA 1	27.34	38.17	10.83	28.24	37.23	8.99	86.27	40.12	-46.15	45.11	73.39	28.28
LEA 2	71.52	7.06	-64.46	62.07	7.90	-54.17	90.04	78.51	-11.53	82.52	29.98	-52.54
LEA 3	81.32	3.91	-77.41	79.92	3.31	-76.61	86.60	-	-	84.05	58.39	-25.66
LEA 4	42.18	8.41	-33.77	42.77	11.16	-31.61	90.63	-	-	79.06	56.60	-22.46
LEA 5	34.89	47.69	12.80	34.89	35.61	0.72	84.94	-	-	71.03	54.58	-16.45
LEA 6	10.15	32.15	22.00	14.98	29.66	14.68	-	59.32	-	45.70	61.57	15.87
LEA 7	61.27	42.21	-19.06	59.58	41.07	-18.50	95.65	78.55	-17.10	81.74	70.79	-10.95
LEA 8	66.95	19.07	-47.88	63.76	14.89	-48.87	86.00	-	-	74.45	75.80	1.35
LEA 9	63.41	29.80	-33.61	62.53	30.78	-31.75	90.03	-	-	74.79	70.55	-4.24
LEA 10	-	25.44	-	-	27.41	-	-	88.17	-	42.41	65.41	23.00
LEA 11	85.63	33.05	-52.58	83.86	40.31	-43.55	98.67	-	-	82.23	52.51	-29.72
LEA 12	85.48	8.91	-76.57	82.09	14.78	-67.31	96.74	-	-	90.41	61.11	-29.30
LEA 13	86.97	25.18	-61.79	75.77	24.19	-51.58	100.00	-	-	87.41	73.63	-13.78
LEA 14	67.80	31.61	-36.19	74.53	29.95	-44.58	96.90	-	-	87.13	84.84	-2.29
Average	60.38	25.19	-35.21	58.84	24.88	-34.16	91.87	68.93	-24.92	73.43	63.51	-9.92

Of the 14 LEA districts authorizing charter schools during the 2018-2019 academic year, the average Proficiency Index for LEAs was 60.38, with the charter school they authorize having an average Proficiency Index of 25.19 (Table 12). A difference of 35.21 points. The growth results were also considerably different, with the average LEA Growth Index being 58.84, and the average related charter school Growth Index is 24.88. A difference of 34.16 points. Only three LEA school districts had graduation rates to compare between the LEA and charter schools. Of the three LEA districts, the average Graduation Index was 91.87, while the average charter school Graduation Index was 68.93. A difference of 24.92 points. The overall School Quality Index was not as prominent, with the average LEA School Quality Index being 73.43 and the average charter school School Quality Index being 63.51. A difference of 9.92 points.

An observation of the data is that the lower performing LEA districts had some of the higher charter school performance. Conversely, some of the higher-performing LEA districts had some of the lowest charter school performance. An additional observation was that charter school performance across all LEAs was low. This is consistent with the prior inferential analyses in Research Questions 1 and 2. Schools authorized by LEA districts in Michigan perform considerably lower than their authorizer's district, other charter schools, and the state averages.

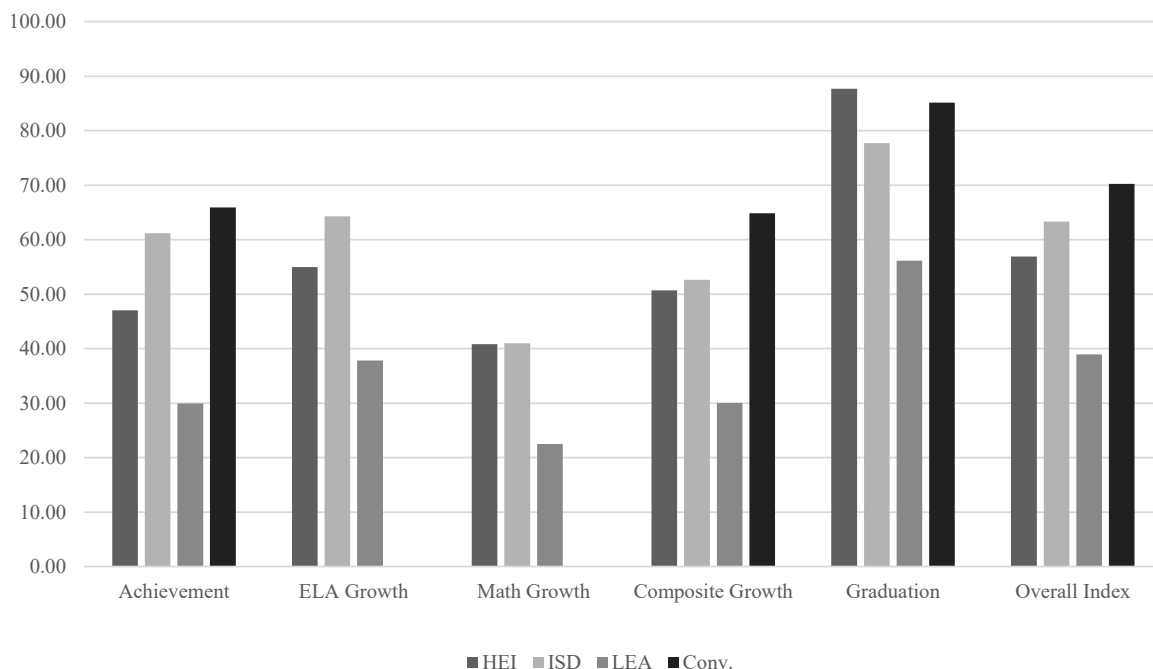
Discussion

The purpose of this research was to investigate the various types of authorizers that oversee Michigan's charter schools and explore the variables associated with school performance. Although state law allows different organizations to issue charters, does the type of authorizer influence charter school performance? This research concludes that there is a statistically

significant difference in authorizer type and charter school performance in Michigan. Specifically, ISDs performed the best among all authorizer types. While HEI authorized schools did not perform as well as ISD authorized schools, their results were similar across most variables, with graduation rates being higher for HEI. Overall, schools chartered by ISDs and HEAs had measurably higher academic performance than did schools authorized by their local districts (LEAs). The mean differences in scores for each authorizer are displayed in Figure 1.

Figure 1

2018-2019 Mean Difference in Charter School Index by Authorizer



An intriguing finding from the analysis was the variation among authorizer type and conventional public schools. Of all public schools in Michigan with Overall Index results for 2018-2019 (both conventional schools and charter schools), the mean Overall Index score was 64.7. However, the schools chartered by LEAs had an Overall Index of 66.5, while HEI and ISD chartered schools Overall Index was 71.9 and 74.1, respectively. Additionally, when only looking at the LEAs who chartered the schools in this study, they had an Overall Index of 61.5. Therefore, combined LEA authorized charter schools did better than their district in all measured categories and performed higher than the state average, though schools chartered by LEAs had the overall lowest performance across all variables. Most, about half that of ISD-authorized schools.

Considering the historic adversarial relationship between conventional districts and charter schools, this is a particularly intriguing outcome. Did LEA performance play a role in the performance of the schools they authorize? Although the LEA charter schools performed better than their authorizer, did authorizing practices play a role in their overall reduced performance? Do LEAs who authorize charter schools have less oversight of their charter programs than do ISDs and HEIs? Are there fewer resources provided to these charter schools, as the district prioritizes the conventional schools? Do these LEAs not perform as well, overall, impacting the performance of the charter schools they authorize? Although the last question does not appear to be the case,

according to the observations of Research Question 3, additional research is needed to fully understand this phenomenon.

When accounting for fiscal and operational performance, however, there is a different story. Schools authorized by LEAs had the highest performance in both fiscal and operational areas. LEA-authorized schools, on average, had nearly twice the fund balance as a percent of expenditures than ISD and HEI-authorized schools. Additionally, LEA authorized schools had the highest, positive enrollment trend, seeing an average increase of 16.98 students from the prior year. Reflecting on the discussion around school performance, enrollment trends were highest among LEA authorized schools. Still, they had the lowest growth, suggesting that school choice is more complex than just selecting a school based on performance.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The legitimacy of charter schools and their long-term success across the education field in the United States is still debated. Although, after nearly 30 years, they have become a mainstay in many communities throughout the country, their legality and right to exist are continuously being questioned. One factor, and possibly the most crucial factor, is the performance of these experimental public school programs. Although research is still shedding light on charter schools and their performance, a reasonable conclusion is that charter school performance varies widely as does the types of charter schools in existence. One factor that plays a role in this is the contributions of the charter school authorizer. The results of this study clearly illustrate that charter schools perform differently by authorizer. Therefore, the next step in the evolution of charter school performance is to understand better why and which factors contribute to higher-performing charter schools to learn from these programs so all schools can improve.

Recommendations for Policy

As the results of this study indicate, the quality of authorizing varies across authorizer types. Legislators and policymakers need to consider this phenomenon when reviewing charter school performance and looking at variables that impact school performance. Lumping all charter schools into the same category ignores the nuances that distinguish the uniqueness of these programs. Additionally, because charter schools typically have less oversight from state education agencies, the additional focus should be placed on the quality of authorizing practices due to the nature of the authorizing relationship. The policies, practices, and staff makeup of authorizers should be reviewed. If there is such a stark difference between outcomes of charter schools by authorizer type, it would be appropriate to assume that the activities around oversight and accountability of authorizers are also different. Policies that address quality authorizing practices, such as budgets, staffing ratios, and even accreditation, might address the variation among authorizers.

Recommendations for Practice

The authorizer has both a unique and vital role to play in the quality element of charter schooling. As this study's outcomes suggest, not all authorizer practices are consistent per the association between authorizer type and the results of the schools they oversee. Organizations, such as the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA), provide both a community for charter school authorizers and training, professional development, and best practices for their staff.

Many states that allow charter schools to operate also have state-level associations. The Michigan Council of Charter School Authorizers (or Council) is one example. Members of the Council meet regularly to discuss charter school topics and authorizing practices, and the element of quality oversight. Charter school authorizers should engage with professional organizations holding quality discussions and offering insight into quality authorizing practices. NACSA and state authorizer organizations can be resources to assist authorizer staff in improving their oversight activities, improving their school's performance. If we want better charter school outcomes, we need better authorizing practices.

Study Limitations

I examined the variables surrounding charter school performance by authorizer type. The scope of this study was intentionally limited to allow for a focused analysis of authorizer type and specific school performance factors in Michigan. There are many additional variables associated with school performance and charter school performance that were not used within this study, including geography and size of the schools, student gender, race and ethnicity (e.g., minority status), socioeconomic status, special education, or alternative types of school programs (e.g., strict discipline academies, alternative educational or special education focus, career tech only programs). This study was also limited to data collected by the state department of education. Aggregated, publicly available performance scores were used. This analysis did not consider the school size as a factor. This study was also limited by the data around LEA authorizing performance. No student-level data was used, which would have yielded additional options for analysis when comparing LEA district outcomes and outcomes of the schools they authorize. Another limitation of this study was its focus on outcomes as the dependent variable rather than actual authorizing practices.

Future Research

Due to the lack of literature specifically focused on charter school authorizing practices, this study sought to inform whether differences exist between authorizer types. Based on the evidence that the performance of charter schools does differ among authorizer types, a logical progression of this work would be the investigation around authorizer practices. What specific behaviors contribute to charter school performance? Are specific policies attributed to higher performance, or lower performance, of charter schools? This study was also limited in analyzing the differences between LEA performance and the schools they authorize. Additional research in this area would shed light on this relationship that could inform both policy and practice. This study was Michigan-centric in nature. Though Michigan has a large charter school population, additional research into other states would be appropriate. This could also increase the sample size, helping to substantiate the results of this study. Also, a more focused look at the additional variables associated with charter school performance would add additional results to this topic of authorizer performance. Specifically, race and other demographic factors, such as urban, rural, and low SES, would inform the nuances among authorizing practices and the uniqueness of the schools they charter. And finally, a broader investigation into closed charter schools and the relationship to authorizing practices may illuminate behaviors of authorizer staff and the decision-making process.

Conclusions

Charter schools are unique public school entities, autonomous from conventional district school programs. Their organizational structure includes other influencers to the overall performance of their programs, not found with conventional schools, through educational service providers and authorizers. Charter schools are interconnected to their authorizer, but little is known about how authorizing policies and practices impact them. The authorizer is a critical piece in determining the quality of the schools they oversee, so understanding their practices and outcomes is essential to improving the overall quality of public schools.

The findings of this study show that a statistically significant difference exists between various authorizing types throughout key performance measures; academic and operational. These results infer that authorizing plays a role in student performance and overall program outcomes. Therefore, the policies and practices impacting authorizing are an element in the school quality quotient and should be considered when drafting policies and oversight activities. Although this study did not analyze the qualitative aspects of authorizing practice, it substantiates the differences in outcomes of charter schools by authorizer types, which may be more than solely the difference of the schools. Additional work to unpack the specific behaviors and attributes of authorizing would be appropriate to understand authorizers and their impact further. Ultimately, however, these outcomes are a step in understanding the link between authorizers and the schools they oversee.

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How We Did It: Academic, Financial, and Community Aspects of Rural School District Consolidation

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This study explored the impact of rural school district consolidation in eastern North Carolina. Wilkins County is a low-income, low-performing county with an average daily membership (ADM) of 1,501 students. This case study reviews the process of consolidation one year after the 2017-2018 consolidation in terms of academic, financial, and community. It was determined that academics increased, the need for financial support increased, and the community perceived the event as positive overall. It was also concluded that additional years of data would be needed to determine the long-term effects.

Keywords: school consolidation, rural schools, academic impacts, fiscal impacts, perception impacts

Small school systems have historically struggled to educate children and maintain their attendance levels and campuses (Reynolds, 2013). Ultimately, the result, especially in rural areas, is the closing of small rural schools (Imazeki & Reschovsky, 2003). According to the United States Census Bureau (2019), in 1940, 43.5% of the United States (US) population lived in rural areas; now, only 21% do. Despite the decline in the population of the rural areas, there is a need to provide an equitable education for all students who remain (Buzzard, 2016). Equity becomes an issue in areas with small populations because funding is driven based on the number of students present at the school site.

School consolidation is a way to manage school populations by providing increased resources to the consolidated school (Adams & Foster, 2002; Imazeki & Reschovsky, 2003; Reynolds, 2013). To understand the importance of supporting rural schools in light of the trend towards consolidation, it is necessary to review the impact of consolidation on the school communities. To that end, this case study explored the impact of the 2017-2018 consolidation of the Tiger High School (THS) Grade 6-12 site in Wilkins County, North Carolina. Figure 1 shows the changes to the Wilkins County school sites through consolidation from 2016-2017 through 2018-2019. Consolidation was completed with the intention of addressing academic, fiscal, and perception concerns. The findings from this case study provide a framework for district consolidation to future researchers and practitioners considering the consolidation of several schools into one site.

Statement of the Problem

The push to increase efficiency in spending for educational expenses has dominated consolidation debates for years (Grier, 2012; Nitta et al., 2008). Although the debates do not point to results that show financial gain (Silvernail et al., 2007), they do focus on the ability to increase resources for all students (Marchbank, 2015). This case study is needed to determine the fiscal, academic, and social aspects of school consolidation in the rural eastern NC school district that occurred in 2017-2018 to prepare for any consolidations in the future. While this is a case study, similar circumstances apply to many rural school districts considering school consolidation.

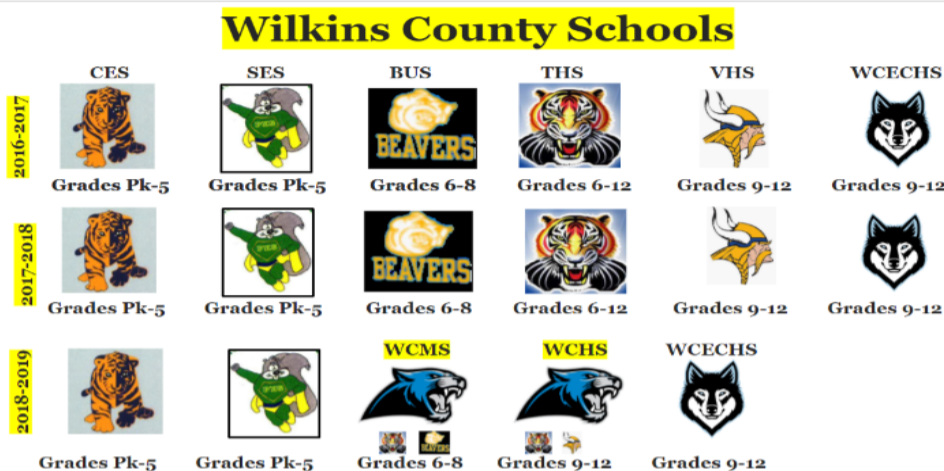
Purpose of the Study

When rural areas are faced with the practicality of consolidation, it is often around the premise of financial or academic concerns. This study explored the fiscal, academic, and perception impacts at the end of the 2018-2019 school year after the school closed for one full year. Data were collected from informational materials promoting the consolidations, educational facts and figures, surveys, interviews, and financial records available from the residents and staff members in Wilkins County.

The push to consolidate the schools in the system is not a new idea. In 1996, the former Wilkins County Schools superintendent noted the imperative for consolidation (WCS Board Meeting Minutes, 1996). In 2017, there were six school sites: Cub Elementary School (CES), Tiger High School (THS), Squirrel Elementary School (SES), Beaver Union School (BUS), Viking High School (VHS), and Wilkins County Early College High School (WCECHS). The Average Daily Membership (ADM) in one school site, THS, proved to be declining. With some grade levels at THS having only 10 students enrolled, there was a notion of exploring the possibility of consolidation of the site by the board of education. Figure 2 shows the ADM of each school site

and the new ADM after consolidation for the 2018-2019 school year. The figure also shows the gain or loss by school site. Overall, the district lost 1% of the students (21 students) from the 2017-2018 to 2018-2019 school year in which the consolidation occurred.

Figure 1
Wilkins County Schools' School Sites



Note. In 2018-2019 Grades 6-12 at THS were consolidated into the site of BUS and VHS. BUS was rebranded as BPMS. VHS was rebranded as WCHS.

Figure 2
School Capacity

Wilkins County Schools					
School Name in 2017	ADM in 2017	Change to ADM from 2017 to 2018	ADM 2018	School Name in 2018	
Cub Elementary School (CES)	191	-35	156	Cub Elementary School (CES)	
Tiger High School (THS)	153	-	-	consolidated	
Squirrel Elementary School (SES)	651	-24	627	Squirrel Elementary School (SES)	
Beaver Union School (BUS)	258	+40	292	Wilkins County Middle School School (WCMS)	
Viking High School (VHS)	346	+23	369	Wilkins County High School (WCHS)	
Wilkins County Early College High School (WCECHS)	38	+13	51	Wilkins County Early College High School (WCECHS)	
Total	1,480	-21	1,501		

Note. Figure 2 displays the change in ADM for each school site from the 2017-2018 school year in January 2018 to the 2018-2019 school year in September 2018.

As shown in Table 1, the Grade 6-12 school, THS, was projected to spend \$12,691.10 per student. State funding per pupil is \$7,225.87. This means the state committed to spending this amount per child. Any amount above this would have required the district to use other funding sources to meet their school's individual needs. When compared to other district sites, more funds were being spent at the THS site. This also means that larger schools would have fewer staff or funding to ensure the smaller sites were appropriately supplied with staff and school needs. The major differences in expenses were partially due to the cost of staff salaries. The only other school exceeding \$10,000 per student was a Grade 9-13 specialty school, WCECHS.

Table 1
School Cost Analysis: 2017-2018 Fiscal Year Budget Projections (Based on an ADM of 1498)

Categories	Cub Elementary School (CES)	Tiger High School (THS)	Squirrel Elementary School (SES)	Viking High School (VHS)	Beaver Union School (BUS)	Wilkins County Early College High School (WCECHS)
Salaries	\$1,196,657.46	\$1,471,350.29	\$3,436,124.55	\$2,394,625.11	\$1,956,094.35	\$435,385.84
Water	\$6,500.00	\$6,000.00	\$53,000.00	\$11,000.00	\$8,000.00	\$0.00
Fuel	\$17,500.00	\$17,500.00	\$25,000.00	\$50,000.00	\$25,000.00	\$0.00
Electricity	\$39,000.00	\$74,000.00	\$81,000.00	\$104,000.00	\$64,000.00	\$0.00
Maintenance	\$49,276.77	\$28,893.00	\$40,746.00	\$144,381.04	\$49,796.20	\$217.00
Instructional Supplies	\$27,533.40	\$32,096.17	\$200,959.33	\$81,308.02	\$58,791.13	\$46,146.32
Cafeteria – Non-Salary	*All Cafeteria is included with THS	\$159,650.00	\$282,800.00	\$108,050.00	\$93,550.00	\$0.00
Total Cost	\$1,336,467.63	\$1,789,445.46	\$4,119,629.88	\$2,893,364.17	\$2,255,204.16	\$481,749.16
Estimate of Total Students	179	141	590	316	240	32
Cost Per Student	\$7,466.30 \$240.43	\$12,691.10 <u>\$5,465.23</u>	\$6,982.42 <u>-\$243.45</u>	\$9,156.22 \$1,930.35	\$9,396.68 \$2,170.81	\$15,054.66 <u>\$7,828.79</u>

Difference
Between
District Cost
per Student
and State
Allotment
per Student

Percentage of
Budget Spent
on Students
at this Site

10% 14% 32% 22% 18% 4%

Note. 1,498 Total Students; \$12,875,860.46 Total Cost; \$7,225.87 WCS Per Child Allotment. This table displays the cost of each site in the 2017-2018 school year with the WCECHS and THS noted with an underline to show the increased cost at each of these school sites.

Review of Related Research and Literature

Consolidation of schools has been and is a topic that attracts researchers and practitioners alike. According to Flowers (2010), it is one of the most difficult challenges to face in a community. In this regard, school consolidation is unsurpassed compared to other modern reform efforts in the drastic impact it has had on public schools (Berry, 2006; Duncombe & Yinger, 2010; Hayes, 2018). After the consolidation of a 1,501 ADM Grade 6-12-school in the 2017-2018 school year, this case study assisted the Wilkins County Schools in determining if their anticipated benefits materialized. The purpose of this mixed-methods case study was to determine the degree of community, financial, and academic impacts resulting from the local school board's decision about consolidating a Grade 6-12 school site. This review of literature will cover

- The history of school consolidation
- Perceptions about school consolidation
- Academic performance, financial impacts, and community
- Sustainable impact
- Building community consensus processes
- How academics are assessed in NC

History of School Consolidation

School consolidation is a term that is not new to the educational sector. School consolidations have been used to reduce the number of schools starting as early as 1939 (Ackell, 2013). There were over 117,108 school districts in the United States in the 1940s (Cotton, 1999).

This number has decreased to 13,225 in 2017 (United States Census Bureau, 2018). Evolutions within this timeframe have required school districts to change over time (Johnson, 2015). During the history and evolution, schools have transformed from one-room schoolhouses to modernized, multiple buildings and technology-enhanced buildings (Johnson, 2015; Marchbank, 2015). Likewise, teachers had to shift from teaching multiple grades in one classroom to multiple teachers teaching individual grades of students, all with a variety of low to high technology resources as supports (Houston, 2001). Cox and Cox (2010) asserted that, as communities continue to face

reduced budgets, school consolidation would continue to be a recommendation of governance to facilitate fiscally responsible decisions related to educational costs.

Perceptions on School Consolidation

Several scholars have referred to school consolidation as school redistricting, school mapping restructure, school merger, school deactivation, and school district reorganization (Alberghini, 2017; Bard et al., 2006; Durant, 2016; Johnson, 2015). Nonetheless, each term defines the process of combining school sites due to a variety of reasons. With reasons varying from student choice to financial reasons, the perception of this topic differs based on the stakeholders involved. These stakeholders include parents/guardians, former attendees, students, superintendents, school leaders, staff, and local school boards.

Criticism, Size, Academics, Poverty, and Financial Impacts

Research about school consolidation is positive and negative regarding its impact on academic and financial issues. Overall, there appears to be a chorus of critics who view consolidation at the very least with skepticism. Skeptics argue that “under the rubric of school improvement, many places that once provided school no longer do; for they have been improved out of existence” (DeYoung & Howley, 1990, p. 3). In some successful consolidations, efforts are made to involve community meetings, share plans, and have all student bodies interact prior to consolidation. Despite those glimmers of successful consolidations, agreement for maintaining smaller schools seemed to thrive from the association of smaller class sizes, more extracurricular involvement, stronger community connections, and the lack of research that showed increased school quality after consolidation (Bard et al., 2006; Cutshall, 2003). When looking at impacts, researchers have varied points depending upon perceived impact, school size, poverty and race, and resources (Alberghini, 2017; Baldwin, 2015; Bard et al., 2006; Irvin et al., 2011). While some researchers in this area also looked at the per-pupil cost to analyze the data, other researchers looked at the grade spans served and whole child focus areas such as poverty and social-emotional aspects (Lowen et al., 2010; Lyson, 2005; Woods et al., 2005).

Equity in North Carolina Districts

In North Carolina, the State Constitution mandates the funding of adequate resources for all schools in the state. While the outcome unanimously stated that “neither school district nor counties have any constitutional right to equal funding, ...all children...have a fundamental state constitutional right to the opportunity to receive a sound basic education” (Leandro v. State of North Carolina; Leandro v. State: Duke University School of Law, n.d.). A sound education was defined as providing opportunities for children to become adults that are literate, make informed choices, and have sufficient academic and vocational skills to engage in additional education or gainful employment. With the pressure from Leandro for schools to improve academically and survive financially, school leaders and school boards consider consolidation to increase fiscal and academic resources.

Building Sustainable Impact

Supporters of consolidation point to the benefits of improving financial issues, manageable enrollment, cost savings for maintenance of facilities, balancing equity among schools, and centralizing administrative responsibilities (Britt, 2013). Britt (2013) indicates that benefits can be seen in sharing of staff for efficiency, increasing PK-12 student-to-student interaction, and increasing Teacher Cadet Programs. Each of these brings greater benefits to a small rural area where it is typically hard to attract highly qualified staff.

Community Consensus Building

Consolidation will always be a pivotal issue in education, especially in rural areas (Gordon & Knight, 2008). When consolidating, the impact extends beyond the physical building (Hyndman et al., 2010). To build consensus, leaders must invest time learning about the needs and wants of the community and the characteristics present in the neighborhood of the school (Lyson, 2002). With the school sometimes being a major employer in a small rural area, the staff will populate the area near the school. As a result of shared values and a blend of professional to managerial staff in the area, both social and economic vitality can co-exist (Baldwin, 2015; Bard et al., 2006; Lyson, 2002).

The push to consolidate the schools in the system is not a new idea for this case study. Since 1996, the former Wilkins County Schools Superintendent has noted this need. In 2017, the current ADM in one school site proved to be declining; and with grade levels with only 10 students, there was a notion of exploring the possibility of consolidation of the site by the board of education. In this small, low-performing district that lacked resources, it was assumed that it would not be best practice to have one teacher preparing to teach six courses. Another consideration was the use of substitutes for classroom teachers on one site while the same position at a different site was not maximized.

Testing and Accountability in North Carolina School Districts

Early in the research, the perceived academic gains for students were considered a strong rationale for why board members shared some consensus with the community. According to North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) (2018), Wilkins County Schools had been on the state's low-performing school districts list since 2011. Data from NCDPI End-of-Grade (EOG) and End-of-Course (EOC) assessments provide a history of low-performing schools in Wilkins County Schools. In the context of this case study, the local school board hypothesized positive gains for students impacted by school consolidation.

Methodology

According to Buzzard (2016), "the school is the center of the community, and all of its components interact with one another and the rural community to form the ever-evolving open-social system of people, things, and ideas" (p. 3). This center was, however, disappearing in rural areas as school mergers and consolidations have taken a priority to save resources and funding.

The goal of this research was to assist small rural school districts with a practical plan for the consolidation of multiple school sites. In the research context, the school district was in dire

need of several new facilities at one time. School construction cost can be extremely expensive, with new schools ranging from \$7 million to \$60 million per site depending upon the size and grade range (NCDPI, 2021). This dilemma has helped the district to change its focus from developing five individual new sites over the next 50 years to building one site to hold all student PK-13. This brought us to the current case study. Through a mixed-methods approach, we explored the consolidation of the Grade 6-12 site through the lens of academic, financial, and community impacts. This study also provided significant insight about the impact of site consolidation for small districts.

The mixed-methods approach was the most suitable based on the allowance for a variety of data to be analyzed. This approach allowed us to combine qualitative and quantitative data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Qualitative designs impacted the descriptive, open-ended, narrative capabilities of this data collection process (Creswell et al., 2007). Qualitative methods also encouraged the use of emerging methods of data collection as well as seeking themes and patterns for interpretation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Qualitative data provided rich, detailed accounts of stakeholders' perspectives regarding the processes and impacts of school closure and site creation. We conducted community meeting focus groups to gain group feedback on the consolidation process. Surveys were also used to gauge the community perspective. These surveys included areas that required a written response for feedback. Coding of these data was completed when collected to support analysis of each participant and categorization into common themes.

Quantitative methods required an instrument to be used for data collection, statistical analysis, and statistical interpretation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Quantitative data in this research were explored in outcomes that have pre- and post-data structures. Data on the construction of buildings, school report card data, academic performance of local and state benchmarks/assessments, enrollment data, staffing data, and coded data from community forms helped to provide a quantitative view of the changes.

The overarching goal of the research was to use a variety of data to paint a whole picture of how school consolidation impacts a small rural district. Qualitative and quantitative data set a stronger foundation for analysis when used complementarily. By combining qualitative and quantitative methods, we identified the weakness of each collection type (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Triangulation of the data collected helped to mitigate these weaknesses to provide a thorough, rich data set.

The positionality of the researchers is noteworthy, as one of the researchers is a lifelong resident of the Wilkins County community and, at the time the consolidation was conducted, superintendent of the Wilkins County school system. While this positionality provided tremendous insight and access, it also lends itself to bias and a lack of objectivity. To help mitigate such bias, two additional researchers were included, both of whom are university faculty in educational leadership and possess no affiliation with Wilkins County.

Population and Sampling Procedures

This research studied the population of a small, rural school district in Wilkins County, NC. According to North Carolina Commerce (2018), 2016 data indicate Wilkins County had approximately 12,503 residents. Its racial makeup was 48.7% Black, 42.11% White, 5.6% Hispanic or Latino, 1.8% two or more races, 1.66% other races, 0.09% Native American, and 0.04% Asian (United States Census Bureau, 2018). It is located in the northeast region of the state.

There were approximately 1,501 students attending school in this area. These students came from the three towns in the 424 square mile county.

From this population, a small group of stakeholders was identified to share data about consolidation impacts. A single-stage sampling design according to Creswell and Creswell (2018), allowed for direct sampling of individuals in the community. Wilkins County School represented three communities: Tiger, Citytown, and Farmtown. All community members were invited to the community meetings, which allowed for a selection of participants in the focus group.

Convenience sampling targeted feedback from the community, staff, students, and parent stakeholders that were available to participate in the focus group. Ideally, the eight focus groups were composed of two 6-8-member groups of students, two 6-8-member groups of parents, two 6-8-member groups of staff members, and two 6-8-member groups of community members.

For the survey, all parents and staff members received an invitation to participate in this research. The invitation was shared on the local radio, on the phone auto calling system, and with a letter sent home to parents and given to staff. In research, it was ideal to test the full population, but historically participation in feedback opportunities yields small numbers of stakeholder input. We were hopeful that using convenience sampling of the full staff and parent population would yield greater results.

Instrumentation

For data collection, the researchers used a variety of questions for focus groups and community member surveying. Focus groups conducted at three community meetings with parent stakeholders and staff stakeholders focused on four questions. Question 1: What impacts have you noticed after year one of consolidation? Question 2: What things could we have done differently? Question 3: What things did we do well? Question 4: Are there any other items you want to share?

For community member surveying, the researchers requested permission to modify a developed survey used by Buzzard (2016) to collect data on consolidated schools' systems in New York. This survey was utilized previously by a third-party research company in a telephone survey (Buzzard, 2016). Eight of these questions created by Buzzard began with an informational focus on the participant. The participant disclosed the amount of time they had been in the community, why they moved here (if they were not native to the area), allowed them to think through the changes they have seen in the community, asked them to determine the impact on their "quality of life," and asked how that change had been compensated for by the community. The final three questions asked about changes in the children, tax savings, and additional information the interviewee wanted to share.

Procedures

Provided in this section are the procedures that demonstrated the processes used to gather data. This section first outlined the initial setup of focus groups in community meetings. Next, this section detailed the surveying protocol used for individual input of parents and staff members.

Focus Groups

Based on the research of Krueger and Casey (2000), focus groups followed a four-step design for implementation. These steps were (1) Decide if focus groups are appropriate, (2) Decide who to

involve, (3) Listen to your target audience, and (4) Put your thoughts in writing. Focus groups were specifically included in this research to encourage participation among the participants.

While the facilitation occurred, the role of the researchers was to listen to the group while being observant of body language and group interactions. According to Kruger and Casey (2000), the researchers needed to remain unbiased to the information presented and encourage the reluctant and shy participants to engage more in the conversation. When conversations began to end, the shared information was used to probe deeper into the thoughts of the interviewees.

Survey of Parents and Staff

For the second data collection aspect of this study, the researchers focused on a survey sent to parents and staff. The survey was available in hard copy, and any surveys collected within the three-week window were used to inform this research. Data collection procedures also involved the review of financial statements, audits, state release academic data, and attendance data. Each of these sources was reviewed to look for trends within a three-year time frame (2016-2017, 2017-2018, and 2018-2019). Course audit data were also compiled to show the change in course offerings for students.

Data Processing and Analysis

In the literature review, there was a strong focus on the criticism, size, academic, and financial impacts of consolidation. This case study focused on how school consolidation in a small rural community impacts:

- the academic performance of the school district
- the financial state of the school district
- the community perception of the school district

For question one, state and local data were analyzed to show trends in data present from the previous three years and the current school year in terms of ADM and academic performance. This included the courses that were offered each year. For question two, financial information on the cost to run each school site and the current cost after consolidation were compared. This included a variety of variables such as water, electricity, gas, site maintenance, transportation, staffing cost, and annual budget increases and decreases. For question three, data were collected from focus groups and the survey to determine the community perception of school consolidation.

When coding the focus groups for common themes, we reviewed charted details, researcher notes, and the transcription of the focus group. When coding the surveys for common themes, we reviewed responses from participants. This allowed me to develop a theory based on the reoccurring themes present in the responses. There were also data from community participation about the number of participants in each focus group, the number of sent surveys, and the number of completed surveys. The data matrix aligned each of the surveys and focus group questions with the three research questions.

Results

School consolidation is a consideration for many rural districts struggling to provide a quality education for all school sites. To ensure the questions posed for the focus group and survey were easy to understand and not biased in how they were written, a pilot study was conducted with ten

central office staff from Wilkins County Schools who agreed to participate. Data from the pilot survey revealed responses that were logical responses based on the question asked. At the conclusion of this pilot, there were no recommendations from participants for changing the focus group questions or the survey.

Data Collection

Data were collected from October 2019 to May 2020. Only 8% of the surveys were returned (121 respondents from the 1,501 surveys delivered home by every student in Wilkins County Schools). The first community meeting was held on October 22, 2019, the second community meeting was cancelled due to a lack of stakeholder interest in the community meeting of that area, and the third focus group occurred with four students after the community meeting. Opportunities for adding additional feedback were provided. The fourth focus group occurred on August 18, 2020. After COVID-19 plans were completed, the researchers were able to get this additional group of students to give feedback on the focus questions.

Data Analysis

As stated previously, there were a variety of data sources to be analyzed in this research. The data were analyzed to determine if the perceived benefits of increased academic gains, decreased financial cost, and increased positivity from community perception were achieved in this district's school consolidation.

Analysis of Research Question #1

For research question one, state and local data have been analyzed to show trends in the previous three years. When reviewing these data, it is important to remember the information shared was gleaned from North Carolina's System of Assessment retrieved data from End of Grade assessments (EOGs) for elementary schools and End of Course assessments (EOCs) for high schools. In Grades 3-8, there are growth scores present due to the ability to track annual progressive data from assessments that occur annually. Growth refers to the academic progress of a group of students from the beginning of the year to the end of the year (SAS Institute Inc, 2021). At the high school level, Grades 9-12, only performance data are present, not growth, because there is not an annual source for data collection from sequenced assessment in the previous grades. Overall, performance grades for reading, math, and science assessments are also not considered a data point for Grades 9-12 for this same reason.

A review of the reading, math, and science data in Table 2 showed greater academic performance gains by the school site after consolidation. Based on Year 3 data, more students were performing at a higher proficiency rate after the schools were consolidated. This collective proficiency is based on the total of each student who has a proficiency level of level three, four, or five. The fluctuation in growth with only one school not growing for both reading and math also shows that most schools were able to individually grow each student even though the students may not have made it to proficiency by the end of the school year.

Table 2
School Performance Grades in Reading, Math, and Science

School	Subject	2018-2019			2016-2017			2017-2018		
		Growth	Performance	Grade	Growth	Performance	Grade	Growth	Performance	Grade
CES	Read	77.6	51	D	84.5	49	D	79	50	D
	Mat	79.2	51	D	84.3	50	D	87.3	59	C
	Sci	n/a	57	n/a	n/a	64	n/a	n/a	56.6	n/a
SES	Read	70.7	48	D	77.2	46	D	80.3	48	D
	Mat	58.6	41	D	74.3	48	D	58.2	40	D
	Sci	n/a	51	n/a	n/a	46.3	n/a	n/a	46.7	n/a
BUS	Read	89	51	D	75.5	49	D	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Mat	87.4	42	D	75.4	35	F	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Sci	n/a	67	n/a	n/a	58.4	n/a	n/a	69.3	n/a
WCMS	Read	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	87.2	55	C
	Mat	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	82.5	40	D
	Sci	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
THS	Read	72.3	51	D	74.1	45	D	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Mat	67.5	31	F	86.3	41	D	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Sci	n/a	55	n/a	n/a	29.6	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
VHS	Read	n/a	33	n/a	n/a	23	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Mat	n/a	29	n/a	n/a	26.3	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Sci	n/a	25	n/a	n/a	5.8	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
WCHS	Read	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	36.4	n/a
	Mat	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	11.8	n/a
	Sci	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	38.5	n/a
WCEC HS	Read	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	56	n/a	n/a	71.4	n/a
	Mat	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	53.3	n/a	n/a	81.8	n/a
	Sci	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	52	n/a	n/a	>95	n/a

Note. *There were no letter grades for individual subjects in the 2016-2019 school year for high schools. **There are no high school growth scores because there is not an annual source for data collection from sequenced assessments in the previous grade.

Beyond the individual subject data, schools in North Carolina are also recognized as having not met, met, or exceeded growth based on the combination of performance and growth factors. The NCDPI School Accountability Model/ Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Plan requires the

use of a formula to determine overall school performance grades. This is the combination of 80% of the school's achievement score (performance) and 20% of the school's growth of the students served within the school. Based on these data, the consolidation of schools led to an increase in schools meeting growth. In Year 1, CES, SES, BUS, THS, VHS, and WCECHS were all open. WCECHS was not open this year, and only CES and BUS met growth. This means that 40% of the schools (two of the five sites) met or exceeded growth. In Year 2, CES, SES, BUS, THS, VHS, and WCECHS were open and SES was the only school not meeting growth.

Attendance

The majority of the schools showed an increase in their average daily attendance percent each year except for two sites. The sites showing increases from year to year include CES, THS, VHS, and WCECHS. The sites that showed a decrease within Year 1 to Year 3 are SES and BUS. Overall, after comparing the initial and the final year, each site did show an increase of 1% to 5% in average daily attendance.

Courses Offered

Another point of reference for academics is the number of courses offered at the school sites. There were 11 additional courses offered in the 2019 school year after consolidation. The decrease in the number of English and Math courses offered was seen in remediation courses (English Essentials, Foundations of Math I, Foundations of Math II) that were removed. The one Elective lost was Physical Education (PE): Lifetime Sports. There was also a significant increase in Career and Technical Education (CTE) Courses, which increased from 15 to 26 courses offered (an increase of 11 courses). The data suggest that access to additional courses were available after the consolidation of the initial sites.

In summary, there was an overall positive impact on academics for school consolidation in a small rural community. The actual EOC assessment data for reading, math, and science, as well as the overall school data, showed an increase. In addition to this, attendance improved, and more courses were offered.

Analysis of Research Question #2

For research question two, the researchers collected data to determine how does school consolidation in a small rural community impact the financial state of the school district? The researchers began with the operational budgets for each school site and the current cost after consolidation for each site. This includes a variety of variables such as water, electricity, gas, site maintenance, transportation, staffing cost, and annual budget increases and decreases.

In analyzing the budget, each funding source is coded as Instructional Services (IS), System Wide Support Services (SWSS), and Ancillary Services (AS). According to the State Public School Fund (SPSF), the subtotal expenses of all-purpose codes decreased by \$52,393.23, as seen in Table 3. These funds are utilized to purchase items like computers and software, instructional supplies, copier costs, electrical services, heating/fuel, and telephones. Local Current Expenses Fund (LCEF) include the same items, but these funds come from the county. There was an increased need of \$208,596.32 in this area. Federal Grant Funds (FGF) increased by \$29,095.05. The federal funds cover instructional supplies, computer software, and supplies. Federal funding

is also an area that has increased funding available due to the district actively seeking grants to fund school purchases. Capital Outlay Funds (COF), which stem from the county, pay for items like rebranding costs for the BPMS and VHS site, new athletic uniforms, and roof repairs at the CES site. This fund saw an increase of \$499,604.35. The Multiple Enterprise Fund (MEF) had the least change with the amount spent per year remaining relatively the same range. In a wealthy school district, this enterprise fund generates revenue from students who pay for lunch each day. However, it is important to understand high-poverty districts like Wilkins County Schools. All of the schools in this district provide free lunch to all students due to the high poverty level in this area. Therefore, the system pays for the operational cost with local funds and then requests reimbursement funding to maintain the cost of the student meals and staffing of the school nutrition department. This fund had an increase of \$347.32. Finally, Local Funds showed a decrease of \$131,203.57. The Local Fund covers purchases for instructional supplies, office and file supplies, participant materials, and school district communications.

Table 3
District Funding Expenses 2016-2019 and Projection for 2019-2020

Funding Source	Purpose Codes (Fund Use)	2017	Change from Year 1 to 2	2018	Change from Year 2 to 3	2019	Change from Year 1 to 3	Projected 2020
SPSF	IS	\$362,167.67	-\$58,442.33	\$303,725.34	-\$1,334.98	\$302,390.36	-\$59,777.31	\$302,390.36
	SWSS	\$416,003.83	\$33,630.70	\$449,634.53	-\$26,409.86	\$423,224.67	\$7,220.84	\$423,224.67
	AS	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$163.24	\$163.24	\$163.24	\$163.24
	Subtotal	\$778,171.50	-\$24,811.63	\$753,359.87	-\$27,581.60	\$725,778.27	-\$52,393.23	\$725,778.27
LCEF	IS	\$4,697.70	-\$2,655.88	\$2,041.82	\$13,067.71	\$15,109.53	\$10,411.83	\$5,000.00
	SWSS	\$551,670.98	\$50,045.74	\$601,716.72	\$149,856.48	\$751,573.20	\$199,902.22	\$751,573.20
	AS	\$2,317.73	\$700.93	\$3,018.66	-\$2,418.66	\$600.00	-\$1,717.73	\$600.00
	Subtotal	\$558,686.41	\$48,090.79	\$606,777.20	\$160,505.53	\$767,282.73	\$208,596.32	\$757,173.20
FGF	IS	\$151,976.64	\$52,939.12	\$204,915.76	-\$11,565.09	\$193,350.67	\$41,374.03	\$193,350.67
	SWSS	\$38,984.08	-\$4,697.98	\$34,286.10	-\$7,581.00	\$26,705.10	-\$12,278.98	\$26,705.10
	Subtotal	\$190,960.72	\$48,241.14	\$239,201.86	-\$19,146.09	\$220,055.77	\$29,095.05	\$220,055.77
COF	IS	\$11,940.05	-\$7,473.73	\$4,466.32	\$73,914.97	\$78,381.29	\$66,441.24	\$15,000.00
	SWSS	\$21,604.07	\$176,558.28	\$198,162.35	\$256,604.83	\$454,767.18	\$433,163.11	\$15,000.00
	Subtotal	\$33,544.12	\$169,084.55	\$202,628.67	\$330,519.80	\$533,148.47	\$499,604.35	\$30,000.00
MEF	AS	\$6,447.69	\$316.57	\$6,764.26	\$30.75	\$6,795.01	\$347.32	\$6,795.01
	Subtotal	\$6,447.69	\$316.57	\$6,764.26	\$30.75	\$6,795.01	\$347.32	\$6,795.01
Local Funds	IS	\$13,501.57	\$17,704.27	\$31,205.84	-\$14,238.42	\$16,967.42	\$3,465.85	\$16,967.42
	SWSS	\$134,669.42	-\$55,429.26	\$79,240.16	-\$79,240.16	\$0.00	\$134,669.42	\$0.00
	Subtotal	\$148,170.99	-\$37,724.99	\$110,446.00	-\$93,478.58	\$16,967.42	\$131,203.57	\$16,967.42

Total
for All

Funds \$1,715,981.43 \$203,196.43 \$1,919,177.86 \$350,849.81 \$2,270,027.67 \$554,046.24 \$1,756,769.67

Note: Bold means there was decreased cost.

Overall, there was an increased fiscal need of \$554,046.24. The funds impacted during the school consolidation process in order from least impact to most impact are as follows: Local Funds, State Public School Fund, Multiple Enterprise Funds, Federal Grant Fund, Local Current Expense Fund, and Capital Outlay Funds. Analysis of these sources reflects the high need for physical equipment and rebranding when consolidation occurs. The overall increased need reveals that there was an increased fiscal need when consolidation occurred in this case study.

Focus Group Responses for Financial Data

The next source of data for fiscal review was the focus group responses. In the focus group questions, perceptions about fiscal impacts from the parent groups. One parent group noted the lack of physical traffic to the local stores in the area of the school that closed. One of the parent group participants stated, “Now I don’t see many kids going to the local grocery store or the pizza place, so I know it has impacted their business.” The student focus groups did not note any fiscal impacts.

Survey Responses for Financial Data

The final source of data for the fiscal review was the answer to the survey questions. Fiscal impacts were apparent in questions 5, 6, and 10 from the survey. In the survey, 81% of the respondents felt that the community has not tried to compensate for the loss of the school building and students. When asked if they felt the closing of the school building had a financial impact on the community, 75% stated there was no impact, 11% were unsure, and 14% noticed an impact. The final question related to seeing any school tax savings since the school building closed. Respondents noted that 58% saw no impact, and 41% were unsure if there was any impact. Overall, the majority of the respondents saw no impact or little impact fiscally after the consolidation of the school.

Analysis of Research Question #3

According to Kramer (1994), effective citizens have common values, motivations, and shared commitment of energy. They also recognize potential concerns in their environment. This is the power of the perception of community members. As stated in the Survey Demographics section of this research, the largest number of participants who have lived in the Wilkins County area for 31+ years was 36%. The second-largest number of participants who have lived in Wilkins County for 0-5 years was 30%. The remaining participants who lived in Wilkins County for 6-30 years was 30%. A final group who lived in Wilkins County but did not participate at 4%. The participants also shared their reason for selecting this rural community. From these data, the reasons were as follows: 52% not applicable, 16% family-related reasons, 9% reporting less crime, 7% bought a home, 7% were raised in the area, 6% relocated closer to their church, and 3% were relocated due to family.

Focus Group Analysis

Making decisions about school consolidation can be complex. To analyze the data, the researchers developed common themes from the participants' responses. In Table 4, the responses from the three focus groups have been combined. In this case study, the researchers specifically reviewed the academic, fiscal, and community perception impacts that materialized after school consolidation occurred at the end of Year 2.

Table 4
Emergent Themes Based on Focus Group Responses

Question Focus	Focus Group Themes
Impacts after year 1 of consolidation	<p>Longer bus routes (students return home after dark)</p> <p>Increased opportunities (classes, better schools, progressing in academics)</p> <p>Bullying (minimal and handled early)</p> <p>Loss of people in the town of the consolidation (empty buildings, less traffic)</p> <p>Increased student relationships (students have more interactions, happier, more communication, new people, diversity, family-oriented, more attention)</p>
Things to be done differently	<p>Nothing</p> <p>Timing (extra year, allow 9th-grade cohort to finish)</p> <p>Opportunities to accept each other and traditions (diversity, acceptance, take advantage of opportunities)</p> <p>Increase student and parent interaction prior to consolidation (increased comfort level with new families, small county)</p>
Things done well	<p>Informing the public (communication, town meetings)</p> <p>Stakeholder Input (share views, collaborations, planning, opportunity to have a voice, long-awaited and needed step, sharing pros and cons)</p> <p>Combine community's culture (collaboration, different learning styles, more teammates for sports, no inferiority within schools)</p> <p>Rebranding (uniforms, gym, technology, new items)</p> <p>Opportunities (cooking classes, more help with academics)</p>
Other items to share	<p>No</p> <p>Suggestions (students should be home before dark)</p> <p>Appreciations (bring schools together, better than when separated, good process, bringing the county together, desire to reclaim more students)</p>

Summary of Research Questions

Research question 1 required a review of quantitative data about the academic performance of each school and the district. Ultimately, academic performance improved, with data showing an overall positive impact on academics. The assessments given during this period showed an increase in growth and proficiency, attendance improved, and more courses were offered. However, this study was not intended as a comparison of direct cohorts of students, nor does it consider other possible variables impacting student outcomes like teacher quality. Based solely on the data, there was an increase, but the scope of this study utilized a limited time frame for academic performance to demonstrate improvement. Nonetheless, improvement in academic measures emerged after the consolidation.

For research question 2, the researchers reviewed the operational cost prior to and after school consolidation. The consolidation of the school did have an impact on the district finances and local expenses, showing increased funding needed. Although the stakeholders did not perceive any fiscal impact, the financial analysis shows that school consolidation in a small rural community does impact the financial state of the district's funding.

Lastly, in research question 3, the researchers focused on the perception of the school community about school consolidation. Data from focus groups and surveys helped to determine this impact. The results of this collection yielded evidence to support the fact that when a school is consolidated, there is little to no impact on the community's perception of the district.

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

School consolidation is a process used to combine schools with perceived benefits for the local education agency closing the school. This case study focused on the materialization of benefits in academic, fiscal, and community perception when school consolidation occurs in a small rural school district. For Wilkins County Schools, the consolidation of a 6-12 site in 2017-2018 (Year 2) was studied. With future consolidations being considered, the results of this study provide valuable information for future consolidation decisions.

Summary of the Findings

For research question 1, a review of the academic performance of each school and the district was conducted. After a review of the end-of-the-year performance data, attendance, and courses, the researchers found an overall positive impact on academics for school consolidation in a small rural community. The end-of-course assessment and overall school data increased, attendance improved, and more courses were offered.

For research question 2, a review of the operational costs prior to and after school consolidation was conducted. After a review of data from daily operational bills, transportation costs, salaries, survey data, and focus group data, the researchers found that there was an increased impact on the district finances and local expenses. School consolidation requires an increased financial need, especially during the year of consolidation (Year 2) in preparation for the consolidated year (Year 3). Although the surveyed participants did not notice a fiscal increase, reported finances showed an increase in monetary need. Without a longitudinal study, it is hard to

determine if there would be projected savings in time to offset the initial increased fiscal expenditures.

With the last research question 3, the perception of the school community was examined. Data from focus groups and surveys were utilized to help to determine the impact of consolidation on the school community. These data revealed little to no negative impact on the community when school consolidation occurs.

In summary, school consolidation does have an impact on the school district. This case study explicitly focused on what materialized in Wilkins County Schools after the consolidation of a 6-12 site in the 2017-2018 (Year 2) school year. This impact can be seen in increased academic gains, increased financial costs, and increased positivity from community perception.

Interpretation of the Findings

Perceptions on School Consolidation

In this case study, survey participants from the school area where the consolidation occurred noted the feeling of loss and a desire to have students attend the same school where they are now alumni. The notion that parents had issues with longer bus rides due to the consolidation was also noted in studies by Boddington (2010), Delph (2015), Durant (2016), and Tieken (2016). In the focus group, parents specifically pointed out issues with longer bus routes for their children. Each of these items about the potential perception of stakeholders (stability and longer bus routes) emerged in this case study, confirming what was shared in the literature review.

Criticism, Size, Academic, and Financial Impacts

The onset of literature reviewed in this area focused on the complexity of research that supports or opposes school consolidation in terms of the size of the school closing, academic gains, and financial impacts. This is a large part of why this case study occurred, to see if the perceived benefits materialized. As identified in the research of DeYoung and Howley (1990) and Bard et al. (2006), the perception of loss by the participants in terms of traditions (for example, mascots, ceremonies, reunions, etc.) was apparent in the school that was closed due to the schools consolidating.

Consolidation offers some benefits to a community, which can be an opportunity for criticism or support. However, this can also be seen as a loss of opportunity for minorities to lead and control their schools (Collins, 2019; Diem et al., 2015; Jimerson, 2005). In this study, there was an elevated perceived increase in social benefits by the students, which somewhat refuted the claim that consolidation in larger schools yields low achievement and decreased student satisfaction (Bakioglu & Geyin, 2009; Bard et al., 2006; Chavez, 2002; Grier, 2012; Lenear, 2013; Machesky, 2006; Raywid, 1999; Riha, 2011).

There is also an understanding based on school size that both schools, when consolidated, did not create a significantly large school. The consolidated school site added fewer than 100 students to the site when combined due to its prior small size and ADM of only 153 of the students displaced from Tiger High School. In addition to this, poverty did impact the offerings in the smaller school (Irmsher, 1997) and the ability of the school to provide 21st-century resources, more courses, and improved instruction. This can be seen in the data collected showing an increased

number of courses offered after schools were consolidated. Finally, the financial need did increase during the process of school consolidation for the district.

In summary, future disparagement of school consolidation will continue in school size. This is seen in this case study as well as literature collected to examine school consolidation. Despite this, there are clear, direct positive impacts present for the areas of academics, poverty, and finances that correspond with the research collected in this study.

Implications of the Findings for Practice

After careful review and analysis of the summary, interpretations, and limitations, there are several implications of the findings for practice. Where school consolidations are becoming more prominent, it is important to understand the potential outcomes and prepare for them accordingly. The findings of this case study about school consolidation revealed several implications for school districts seeking to consolidate schools.

Academics

In research question 1 about the academic impact of school consolidation, there are advantages that may have a positive academic impact in this case study. For school districts looking for options to combine the course with low enrollment, this solution offers a means to fill what could be potentially several vacancies. If the school to be closed during the consolidation and the currently open school are to combine, common scheduling issues are decreased while an opportunity for more courses being offered emerges. More courses offered to students often helps those schools looking to diversify course options without having the staff to maintain current sections. Once combined, a class of five to seven students at one site can be combined with another low enrollment course at the remaining school. With a free period, the teacher can now entertain remediation or enrichment courses new to the school site.

With courses being combined and the engagement of remediation and enrichment, it may also follow, based on this case study, that increased academic outcomes developed. With greater flexibility in scheduling, supports are included in the traditional day that allows students to be grouped based on mastery of instruction and intervention. This may have positive impacts on end of grade testing results.

Fiscal

In research question 2 which focused on the financial impact of school consolidation, there were highlights and shortfalls based on fiscal reports and perception data. Parallel to the ability of the district to offer new courses comes the addition of students to the physical school site. The size of the school, as noted in Chapter 2, can have major ramifications on a system's consolidation process. In this case study, the consolidating schools were small schools (fewer than 500 ADM). The school to be utilized also had the capacity to add additional students with no major changes. This was due to the ADM decline that impacted the entire district. Therefore, the schools were not greatly impacted by adding an additional small school (fewer than 500 ADM) for the overall growth of ADM <100 students. If school systems are considering consolidating medium-sized or schools that are larger, strategic planning needs to occur to ensure you have space to fit all students when the sites are combined.

Another critical part of any planned activity is having a budget to support the full operation. It has been identified by researchers (Andrews et al., 2002; Gordon & Knight, 2008; Hayes, 2018) that increasing school size is not the best solution to increasing student achievement and decreasing the fiscal demands of running a school system. For school districts seeking to consolidate schools, it is counterproductive for a school board to assume school closure is a simple process. Financially, this can be a very complex process that is not the direct reduction of school funds for a closed school and additional funds added to the maintained schools. Traditional fiscal needs for maintenance as well as increased funding for rebranding are major financial investments that occurred during this case study. Financial expenses were impacted by several things like changing the physical structure of the district, the cost of emergency heating issues due to older buildings, money spent on creating new mascots and buying new uniforms. It is imperative for rural school districts, especially those in financial need or distress, to have strategic conversations with county commissioners and other stakeholders who can support increases in the overall cost to run the school site and any remnants of the old site when it is closed.

Community Perception

In research question 3 about the perception of the community when it is impacted by school consolidation, there was little to no evidence of any major impacts. Regardless of any noted impacts, communication is critical during any time of change in an organization (Burrack, 2019). The theoretical framework's focus on organizational change intentionally focuses on the structures, operations, technologies, culture, and strategies that need to be addressed to ensure viability (Spector, 2010). The community and its stakeholders in this case study appreciated being informed. At the same time, there were a few surveys that noted they wanted to be more informed. As a district, the key is to create open, honest, two-way communication lines with stakeholders to ensure greater trust and continuing collective effort during the process of consolidation.

Of those respondents with negative reviews around the process, it was clear that there was a sense of loss in the community and a loss of tradition. It may benefit a district planning to consolidate school to make conscientious efforts in the school closing to keep them informed, honor their heritage and traditions from the closed site, and provide sessions for former graduates to maintain some way of connecting to their alma mater. Although the physical building may no longer be in use, the new site can host class reunions and traditional events.

Future Planning for Wilkins County Schools

This case study was initiated to determine if the perceived results of school consolidation in the 2017-2018 school year for a Grade 6-12 site materialized. Similar to other small districts saddled with decreasing enrollment and resource issues, the more knowledge about the benefits and shortcomings, the greater prepared the school district can be in the planning for this process. The Wilkins County Schools' case study is unique because the consolidation is being done in phases.

Phase one was the consolidation of the Grade 6-12, completed in 2018. These data are meaningful to the districts' long-term plans. The second phase is to consolidate all five remaining schools into one PK-13 site. This site would hold pre-kindergarten, elementary, middle, high school, and early college students for all county residents. This new facility will eliminate the need to make major repairs in each of the antiquated buildings. It is also more cost-effective to build one new site versus awaiting the building of five individual sites to replace each of the five current

antiquated sites. With this phase planned for in the future, it is important for the school board and the community to understand the school consolidation process. Community engagement in planning, feedback on the present state of schools, and considerations for future planning all impact the community's perception.

In summary, the findings of this case study about school consolidation revealed several implications for school districts seeking to consolidate schools. These implications include planning for increasing course offerings, possible increases in academic performance, considerations of school size and increased operational cost, strategic planning with an organizational change framework, and planning for those who feel marginalized. It also reviewed the district-specific plans for future consolidations. All of these items represent the academic, fiscal, and community perceptions impacts that practitioners should be aware of when considering school consolidation.

Recommendations

In evaluating the process of uncovering the impacts of school consolidation, there are a few areas that are recommended as additional research topics for future practitioners. In my research, there was confirmation of research shared in the review of literature in Chapter 2, as well as the onset of a mass pandemic that could drastically shape the future of education. These items specifically include researching another district from an outside perspective, determining standards for school size, lengthening the collection of data periods, and gathering data on COVID-19 impacts on future education plans. We will examine each of these items below.

If we were to conduct this study again, we would begin by researching other school districts currently undergoing or considering consolidation. An analysis of data from similar rural districts as well as a variety of different types of school districts by contrast would provide much needed insight into whether there are optimal conditions for successful consolidation. In conducting this research, we would recommend using the same data items from the initial research. The data collection items can be reproduced from any state-level report for academic scores and fiscal expenditures. Replication of this exact study will ensure we are able to create comparable scenarios for research practitioners and other stakeholders wishing to learn the impact of consolidation in different districts. We have identified several case studies with similar replication of academic and fiscal gain in other states. However, currently, there are a limited number of systems on file in regard to school consolidation, specifically in North Carolina.

While this research is being conducted, it would also be a recommendation for future practitioners to determine standards for school size. When comparing data from school site sizes and school district sizes, there is a need to have comparable data. The headers of these data should entail the range of grades covered in the school and the number of students within the school. There will then need to be scales created to determine the range in ADM required to represent small, medium, and large schools and districts. My research concludes that there are benefits that come from combining two small schools, both with fewer than 500 students attending each site. As referenced in Table 1, many of the school size categories do not address schools with fewer than 500 students. This school size, fewer than 500 students, would be found more frequently in rural school settings.

The data from other researchers on perception confirmed the perceived increased social benefits for students. These benefits are in terms of interactions with additional peer groups. However, some data refuted this claim, revealing decreased student satisfaction due to the loss of

traditions present in the consolidated school (Lenear, 2013; Machesky, 2006; Raywid, 1999; Riha, 2011).

When reviewing academic impacts and their connection to school size, this case study supported data from other studies. The data from the literature review supported the notion that larger school consolidations did not yield lower academic achievements for students. With small rural schools (fewer than 500 students), the school consolidation process can add a small number of students and staff, keeping them relatively small (fewer than 500 students). In this case study specifically, THS had fewer than 100 students to be relocated to the new site after consolidations. Lenear (2013) also supported the results that minorities perform better in smaller schools, which was comparable to this case study conducted in a predominantly minority district. A suggestion to conduct additional reviews of small school sites that are consolidating is the recommendation. These schools, due to their rural location, may remain small (fewer than 500 students) and may not be able to offer greater opportunities or fill current vacancies.

For this case study, we would also recommend pulling data from the next school year to see if trends continue. By increasing the collection of data to year four, it may reveal a lesser impact in the finance category once major consolidation items have been paid for in the first three years of consolidation. The cost for items such as uniforms, re-branding, paint repairs, and roof repairs was removed from the local current expense funds and capital outlay funds. This would already generate a savings in Year 4. Exploring the fiscal collection process in the upcoming years would prove critical to seeing a true picture of the fiscal impact of consolidation.

Finally, a major area for a recommended study about school consolidation is the impact of COVID-19. When the world began to quarantine under stay-at-home orders, the use of the school buildings diminished extensively. These actions also impacted the data collection of this research. Since no students could come on-site, parents were then engaged in opportunities to have educational opportunities anytime and anywhere. It will be a strong recommendation to determine if school consolidation rates increase as students take on virtual learning opportunities.

Conclusions

The choice of local school boards in North Carolina to consolidate schools is one of the most controversial decisions a district can make. Nevertheless, rural school systems seeing declining enrollments and budget cuts, which ultimately lead to school closures (Baldwin, 2015), should know that the decision to consolidate impacts students, staff, parents, and community stakeholders.

This case study was conducted in Wilkins County Schools, NC, to determine if the perceived benefits of school consolidating materialized after closing a Grade 6-12 school in Tiger, NC. Based on the findings, there appeared to be academic gains, gains that occurred because of the smaller size of the district: fewer than 500 students. This is partially due to the strategic use of resources across the district. Another noteworthy gain attributed to the consolidation was increased access to a variety of academic courses and resources.

When reviewing fiscal gains, this study revealed increased costs during the year of closure. Items that contributed to the increased expenditures were rebranding costs and transportation costs for students who now have longer bus routes. Despite the increased cost, residents indicated that there were little to no perceived changes in the financial impacts other than less traffic in the area where the school was closed.

Lastly, community perception overall was not impacted by the close of the school site, with only 30% of the surveyed stakeholders reporting some impact. Of the participants in the focus

group and survey data, 10% of the candidates noted an impact on their quality of life, and 100% noted they did not know or did not experience any tax savings.

Overall, the research collected in this case study mirrored the research being conducted in other states around small rural school consolidation in their data collection and results. As rural districts have to make these tough decisions more often, we will be able to better identify the direct impacts by district size for academic, financial, and community perception indicators. In this current approach of face-to-face and virtual education opportunities, the results from this study might provide much-needed guidance for North Carolina and other states' school systems and similar schools.

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ICPEL Living Legend Award

Dr. Julia Ballenger

Foreword by Sandra Harris

The ICPEL Living Legend award – established in 1999 - recognizes individuals who lead a life that inspires others and foster a model of genuine care, ethics and professionalism in service to education. Recipients also provide exemplary service to the ICPEL organization, display dedication to research, teaching and service to the professions, and make significant contributions to the field of educational administration. Dr. Julia Ballenger was the recipient of the ICPEL Living Legend award in 2021. She was presented this prestigious award at the annual conference held virtually.

Dr. Ballenger has been a role model for educational leaders for many years. She received her Bachelor of Education in Special Education and Psychology and her Master's of Education in Elementary Education and Special Education from East Texas State University – Commerce, Texas. She earned her PhD in Educational Administration from The University of Texas – Austin. After serving as a teacher and administrator in Texas public schools, Dr. Ballenger began her university teaching career in the Educational Leadership Department at Stephen F. Austin State University. Since 2012, she teaches both Doctoral and Master's classes in the Department of Educational Leadership in the College of Education and Human Services at Texas A & M University-Commerce.

Currently, Dr. Ballenger serves as an editor of the *Research on Women and Education* Book Series, Information Age Publishers. Dr. Ballenger is an associate editor for the *Advancing Women in Leadership Journal (AWL)*. Dr. Ballenger has co-edited eight published books with one additional book in press (third editor) and another book in progress (first author). She has published over 55 peer-reviewed articles and book chapters. Dr. Ballenger's recent book, where she served as the first editor, is entitled: *Women of Color in STEM: Navigating the Workforce (2017)*. In addition, Dr. Ballenger has served on numerous committees representing educational leadership organizations at all levels. In addition, she is widely known and recognized for her work as a mentor to aspiring educational leaders statewide, nationally, and internationally.

Each year, the Living Legend award winner's acceptance speech is published in the flagship journal of ICPEL, the *Education Leadership Review*. It is our honor to continue this tradition and recognize Dr. Julia Ballenger, 2021 Living Legend recipient.

The Choices We Make: The Why, What, and How?

Julia Ballenger

Texas A & M University – Commerce

Thank you for this splendid honor. I am filled with gratitude to be among the outstanding past Living Legend recipients. I give special thanks to Dr. Nate Templeton for nominating me for this award and the International Council of Professors of Educational Leadership (ICPEL) Board for casting their positive vote of approval. Thank you for this privilege to the Executive Director, Dr. James Berry, the President of ICPEL, Dr. Kenneth Young, officers, and the outstanding Living Legends before me.

When I pondered the contents of my presentation, I thought about the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA) mission statement, which is “To advance the field of education administration, both in leadership and management” (NCPEA Constitution, 2009, p. 4). This mission is accomplished through research, teaching, and services to prepare aspiring and practicing educational administrators. Attending the summer conferences held in a different location of the United States allowed me to network with other faculty members. This networking opportunity allowed me to establish writing partners and lasting friendships.

I had the pleasure to serve three years on the NCPEA Board as the secretary. In addition, I served on the publications committee and worked with various groups. While serving on the publications committee, I was a topic editor and assistant editor of the 2011 NCPEA Yearbook. One of my most significant contributions to NCPEA was the establishment of the Mentoring MOSAIC. I always felt the need to pay it forward to others who needed mentoring. Thus, the idea of forming the NCPEA Mentoring Program came to mind. The first NCPEA MOSAIC Mentoring committee members were Drs. Ballenger, Coordinator; members Jenny Trispses, Will Place, and Linda Searby. Linda Searby served as the first director of the Mentoring MOSAIC. After Linda stepped down, Dr. Ballenger served as the director. Later, Jenny Trispses served as the director of the Mentoring MOSAIC. We acknowledge Dr. Carol Mullen’s husband for creating the design and name MOSAIC. I am so pleased the Mentoring MOSAIC continues to be active today.

Looking forward to the current time, I am pleased to see that ICPEL has continued the long history of serving the interests and needs of professors of educational administration and practicing school leaders. I applaud ICPEL for its new focus on social justice. One of ICPEL’s objectives is to ensure access and inclusion of underrepresented groups into the professorship and administration and promote social justice in education. While this statement is profound, the ICPEL Board goes beyond crafting a message to putting a committee in place to employ action-oriented steps to ensure worldwide advocacy around race, equity, inclusion, and diversity. Thus, the ICPEL Board established the Justice, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion (JEDI) committee. I commend the ICPEL Board, the JEDI committee chair and co-chair, and members for their willingness to serve for such a worthwhile cause.

After exploring ICPEL’s objective of access and inclusion and JEDI’s action-oriented steps around race, equity, inclusion, and diversity, I decided to use this opportunity to advocate for equity-minded leaders. In this speech, I developed the context around the social construct of race and the inevitable narcissism of caste. Next, I used the voice of Shields (2018) as she profoundly addressed the need for educational leaders to educate all children. Shields asked the questions: “What is our responsibility as educational leaders?” and “How do we fulfill it?” (p. 9). My response to the two questions was “A Choice to Make. The Why, What, and How?” I believe we as educational leaders have a choice to make. This speech will discuss some options for positive academic change for all children.

The Choices We Make: The Why, What, and How?

The Why?

Ashley Montagu (1942) was an anthropologist and vigorous integrationist. His early writing of “Man’s Most Dangerous Myth” was first published in 1942. Montagu published this book during the times African Americans had to sit in the back of the bus. Montagu’s theory on race was revolutionary. He was among the first to challenge the biological concept of race that reinforces discrimination. Montagu argued that race is primarily a social construction that does not constitute significant biological differences.

The Inevitable Narcissism of Caste

Caste has intruded into all of our lives. Through no fault of any individual born to it, a caste system centers the dominant caste as the sun around which all other castes revolve. Wilkerson (2020) stated that one way dominant caste is defined is as the default-setting standard of normalcy, intellect, and beauty, against which all others are measured, ranked in descending order by their physiological proximity to the dominant caste. This type of thinking has been passed down from generation to generation.

We cannot choose the circumstances of our birth. We had nothing to do with having been born into privilege or non-privilege. However, we have everything to do with what we do with our God-given talents and how we treat others in our species from this day forward. We are not personally responsible for what people who look like us did centuries ago. However, we are responsible for what good or ill we do to people alive with us today (Wilkerson, 2020).

Wilkerson (2020), Pulitzer Prize Winner, asked the right questions and answered them. What would a world without caste look like? In a world without caste, we would be invested in the well-being of others and recognize that we need one another more than we have been led to believe. A world without caste would set everyone free. (pp. 387-388)

The What?

Equity Leadership

I argue that Leadership for Equity is one way to bring about progressive change. Leadership for equity is the ability to lead others when discussing challenging topics, which requires a foundation of vocabulary and concepts. Many people know the standard definitions of equality and equity,

but they do not see the difference between these two concepts. Equality means that everyone gets the same thing. Equity means that everyone gets what he or she need. We need equity because inequality is historical and entrenched; The Caste System. Inequity is the compounding impact of inequality over time; it is unfair and partial, as is racism. Universities and schools are subject to and promote some of the same rampant disparities throughout society.

Leading for Equity Framework

The National Equity Project (n.d.) “Leading for Equity Framework” called for leaders to engage in purposeful leadership action. Equity leadership moves from the “inside-out,” which is different from traditional top-down or bottom-up leadership. This framework consists of a leadership standpoint. Three action words are a part of the leadership attitude. These action words are: see, engage, and act. How *we see* informs how *we engage*, which describes *how we act*. How do we define these action words?

See: How we perceive the world (window) and practice self-awareness (mirror).

Engage: How we “show up: and engage relationally; how we listen, build relationships, and create strong “containers” for complex work.

Act: How we design, decide, implement, learn; how we influence direction, bring focus to action, engage in safe-to-fail experiments.

Equity-minded leaders have equity consciousness. These leaders broaden their lens to see how the system benefits some and allows disadvantages. Using an equity lens, these leaders drive the overall process and practice change in the organization, transforming student experiences by providing:

- A welcoming and inclusive school environment
- An Authentic relationship to foster learning
- A Culturally responsive behavior expectations
- A Culturally responsive curriculum, and
- A Culturally responsive instruction and assessment (Gogins, 2021, p. 1.).

The How?

A New Approach

Shields (2018) argued that we need a new approach to educating all children. First, Shields (2018) noted that the way education is delivered in many schools does not result in the great equalizer envisioned by Horace Mann, nor is it the custodian of the American Dream. Shields acknowledged that reform efforts had done little to disrupt the inequities that inhibit our efforts to equalize the playing field for all students. Therefore, Shields (2018) challenged educational leaders to accept responsibility to educate all students for intellectual excellence and global citizenship. Leaders must reflect on critically important issues of the current time and sort out truth from fiction.

Accordingly, Shields (2018) raised the questions: “What is our responsibility as educational leaders?” and “How do we fulfill it? (p. 9). The response can be what we need to do to educate all children to positive change successfully. Shields (2018) stated that it is possible to make profound and fair changes in the education of all children. However, we must determine the necessary adjustments to create equitable, inclusive, and socially just schools.

Let us choose to make changes in institutions where racism abounds. Racism is not only about individual mindsets and actions. Racist policies also contribute to antagonism. While personal choices are damaging, racist ideas in policy have a widespread impact by threatening the equity of our systems and the fairness of our institutions. To create an equitable society, we must commit to making unbiased choices and being antiracists in all that we do.

Osta and Vasquez (2019) stated that implicit bias increases individuals' awareness of others and changes how they view and treat others. These authors believed the work must begin inside of ourselves. Osta and Vasquez (2019) acknowledged the metaphor of a window and a mirror developed by the Emily Style of the SEED Project. I referred to this metaphor earlier; however, I feel it is worth repeating as I near the end of this presentation. We need to look in the mirror to notice how our lived experiences have shaped our beliefs, attitudes, and biases about others and ourselves. Osta and Vasquez (2019) also noted that individuals need to look out of the window to understand how racism, classism, sexism, and other forms of systemic oppression operate in institutions to create a systemic advantage to some groups and disadvantage the others.

A Choice: To Become Antiracist

No one is born racist or antiracist; these result from our choices. Being antiracist results from a conscious decision to make frequent, consistent, equitable choices daily. These choices require ongoing self-awareness and self-reflection as we move through life. In the absence of making antiracist choices, we (un)consciously uphold aspects of White supremacy, White-dominant culture, and unequal institutions and society. Being racist or antiracist is not about **who you are**; **it is about what you do**.

A commitment to being antiracist manifests in our choices. When we encounter interpersonal racism, there are ways to respond and interrupt it. Asking questions is a powerful tool to seek clarity or offer a new perspective. Below are some suggestions to use in conversations when racist behavior occurs:

- Seek clarity: "Tell me more about _____."
- Offer an alternative perspective: "Have you ever considered _____?"
- Speak your truth: "I don't see it the way you do. I see it as _____."
- Find common ground: "We don't agree on _____ but we can agree on _____."
- Give yourself the time and space you need: "Could we revisit the conversation about _____ tomorrow?"
- Set boundaries. "Please do not say _____ again to me or around me."

As you practice, take note of your responses and ask: *How am I processing the experience? What body sensations do I have? What is my emotional reaction?* Notice what triggers your response and how it manifests in your body.

The Silver Lining

The silver lining to racist behaviors and implicit bias is that policymakers and institutional leaders increasingly recognize the urgent need to focus their efforts and resources on creating equity in public schools and higher education. Several states have acknowledged the need to make their higher education systems more equitable for African Americans, Latinos, low-income students, and other historically marginalized populations.

Native Americans, For example, California has spent nearly \$400 million to fund student equity efforts at the state's community colleges over the past three years. Each of California's 113 community colleges was required to develop a detailed student equity plan in which they presented institutional data for critical outcomes. They also identified which demographic groups were experiencing inequities, set goals for closing those equity gaps, and proposed specific activities.

In sum, Shields (2018) raised the questions: "What is our responsibility as educational leaders [to educate all children]?" and "How do we fulfill it? To answer this question, I say we are all connected. Leading for equity is not about helping those kids but about dismantling structures that exclude them. We must increase access to opportunity and work together to build healthy, inclusive communities where all can belong and thrive.

Thank you for the space and opportunity to speak. Last but certainly not least, thank you for honoring me with this prestigious Living Legend Award. I am humbled.

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