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Education Leadership Review of Doctoral Research **Fall 2014**

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A Study of “Career Pathways” Policy with Implications for School Leaders

This manuscript has been peer-reviewed, accepted, and endorsed by the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA) as a significant contribution to the scholarship and practice of school administration and K-12 education.



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This explanatory mixed-methods study began with a quantitative survey to investigate counselor beliefs and implementation behaviors related to providing college and career planning services to high school students. Survey results informed the development and implementation of interview protocol designed to provide deeper insight into counselors’ decision-making and implementation fidelity. Findings revealed that while counselors place substantial value in state and district policies, and believe their implementation decisions connect student interests and postsecondary goals to appropriate high school programs of study, they spend more time assisting students of higher socioeconomic status with college planning, resulting in less time for supporting students more likely to need their specialized assistance. Implications for educational leaders are discussed.

High school seniors confront ever-increasing competition for both jobs and college acceptance after graduation. Students, therefore, depend more than ever on a college and career focused high school program to develop the necessary skills to successfully compete in the job market and/or complete a postsecondary degree. Responding to these needs, many states have taken up the call to incorporate college and career readiness skills into the high school curriculum for all students under the Career and Technical Education (CTE) umbrella.

To better understand how to best meet the above challenges, the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) commissioned the College and Career Readiness Initiative (CCRI) to further refine their CTE focus (VDOE, 2010). Characteristics of “ready” students included: taking Algebra II and Chemistry; scoring Advanced Proficient on the math and reading Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) assessments; earning an advanced diploma; participating in Advanced Placement (AP) and dual enrollment (DE) courses; participating in the Virginia Early

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Scholars Program (earning college credit via AP or DE experiences); and earning "college ready" scores on the SAT or ACT (VDOE, 2010). The above characteristics currently drive the VDOE college and career readiness initiatives. An important component to seeing these goals to fruition is the use and development of an Academic and Career Plan (ACP) for each student.

The success of the ACP initiative depends, in large part, on how well the counselors implement the policy on a daily basis. Understanding counselors' knowledge and attitudes about the policy and discovering their actions as "street level" policy makers (Goldstein, 2008; Mansfield, 2013, b) sheds light on the plan's ability to prepare students for postsecondary options. It is conceivable that if counselors do not adequately understand the ACP, or have the necessary skills or support systems to adequately implement the policy, then the resulting plan may be haphazard or fail to accurately capture student interest. Also important is how student factors might impact the implementation of the ACP plans. While Virginia policy acknowledges the importance of using the ACP to reach "at risk" students, Mickelson and Everett (2008) found, while studying similar plans in North Carolina, that at risk students continued to experience segregation and reduced access to college preparatory and career training opportunities during high school. The focus of this study (Ormsmith, 2014) was to understand the connection between the meaning making of school counselors vis-à-vis the ACP, the role student demographics may or may not play in policy meaning-making, and the resulting implementation of student plans. Thus, the study addressed the following questions:

1. What is the nature of school counselors' understanding of and attitudes toward the Virginia "Career Pathways" policies generally and the Academic and Career Plan (ACP) specifically?
2. What is the nature of school counselors' ACP implementation practices?
3. How do student demographics influence counselors' interpretation and implementation of the Academic and Career Plan?
4. How do counselor ACP implementation practices coalesce or diverge from policy intent?
5. What relationship(s) exist(s) between policy intent, counselors' knowledge and attitudes, and counselor implementation?

The study was conducted in Coal County¹, a large suburban school district located in central Virginia. The district has a student body of nearly 60,000 students; supports 38 elementary schools, 12 middle schools, and 12 high schools; has a student population of 55% White, 26% Black, and 11% Hispanic, with 30% of the student body classified as economically disadvantaged (VDOE, 2012). A closer look at the data reveals that while the district poverty rates are comparable to both the national and Virginia rates, Black and Hispanic students in Coal County middle and high schools have a much higher percentage of students classified as economically disadvantaged (Table 1). Like Virginia, the Coal County district met the federal student performance standards (Annual Measurable Objectives [AMO]) and the district results are consistent with the state results for the current school year for all indicators. The lone exception is that while the state did not meet AMO for Black student graduation rates, Coal County did not meet the graduation rates for Hispanic students (VDOE, 2012). During the 2011-2012 school year, 94% of Coal County students graduated with an Advanced or Standard diploma, slightly exceeding the Virginia average of 92% (VDOE, 2012). For graduation year

¹ All names of people and places at the local level are pseudonyms.

2012, 64% of Coal County graduates enrolled in an institution of higher education (IHE) with 44% of those choosing a four-year school and the remaining 20% selecting a two-year school (VDOE, 2012a). The national average in 2011 for total IHE enrollment is 68%, with 42% in four-year schools and 26% in two-year schools (Snyder & Dillow, 2012). Finally, Coal County's student to school counselor ratio is 258 to 1 (VDOE, 2012b) and is just above the level recommended by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) of 250 to 1 (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2012).

Table 1.

Percentage of students classified as economically disadvantaged

Race	US*	VA	Coal County		
			All	Middle School	High School
White	9.8	12.6	8.4	16.3	9.9
Black	27.6	15.0	12.1	49.9	33.3
Hispanic	25.3	7.4	7.1	67.2	49.4

Note: * US data from Snyder & Dillow (2012). State and District data from Virginia Department of Education (2013) fall membership reports.

Literature Review

Many students begin preparing for college as early as the seventh or eighth grade when they begin to select courses aligned with their postsecondary goals (Conley, 2010; Savitz-Romer, 2012). Students' experiences in secondary school, through coursework and exposure to the college culture, play a role in preparing them for college and help them to link what they do in school with future expectations (Hill, 2008). However, the focus by public educators on standardized test scores has led many students and parents to believe that achieving a passing score on state created standardized tests represents college and career readiness (Conley 2010; Radunzel & Nobel, 2012). The reality is that state tests often represent a basic content knowledge that is not directly related to postsecondary readiness (NCPPE, 2010; Radunzel & Nobel, 2012). Rather, preparing for college or employment in contemporary America means that high school graduates possess skills and abilities such as self-motivation, goal orientation, and independent learning (Lombardi, Seburn, & Conley, 2011).

Thus, most states have adopted the Common Core State Standards in an effort to align state education standards with postsecondary expectations (Meeder & Suddreth, 2012). As part of the CCSS initiative, and to more accurately assess student progress towards college or career readiness, states are collaborating with the CCSS Initiative to create new state assessments that are a more reliable indicator of college and career readiness (Meeder & Suddreth, 2012). Since many high school students do not take college entrance tests such as the SAT or the ACT (Radunzel & Nobel, 2012), the newly designed CCSS assessments are a tool to help these students align their high school programs with their postsecondary goals. These redefined standards and accompanying state assessments are a critical tool that students need to accurately monitor their postsecondary preparedness and make well-informed decisions about their career path options. In addition to rigorous coursework, exposure to secondary education, and improved

state assessments, students also need a detailed plan to focus their high school experiences toward a specific career pathway (Solberg, Phelps, Haakenson, Durham, & Timmons, 2012). As of 2012, twenty-three states have passed legislation requiring students to develop postsecondary plans (Famularo, 2012).

Research evaluating the effectiveness of these types of college and career readiness plans is limited. However, Budge, Solberg, Phelps, Haakenson, and Durham (2010) conducted 53 focus groups in four states with parents, students, and teachers to determine if preparing the learning plan was useful. All stakeholders reported the plans as "highly valuable" and indicated that they helped students select more rigorous coursework, improved collaboration between stakeholders, provided access to career exploration activities, shed light on postsecondary opportunities, and improved student academic and career motivation (Budge, et al., 2010). Developing focused plans connects students to support personnel such as counselors and facilitates goal setting and realization while strengthening students' abilities to navigate the secondary to post-secondary pipeline (Solberg et al., 2012).

School Counselors and Postsecondary Readiness

As suggested above, school counselors are a significant component to preparing students for postsecondary pathways. Counselors must be adequately equipped to deliver college and career planning services through their professional training experience in order to successfully organize and design effective programs that combine both individual delivery methods and group activities (CACREP, 2009; ASCA, 2012). During individual encounters, counselors help students develop individual learning plans and manage transitions from elementary to middle, middle to high, or secondary school to college or career (ASCA, 2012). Meanwhile, school-wide college and career events might include career fairs, business tours, college fairs, and field trips to campuses (ASCA, 2012). School counseling programs that coordinate the involvement of peer and family groups during college and career planning show a positive impact on student postsecondary choices and allow students to make the most of high school curriculum opportunities (Savitz-Romer, 2012; Hill, 2008).

Increasing the number of encounters students have with a school counselor has a positive effect on a student's application rate to college and career programs (Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines, & Holcomb-McCoy, 2011). Moreover, students who begin career planning with school counselors relatively early (middle school or early high school) are more likely to select a program of study linked to a career pathway as well as be better prepared for postsecondary challenges (Bell, Rowan-Kenyon, & Perna, 2009; Clinedinst, Hurley, & Hawkins, 2011).

Challenges to Plan Implementation

Not surprisingly, student access to school counselors during course planning is important because counselors are one of the main conduits of information related to postsecondary enrollment options and planning (Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines, & Holcomb-McCoy, 2011). However, counselors routinely perform other duties such as crisis counseling, disciplinary action, and testing administration (ASCA, 2012; Bryan et al., 2011). Most counselors spend just 23% of their time helping students plan college or career activities (Clinedinst, Hurley, & Hawkins, 2011). Despite the increasing demand by students for time with counselors exclusively directed towards college planning, counselors must find a way to deliver

appropriate planning services or face the prospect that students will leave high school unprepared for the postsecondary world (Johnson, 2008; Perna et al., 2008; Rowan-Kenyon, Perna, & Swan, 2011).

Additional challenges associated with implementing college readiness plans include organizational constraints such as a high counselor-student ratio (ASCA, 2012a) and lack of funding and other administrative supports (Carey, Harrington, Martin, & Hoffman, 2012; Carey, Harrington, Martin, & Stevenson, 2012; Hill, 2008; Lapan, Gysbers, Stanley, & Pierce, 2012; Lapan, Whitcomb, Aleman, 2012). Considerations also include factors outside the organizational structure such as counselors' feelings of self-efficacy (Savitz-Romer, 2012) and educators' perceptions of students and their families according to race/ethnicity, class/socioeconomic status, and gender (ASCA, 2012; College Board, 2012; Craver & Phillipson, 2011; Jean-Marie & Mansfield, 2013; Kinsler, 2011; Mansfield, 2011; Mansfield, 2013, a; Mickelson, 2009; Sullivan, Klingbeil, & Van Norman, 2013) that influence programmatic access, disciplinary procedures, and academic achievement.

In many secondary schools, college-educated parents from higher SES groups tend to be the primary source of information for students concerning college and career information instead of counselors (Mckillip, Rawls, & Barry, 2012). But for lower SES students whose families may not have college and career information options, school counselors are the primary source of information about postsecondary options (Mckillip et al., 2012). Counselors, therefore, bear a heavy responsibility to provide information to all students equitably and to reach out to students who may not have access to information from other sources (Mckillip et al., 2012). For students who are not in the top of their academic classes and for those students who lack high (i.e., college attendance or beyond) postsecondary goals, counselors will have to seek out the students to deliver information because the students are less likely to come looking for a counselor's assistance (Mckillip et al., 2012). Developing an equity viewpoint of student services to address the disparity in access means that counselors need to have "an orientation toward doing the right thing by students, which does not mean treating students equally regardless of their different needs" (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007 as cited by Mckillip et al., 2012, p. 7). Using an equity framework also means that counselors should spend less time with students that have the most access to postsecondary information and spend more time helping students who lack the social supports to make well developed postsecondary decisions (Mckillip et al., 2012). By using an equity viewpoint to deliver services, school counselors help close the readiness gap by providing additional individual services to students who require structural supports to achieve positive postsecondary outcomes.

Methodology

For the purposes of this study, an explanatory sequential mixed methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Ivankova, Creswell, & Stick, 2006) was employed; meaning, data from the first phase was used to develop the protocol for the second phase. Moreover, data collected during the second phase was used to interpret data collected during the first phase. In the case of this project, a quantitative online survey was used first, followed by qualitative interviews. Before explaining these phases in greater detail, an explanation of the theoretical framework that undergirded the study is given.

Theoretical Framework

Over the past three decades, policy scholars have developed the idea that policy implementation is an interpretive act (Lipsky, 1980; Mansfield, 2013,b; Yanow, 2000). The daily action of teachers represents educational policy interpretation at the local level (Goldstein, 2008; Lipsky 1980; Spencer 2000; Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002) because how teachers behave in the classroom and how they do or do not follow policy mandates represents a form of de facto policy making and interpretation through their implementation (or lack thereof) of a policy (Spillane, et al., 2002). The idea of “street-level” policy making by teachers can be extended to secondary counselors because counselors are the people directly linked to policy implementation through the creation of individual student programs of study.

It is important to note that the design and implementation of education policy is hardly a repeatable process that varies according to particular variables and only within a certain degree of error. Instead, policy formulation and implementation is a complex intersection of facets that are interconnected and dependent upon each other (Mansfield, 2013, b). Friedrich (1940) set the stage for this line of inquiry more than 70 years ago when he noted, "Public policy, to put it flatly, is a continuous process, the formulation of which is inseparable from its execution. Public policy is being formed as it is being executed, and it is likewise being executed as it is being formed" (p. 6). This interconnection means that while state legislatures may have particular ideals and goals in mind for a policy, the policy actors (i.e., counselors, teachers, and administrators) create their own implementation ideals and goals when confronted with policy mandates (Lipsky, 1980; Mansfield, 2013, b; Spillane et al., 2002; Yanow, 2000). Therefore, evaluating policy implementation from the local policy actor perspective can provide a deeper understanding of how the intended policy design manifests at the "street-level."

To investigate the local point of view this study relied on the sensemaking lens prevalent in contemporary policy implementation research. Datnow & Park (2009) explained that the sensemaking theories have their earliest origins in the "mutual adaptation" perspective where policy outcomes ultimately depend on local people who actively construct their environment by interacting with others and use their beliefs and experiences to direct future actions. So, as counselors provide college and career planning services in a comprehensive program, they are engaging in sensemaking within a complex setting that shapes policy implementation in accordance with their personal understandings and beliefs. The complex nature of these interactions necessitates research methods capable of providing deeper understanding and a richer description of the multiple facets related to the implementation environment (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Therefore, this mixed methods study first used quantitative survey data to capture counselor implementation actions, beliefs, and interpretations concerning the policy and then used qualitative interviews to develop a richer understanding of the counselor's sensemaking processes.

Phase One: Quantitative Survey

A web-based survey was designed to reach all middle and high school counselors in Coal County. First, it was necessary to identify several "measurable objectives" (Sue & Ritter, 2012):

1. Describe counselor implementation actions related to the ACP policy (*Objective 1*);
2. Assess counselor knowledge about the ACP policy and its intent (*Objective 2*);

3. Ascertain counselor beliefs about the value of the ACP to student academic and career planning (*Objective 3*);
4. Examine counselor beliefs about race and postsecondary options relating to equity and access issues (*Objective 4*); and
5. Identify how student race and socioeconomic factors contribute to counselor implementation practices (*Objective 5*).

To improve the power of the instrument, responses to questions in the survey include multiple choice, true-false responses, open-ended responses, and Likert-type five-point scale interval responses (Mitchell & Jolley, 2010; Sue & Ritter, 2012). In addition, since the survey questions had not been previously used, an indication of their validity was necessary (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2012; Mertens, 2010; Mitchell & Jolley, 2010). Therefore, the first draft survey questions were presented to a class of graduate students enrolled in the School Counseling degree program at the Virginia Commonwealth University. The students were presented with the proposed questions in paper form and asked to answer the questions, if they could, and to provide comments regarding the wording and clarity of each question. The students provided written feedback indicating questions they felt were confusing or unclear and suggested corrections. The student comments were compiled and modifications were made.

Sample. The participants of this study represented a non-probability convenience sample of the 113 middle school and high school counselors in Coal County who self-selected participation in the survey by responding to the invitation email (Sue & Ritter, 2012). The majority of the 41 respondents to the survey were White (83%) and female (92%). Most participants also reported no classroom teaching experience (64%). Of those who did have teaching experience, 50% were in the classroom for fewer than five years. The majority of counselors also responded that they had been school counselors for fewer than ten years (53%) and that they graduated from a school counseling degree program accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) (73%).

Phase Two: Qualitative Interviews

Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted with a subsample of five counselors who indicated their willingness to participate in interviews during the survey phase. The semi-structured format provided direction for the line of inquiry while also allowing the researcher and counselors an opportunity to explore additional topics in a conversational atmosphere (Cresswell, 2013; Mertens, 2010). So, the use of a semi-structured interview format gave participants a chance to examine and explain their interpretation and implementation behaviors vis-à-vis the ACP policy. The interview questions were organized to reflect data collected during the phase one survey.

As with the survey questions, the interview questions were previously unused and were therefore presented to a second panel of graduate students for suggestions and feedback. For example, the original version of Question 3 under Objective 3 read: "How important do you think the ACP is to students?" The intent of this question was to access feedback counselors may have received from students about the planning process. A consensus developed among the graduate students that the stated intent was not clear from the question. After a short discussion with the class, the question was changed to: "Would you please describe a time when a student gave you his/her thoughts about how important the college and career planning sessions (and the

ACP form) were to their postsecondary preparation?" The change improved the question by clarifying that the response should include a personal story the counselor remembered about a student. Also, the rephrased question helped the counselor to frame a response in terms of what the student said rather than by how the counselor perceived student thoughts about the planning process.

The face-to-face interviews were scheduled by appointment and conducted in the school counselor's office. To foster a candid discussion, counselors were encouraged to answer questions in whatever manner seemed appropriate to them and to discuss any topic they thought was relevant. The counselors were also reassured that there were no "right or wrong" answers and that the researcher was not there to be critical of their responses but only to collect their thoughts on the subject. The interviews were electronically recorded. Each interview audio file was transcribed by a professional third party service and then compared to the audio recording by the researcher for accuracy. After the transcripts were verified, the participant's transcript was emailed to each counselor along with a request to review the document for accuracy (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011; Mertens, 2010). The researcher also contacted the counselors by phone to confirm transcript accuracy.

Sample. The counselors eligible to participate in phase two were counselors who, during the phase one survey, indicated they would be willing to conduct an interview on the survey topics. From this new population, the selection of counselors was a purposeful sample that represented a maximal variation approach where participants are selected to represent distinct variations within the group (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2012). Because socioeconomic status is often linked to race and ethnicity (NCES, 2013), an examination of the student populations allowed for the schools to be categorized by socioeconomic status. Table 2 shows the student body characteristics for both race and socioeconomic groups (i.e., economically disadvantaged) for each high school in Coal County.

Table 2.
Coal County Schools by Minority and Socioeconomic Status

School	Students		
	Total	Minority	Economically Disadvantaged
A	2062	26%	16%
B	1679	54%	33%
C	1890	41%	20%
D	1407	38%	20%
E	1927	37%	20%
F	1476	14%	6%
G	317	68%	60%
H	1798	31%	15%
I	1646	86%	47%
J	2120	15%	5%
K	2322	35%	20%

Note: Minority includes Black and Hispanic students.
Data from VDOE (2013) fall membership report.

To capture maximal variation for the phase two interviews, meetings were requested from counselors serving in the following locations: one high SES high school (School F), one middle

SES high school (School H), one low SES high school (School I). Since middle school counselors were part of the survey sample, meetings with middle school counselors were scheduled as well. Two middle school counselors were selected based on which high school the study body “feeds” into. Since High School F and High School I represented the extremes of both minority population and socioeconomic groups, responses from counselors at these locations provided an opportunity for exploring how contrasting student demographics might influence counselor behaviors and attitudes. Table 3 provides an overview of the counselors who volunteered for the interview phase of this study. The demographics of counselors interviewed for phase two had similar characteristics to the phase one participants.

Table 3.
Interview Participants School Assignment and Demographic Identifiers

Participant	School SES Group	Age	Identifier			
			Years of Counseling Experience	First Time Counselor	Previous Teaching Experience	CACREP Degree Program
Ms. A	Low*	30 – 39	11 – 15	Yes	No	Not Sure
Ms. B	High	20 – 29	0 – 5	Yes	No	Yes
Ms. C	Low	30 – 39	0 – 5	Yes	No	Yes
Ms. D	Middle	50 – 59	11 – 15	Yes	Yes	No
Ms. E	High*	50 – 59	16 – 20	No	Yes	Yes

* Indicates a middle school location.

Findings

The quantitative results are presented first followed by the counselor interview responses. In the interest of space, only a summary of findings affiliated with Objective 5 are shared. Please, see Ormsmith (2014) for a complete report of the findings.

Survey Findings

Objective 5: Identify how student race and socioeconomic factors contribute to counselor implementation practices. Data for Objective 5 were coded so that responses indicate which type of student receives the most counselor time or effort during the planning process. Questions Q23, Q30, and Q9 were used to create an *Equity Implementation Rating* based on the group counselors selected as requiring the most time to complete an ACP plan. Counselor responses to questions Q23 and Q30 that identified any of the Low SES responses were coded as a 1.0 while selecting any of the High SES choices resulted in a 0.0. Question Q9 coding was reversed so that a High SES selection was coded as a 1.0 because the question asked counselors to indicate which groups require the *least* amount of effort. Therefore, selecting any of the High SES groups indicated implementation time distribution consistent with the Low SES responses for questions Q23 and Q30. Combining responses from these three question produces and *Equity Implementation Rating* where a 3.0 indicates that counselors consistently spend more

time supporting Low SES students and at risk students during course planning sessions while scores close to 0.0 indicate no change in counselor behavior based on student status.

The remaining questions for Objective 5 were coded so that selecting the responses "Strongly Agree" or "Always" were scored as 5.0 while the other end of the scale ("Strongly Disagree" or "Never") were scored as a 1.0. In this way, a mean result for a question of 4.0 or above indicates counselor agreement with the statement. For the both the "Agree/Disagree" scale the "Always/Never" scales a selection of 3.0 is the neutral response and cannot be used to accurately determine agreement or disagreement with the statement.

The first set of results for Objective 5 are shown in Table 4 as percentages of responses for each item along with a mean score for each question. Responses to question Q5 indicate most (61%) counselors do not think that lower SES students are less interested in postsecondary options. Thirty-seven percent of counselors report spending more time with lower SES students who are less knowledgeable about postsecondary options and almost as many (34%) report that less knowledge is not a reason for spending more time with students. When asked about the difficulty of obtaining parent signatures, 46% of counselors say that it is hard to acquire them from lower SES parents but a majority of counselors (53%) report not having a hard time obtaining signatures from higher SES parents. Finally, most counselors (67%) do not feel that higher SES students gain more from counselor time than lower SES students.

Table 4.
Student Demographic Factors and Counselor Implementation Practices

ID	Question	Percent of Responses					Mean
		1	2	3	4	5	
Q5	"Compared to a higher socioeconomic student, I spend more time completing an Academic and Career Plan for a low socioeconomic student because they are less interested in postsecondary options."	.17	.44	.32	.07	.00	2.29
Q34	"Compared to a higher socioeconomic student, I spend more time completing an Academic and Career Plan for a low socioeconomic student because they are less knowledgeable about postsecondary options."	.02	.34	.27	.37	.00	2.98
Q6	Do you find yourself spending extra time with at-risk (i.e., lower socioeconomic status, minorities, etc.) students during counseling sessions in order to discuss the benefits of planning for postsecondary options?	.02	.15	.49	.27	.07	3.22

Q8	"Students in higher socioeconomic groups benefit more from my time with them discussing an Academic and Career Plan than lower socioeconomic students."	.29	.37	.27	.05	.02	2.15
Q11	"I have a hard time obtaining parent/guardian signatures on Academic and Career plans from students in lower socioeconomic groups."	.02	.10	.41	.34	.12	3.44
Q32	"I have a hard time obtaining parent/guardian signatures on Academic and Career plans from students in higher socioeconomic groups."	.05	.48	.43	.05	.00	2.48

The second set of results for Objective 5 are shown in Table 5 as percentages of responses for each item. When asked to compare time spent with students versus race indicators, counselors reported that they spend more time creating ACP plans for Low SES Hispanic students (42%) followed by Low SES Black students (29%). When considering time spent versus SES status and gender, counselors selected Low SES Males (46%) as the group requiring additional effort followed by Low SES Females (32%). Lastly, most counselors (68%) report spending the least amount of time helping High SES White students develop and complete an ACP.

Table 5.
Student Socioeconomic Factors and Counselor Implementation Practices

ID	Question	Choices	%
Q23	From the selections below, which race/ethnicity of students require the most effort (i.e., time or resources) to complete an Academic and Career Plan.	Low SES White	.16
		Low SES Black	.29
		Low SES Hispanic	.42
		High SES White	.00
		High SES Black	.13
		High SES Hispanic	.00
Q30	"I spend most of my time with the following type of student:" (Note: SES means socioeconomic status.)	Low SES Males	.46
		Low SES Females	.32
		High SES Males	.03
		High SES Females	.19
Q9	From the selections below, indicate which students require the least effort (i.e., time or resources) to complete an Academic and Career Plan. (Note: SES means socioeconomic status.)	Low SES White	.11
		Low SES Black	.08
		Low SES Hispanic	.03
		High SES White	.68
		High SES Black	.11
		High SES Hispanic	.00

An overall *Equity Implementation Rating* for Objective 5 was created by combining counselor responses to the questions in Table 5 to find an individual *Equity Implementation Rating* from 1.0 to 3.0 (See Figure 1). A counselor mean above 2.0 would indicate that counselors agree with the equity framework concepts and do, in practice, spend more time with at risk students when providing counseling services during course planning. The frequency distribution of counselor means shows an overall equity implementation mean of 2.10 with 17 participants (41%) having a mean of 3.0. The majority of counselors (71%) have an equity implementation mean above 2.0 while the remaining 30% of participants have a mean below 1.0.

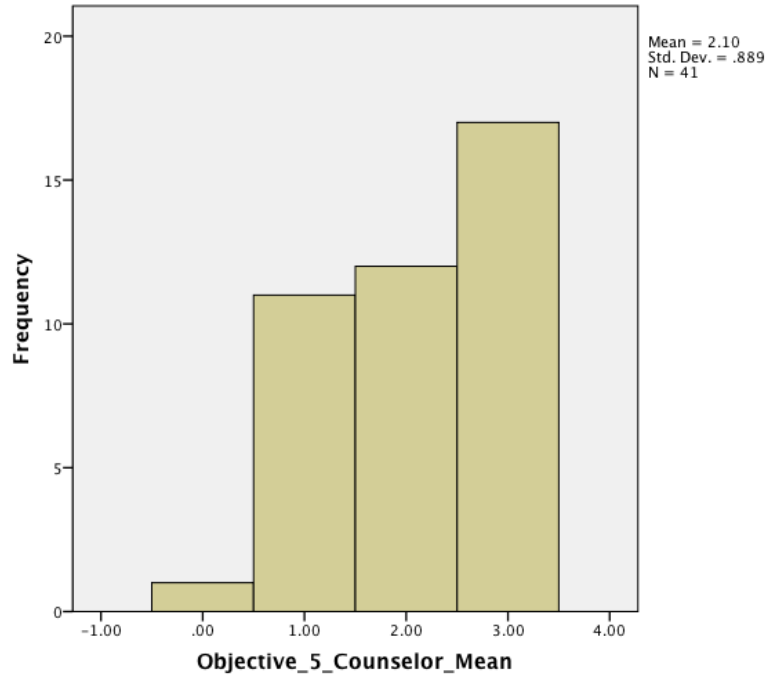


Figure 1.

Counselor Equity Implementation Rating

Preliminary Analysis Used to Inform Phase Two Interviews

The explanatory design indicates that the results from phase one are used to inform data collection in phase two. Subsequently, results from phase one were analyzed and interview questions were developed to explain and supplement the survey results. Each objective from the survey yielded results where the interviews could provide important contexts and additional explanations about counselor behaviors and beliefs. Therefore, the topics identified in this section became the areas of interest for the phase two interviews.

For Objective 5, implementation practices regarding spending extra time with particular groups of students indicated mixed results and many of the questions had means near 3.0 (the neutral response). Counselors were asked to provide examples of interactions they have had with at risk students when helping them complete an ACP to illuminate what activities counselors do engage in with at risk students.

Interview Findings

Since interviews followed the survey both in content and timing, the results are presented according to survey objectives to support the ultimate goal of answering the research questions. For each of the five objectives, the transcripts were coded by evaluating counselor responses for idea threads presented during the interview. In the original study (Ormsmith, 2014), direct quotations were often lengthy. This was an intentional choice by the researcher to maintain the context of the responses and highlight the thoughtful nature of the counselors' responses by including the rich stories they presented about their profession. However, due to space constraints, in addition to only sharing responses affiliated with Objective 5, quotations have been cut substantially. Please, see Ormsmith (2014) for more complete responses.

Objective 5: Identify how student race and socioeconomic factors contribute to counselor implementation practices. Several themes emerged while speaking with counselors concerning the intersection of their implementation practices and race and class. In the interest of space, two of these themes are briefly shared: 1) The desire to provide extra time to at risk students and, 2) A lack of substantive administrative support to do so.

Providing extra time to at risk students. Each counselor, except for Ms. C at the low SES school, indicated that they felt at risk students definitely deserve additional support from the counseling department but often do not receive it due to organizational constraints. Ms. A and Ms. B indicated that they wanted to treat all of their students "equally" but also said that at risk students should receive additional resources. Throughout conversations, counselors indicated their goal is to spend the same amount of time with everyone and to make sure that at risk students receive, at a minimum, the same services as the higher SES students. However, the counselors admitted that the reality of the situation is that they have very high case loads and tend to spend more time communicating with higher SES parents than with lower SES parents.

Ms. A shared:

I do think as a whole we try our hardest to be equal. And again unfortunately the whole time factor with how many students that we have to see. I think it's just difficult as a whole...sometimes kids do fall through the cracks and don't get as much attention. I think it's more the middle and upper income families that are going to be more prone to be involved...they're going to follow through...I think they [lower SES students] should get extra help. We don't want them to fall into the same situation over and over.

Ms. B agreed that she intends to provide equal, or even more, services to low SES students but finds herself dealing instead with higher SES families more often:

I do think that they're [lower SES students] deserving of my time. I would like to be an equal opportunity counselor, but, ... The squeaky wheel gets the grease. We have a lot of parents who will call and [are] vocal if their kids are not getting what the parent deems is "their needs being met" (air quotes)... Socioeconomically they are in a high SES.

Ms. D explained that first-generation college students seem to need more time:

It doesn't have anything to do with the economics as much as the fact that the parents don't have the background to know... So they need more time in just the vocabulary of the whole postsecondary education...they definitely need more time... I have had students...who actually need help in filling out the application...

Ms. C was the only one to say that lower SES student's perhaps do not deserve more of her time: "I don't know if I guess overtly think that you should get more of my time." However, like Ms. D, Ms. C does spend time with lower SES students providing support with the logistics of navigating the postsecondary application process. Ms. C explained the support she provides:

I think that sometimes they [lower SES students] do get more of my time because we may have to sit together and fill out a form or we may have to brainstorm ways how to make, you know, things possible that I don't have to make possible for other students...Just this morning, I had to sit down with one of my seniors because she's using a college application waiver and we're trying to figure out how to submit her application online without inputting credit card numbers. So it's not that she's necessarily demanding more of my time, it's just kind of how it plays out.

These examples show that while the counselors agree, in principle, that lower SES students should receive additional support they do not receive that support because higher SES parents are more vocal and receive more attention. They also described that what support they are able to offer takes the form of assisting students through the postsecondary bureaucracy by helping complete applications or understand the processes.

Administrative support ... in theory. Counselors were asked to comment on whether or not they felt the building administrators supported the idea of providing additional support to lower SES students. The reply was that, in theory, the administration would tell them that it is a good idea but in practice, concrete support does not materialize. Ms. D explained it this way:

I think they support it, but unless you show it with more people helping... more individuals providing service. So what? I mean you can verbalize, "Yes, you're right, they do need..." But, unless it translates into another warm body, it doesn't matter.

Ms. E felt the same way, but added that she would be told it is her responsibility: "I think they would support it, but I think that they would give it to me to figure out how to make it so. And the reality of making it so would be a real struggle." The counselors describe administrators who may be sympathetic to their needs but are unable to provide practical solutions to provide lower SES students with additional counseling personnel. Whether it is the lack of additional personnel or a principal's focus on classroom time, counselors feel that the additional support from administrators is not coming any time soon.

Discussion and Implications for Educational Leaders

While results revealed Coal County counselors provide college and career planning services in accordance to the letter, and spirit, of the ACP policy, findings also indicated counselors would like to do more for lower SES students but that they usually cannot find the time to do so. Counselors describe devoting a significant amount of time responding to the "squeaky wheel"

parents in the community at the expense of the lower SES students. But counselors had a suggestion for how to fix this problem: more counselors. To serve the lower SES groups and provide the additional services necessary to produce successful postsecondary outcomes, additional counseling personnel are needed to reduce the student to counselor ratio. While the division has a ratio close to the ASCA recommended level, counselors still report not having the time to help lower SES students on a consistent basis. And this issue is not restricted to lower SES schools – *every* counselor interviewed conveyed the same need for more counselors to adequately and equitably reach all students. Assisting lower SES students navigate the postsecondary world takes time and attention and no amount of technology or procedures can replace the human resources needed to make sure each student receives the best possible support.

While human contact is of greatest concern to the counselors interviewed, they did identify other division-wide organizational changes essential and easier to achieve. For example, counselors emphasized that an electronic version of the ACP would enable information to be readily available via computer instead of a paper form restricted to the counselor's office. In addition, counselors recommended the development of alternative options regarding course selection for students who change their minds or fail courses. Moreover, counselors thought it would be beneficial to have financial aid experts available in the schools at all times to assist with providing options for lower SES students. These additional personnel might be volunteers or representatives of higher education or government officials who would be available to help parents and students understand the financial aspects of college and career planning.

Since the counselors in Coal County struggle with providing adequate services to all students when the higher SES groups monopolize a large portion of counselor time, it is important administrators consider using additional tools that might stabilize a consistent focus on this target population. For example, to help balance counselor resources, a time log of parent contact might be helpful in determining if all of the counselors are interacting with mainly higher SES parents. Additionally, administrative procedures might be developed and adopted that would provide follow up with students whose grades indicate they are at risk for leaving school or not graduating on time. Making contact with students earning less than a C-minus in coursework a priority will help counselors intervene before student course options are reduced by repeated courses. Along those lines, administrators might reconsider the classroom-counselor divide in terms of time and space by allowing counselors more opportunities to visit students in the classroom. This extra time would be used to check in on students, provide updates regarding events and deadlines, and afford students an opportunity to schedule meetings with counselors. Finally, counselors should set aside time each day to initiate contact with lower SES parents. Counselors reported during the interviews that lower SES parents were not likely to initiate contact but were very responsive once the counselor called. Because lower SES parents are not coming to the counselors, counselors need to be the originators of contact rather than simply reacting to the "squeaky wheels" that come through the door. Principals could support this goal by making it a point of accountability.

While the current study was limited to one suburban school district, the results may warrant recommendations to school leaders beyond this district. To make implementation fidelity a reality for all students, there are immediate steps as well as short- and long-term processes that educational leaders can implement. While counselors are responsible for most aspects of implementing the Academic and Career plans, the role of building principals is just as important to providing quality counseling services to all students. First, administrators should meet

frequently with the counselors to review school policies and procedures. For instance, the manner in which counselors interact with the students and parents should be standardized within the building so that each student is given a fair share of counselor time. Second, career planning is a coordinated effort between students, parents, counselors, administrators, and *teachers*. Administrators should meet with teachers routinely about their role in helping students focus on career planning. Not surprisingly, students spend most of their time during the day with teachers. To capitalize on this time, principals need to make sure the teachers are equipped to provide on-the-spot counseling to students. For example, organizing meetings between faculty and counselors to discuss the options, processes, and requirements of the course planning process will provide teachers with information critical to helping students make decisions and capitalize on questions asked in class. Instead of responding to student questions by saying, "I don't know, go ask your counselor;" teachers will be able to describe the process in detail and offer guidance based on student interests. Finally, administrators should take it upon themselves to actively promote career planning to parents during school events. Most administrators spend a lot of time at athletic events and school functions where meetings with parents occur regularly. Integrating questions such as, "Have you talked with your child about what they want to do after high school?" is an opportunity for administrators to reinforce that public education is important to students because it connects what they like to do with careers after graduation.

Division level administrators (such as superintendents, directors, content specialists, and instructional supervisors) are also an important part of this process. In smaller systems, a division level administrator is often responsible for aligning the career planning focus from elementary school to high school. Leaders in larger divisions have the additional task of ensuring implementation consistency between schools at each level across the entire division. These leaders participate in the process by staying up-to-date on current counseling programs and practices, by researching new career options, by coordinating state and federal regulations, by attending conferences, and by seeking new opportunities for students to interact with higher education institutions and businesses. Division leaders should actively seek out local businesses as partners for college and career planning because students benefit from seeing what they will encounter after school (Conley, 2005; Hill, 2008). Finally, division leaders can support counselors by working to promote college and career readiness awareness by involving local businesses in the school system through school site visits, guest speakers, and financial support for programs linking public education to postsecondary career options.

At the state and national level, educational leaders can promote implementation fidelity by maintaining a focus on the importance of career counseling and by providing resources for school divisions. An example of this effort is an amendment to the *Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act* introduced by Senator Tim Kaine in July, 2014. Senator Kaine introduced the *Educating Tomorrow's Workforce Act of 2014*, in part, to "Improv(e) links between high school and postsecondary education to help ease attainment of an industry recognized credential, license, apprenticeship, or postsecondary certificate to obtain a job in a high-demand career field" and to "Promot(e) partnerships between local businesses, regional industries and other community stakeholders to create pathways for students to internships, service learning experiences, or apprenticeships as they transition into the workforce or postsecondary education" (Kaine, 2014). The increased national focus on connecting public education to well paying jobs by leaders like Senator Kaine will lead to increased interest among parents and students in postsecondary opportunities outside of the traditional college route. This,

in turn, should lead to more students proactively discussing career opportunities with counselors, teachers, and administrators.

Conclusions and Future Research

As the above discussion suggests, improving the implementation fidelity of career pathways policy for lower socioeconomic status students is impossible without the commitment and dedication of educational leaders. The lessons learned from this study in one school district are important for helping administrators understand what counselors think about this ACP policy specifically, and their role in the schools generally. According to the counselors in Coal County, the Academic and Career Plan policy is an effective postsecondary planning tool that supports their efforts to create programs of study that are both interesting and relevant to students. Counselors in this district are knowledgeable about the process and support the policymakers' intent by maintaining implementation practices consistent with the goals of the policy.

Future research should focus on repeating both the survey and the interview process in districts with varied socioeconomic demographics and student populations. Comparing results from these studies would clarify if the problem of higher SES parents obtaining additional counselor time at the expense of lower SES students is unique to this division or if it is an issue with larger scope. The counselors in Coal County exceed the minimum requirements of the ACP by virtue of division expectations and local procedures so exploring these topics within divisions with limited resources would provide additional insight into the challenges and benefits of the policy; specifically, determining if counselors in divisions who do not meet with students every year express the same benefits and connections that the Coal County counselors identified. Additional work should also be done to further identify issues of the students' race/ethnicity and gender. In this particular case, students' gender and race were not discussed along the same lines as socioeconomic status. It is unclear whether there are: no differences between students' experiences based on race/ethnicity and gender; counselors in Coal County purposefully take a "color blind" and "gender blind" stance, or; problems exist but are not recognized due to ignorance. Finally, the overwhelming majority of participants in this survey were white women. It would be interesting to compare this study with a case where counseling services are provided by men as well as by counselors of color.

There are a couple of questions remaining that would also benefit from further study. First, the counselors responded on the survey (Objective 5) that they spend more time helping lower SES students during counseling sessions. However, during the interviews counselors described a different situation where higher SES students and parents receive additional time at the expense of the lower SES population. The reason for this disconnect was not discovered during the present study. Perhaps during the survey counselor responses indicated that it takes more time to complete the actual ACP form for lower SES students whereas during the interviews counselors were thinking about how much time is spent with lower SES students throughout the day. Understanding this discrepancy could provide additional insight into how to promote and maintain an equity framework within the counseling offices. And second, the conversations with counselors seemed to describe a preconceived belief that postsecondary preparation entails making students ready to attend a traditional college instead of an emphasis on all postsecondary choices. Further study is needed to understand this apparent counselor bias towards students not interested in attending college. For example, learning how a perceived district culture relating to a "college ready" student body may influence school counselors'

decisions could illuminate why conversations between counselors and lower SES students tend to focus on finding ways to pay for college instead of exploring other possibilities.

While the ACP policy appears to be an effective postsecondary planning tool, counselors still struggle to find ways to accommodate the needs of lower SES students and their families. While the solution, in the counselors' opinion, is to provide more personnel, securing the funds for the additional counselors is a major policy constraint. Without a concerted effort on the part of parents, educators, counselors, and division leaders, the cycle of privilege will continue and higher SES students will receive additional benefits from the ACP policy at the expense of lower SES populations. Consequently, the importance of school counselors and educational leaders working for social justice as a complementary leadership team cannot be overstated (Walker, 2006).

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Factors Influencing the Improved Academic Success in Literacy at the Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP) Schools in the Delta Region According to Adult Perceptions

This manuscript has been peer-reviewed, accepted, and endorsed by the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA) as a significant contribution to the scholarship and practice of school administration and K-12 education.



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This qualitative case study explored factors that have influenced literacy success of Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP) students in the low-income, poverty stricken Delta Region of Arkansas. The study examined progress made since implementation of the KIPP Program and the influence the program had made upon student achievement in literacy at the KIPP College Preparatory and KIPP Delta Collegiate High Schools, according to administrators' and teachers' perceptions. The study explored factors influencing improvement of previously at-risk students and adopted the theoretical framework of Gene Bottoms' High Schools That Work (HSTW) Initiative that stated high expectations plus rigor, relevance, and relationships increased student achievement (2005). The factors that emerged from the study were high expectations, rigor, relevance, relationship, and accountability. These factors were identified as helping students master skills and state standards in literacy at the KIPP Delta Public Schools. It is imperative that public school leaders narrow the academic gap that exists between white students, black students, and students from poverty in the public schools (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 2009). Only 8.3% of students from low-income backgrounds have earned college degrees by their mid-20s (McDonald, Ross, Abney, & Zoblotsky, 2008). The numbers are more dismal from students from the Delta Region. However, students at KIPP Schools are taking the same state-wide assessments and are scoring at proficient or advanced levels (McDonald, Ross, Abney, & Zoblotsky, 2008). If KIPP Schools are successful in educating students who were failing in traditional public schools, the question remained: What factors have influenced the increased academic improvements in literacy of previously at-risk students in the Delta Region, according to adult perceptions?

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Introduction

For decades a debate existed on whether or not minority students received a quality education from the American public school system. Organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) argued there are gross inequities in the quality of education that minority and low-income students received (NAACP, 2009). The federal government recognized that many students of color and low-socioeconomic status were at-risk of failing or dropping out of school. As a result, the federal government, under the previous No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2002) provided federal monies to schools under Title I to provide various interventions for students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds to become successful and graduate from high school (NCLB, 2002). Schools were designated Title I when 40% or more of the student population was from low-income or poverty-stricken backgrounds, and received free or reduced lunch. The Arkansas Department of Education estimated that 1,043 public schools were designated Title I schools (Arkansas Department of Education, 2012).

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2002)

Prior to the approval of Flexibility Waivers under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 2012, Title I schools had to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) goals set by Arkansas' Department of Education. Arkansas' AYP was the annual target that schools met in mathematics, literacy, and writing on augmented state benchmark examinations and end-of-course examinations (Arkansas Department of Education, 2012). Combined school populations and subpopulations had to demonstrate proficiency in literacy, mathematics, and writing for the school to meet AYP. The subpopulations were (a) Caucasian, (b) African-American, (c) Hispanic, (d) Limited English Proficient, (e) economically disadvantaged, and (f) students with disabilities (Arkansas Department of Education, 2012; NCLB, 2002).

Statement of the Problem

Too many minority students are at-risk of failing in our public schools (Southern Education Foundation, 2002; National Association Advancement of Colored People, 2009). In the study, at-risk of failing was defined as either not proficient, not on grade level, or not being promoted to the next grade. At-risk students were typically poor, African American students who had not realized their full potential, talents, and skills. As a result, many minority students in public schools became statistics for low academic achievement, discipline problems, dropout rates, or failure (NAACP, 2009; Southern Education Foundation, 2002). According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), white students scored an average of 26 points higher than African American students on all 2007 administered assessments (Vanneman, Hamilton, Baldwin-Anderson, & Rahman, 2009).

KIPP students were typically one or two grade levels below upon enrollment (Woodworth, David, Guha Wang, & Lopez-Torkos (2008). Woodworth et al., (2008) found scores of KIPP students entering the fifth grade, ranged from the 9th to the 60th percentile in reading and mathematics on the Stanford Achievement Test (SAT10).

Main Research Question

The main research question addressed in the research study was, “What factors influenced the increased academic success of at-risk students in the KIPP Schools in Literacy in the Delta Region, according to administrators’ and English Language Arts (ELA) teachers’ perceptions?” The factors perceived by administrators and ELA teachers to have a positive effect upon student achievement in literacy were (a) KIPP’s commitment of academic excellence, (b) KIPP’s culture of high expectations, (c) a rigorous, college preparatory curriculum and practices, and (d) accountability of all stakeholders. KIPP’s practices included the Power to Lead Pillar, data-driven instruction and decision-making, research-based instructional strategies, professional development, lesson cycle, and teacher collaboration.

Significance of the Study

It was imperative that public school leaders narrow the academic gap that existed between white students, black students, and students of poverty in public schools (NAACP, 2009). Only 8.3% of students from low-income backgrounds had earned college degrees by their mid-20s (McDonald, Ross, Abney, & Zoblotsky, 2008). The numbers were even more dismal for students from the Delta Region. However, students at KIPP Schools were taking the same state-wide assessments and were scoring at proficient or advanced levels (McDonald, Ross, Abney, & Zoblotsky, 2008). If KIPP Schools were successful in educating students who were previously failing in traditional public schools, the question remained: “What factors have influenced academic improvements in literacy at the KIPP Delta Public Schools?” After identifying what factors have influenced improvements in literacy, can components of the KIPP Program be used as an instructional model for improvement in public school systems to effect the same increased student achievement for all students and narrow the academic gap for African American students and students of poverty (KIPP, 2012)?

Results of this study were beneficial to educators and the community in general because of the information concerning KIPP’s structure, learning environment, graduation rates, college matriculation rate, and college graduation rates. These factors helped KIPP students graduate from high schools, universities, and colleges around the nation. KIPP graduates had a plethora of opportunities that had not been realized in their former public schools. For example, more than 90% of middle school KIPP students enrolled in college preparatory high schools throughout the country. More than 80% of KIPP high school students attended college (KIPP, 2012). Eighty percent college matriculation rate was significant when compared to 40% of the nation’s students with similar backgrounds. For every 100 black and Hispanic students, less than 20 earned a college degree (Mathews, 2009). As future leaders empowered with content knowledge, skills, and character, KIPP students may change the landscape of the 21st century workforce. Furthermore, educating previously at-risk students may also help to decrease the nation’s poverty rate, crime statistics, and high unemployment rate.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify factors that had influenced academic literacy success of KIPP Schools in the Delta Region, according to administrators’ and teachers’ perceptions. This research was significant because, at the time, it was the only study that had interviewed and captured the experience of the first graduates of the KIPP Delta Collegiate High School in the

Delta Region in Arkansas. The students had an opportunity to share their experiences with the researchers.

Literature Review

Review of related literature focused on the following: the alarming illiteracy rate in the Delta Region, background of the KIPP Delta Public Schools, and the theory advocated by Gene Bottoms' *High Schools That Work* Initiative of high expectations, rigor, relevance, and relationships, which may be the catalyst surrounding the success of KIPP Delta Public Schools. The goal was to provide educators with a complete, evaluative, and modern literature review related to KIPP Delta Public Schools' impact upon student achievement in literacy (2005).

Illiteracy in the Delta Region

Illiteracy in the Delta Region is an economic problem for Arkansas. Inadequate literacy skills were next to the lowest level of literacy skills and prevented individuals from fully functioning in society. Examples, from the National Institute for Literacy, illustrated the devastating effects for individuals with inadequate literacy skills: they were unable to read and summarize a news article or complete employment applications. Counties that were part of the Delta Region: Lee, Phillips, and Chicot had the highest illiteracy rates in Arkansas. Forty to 45% of the adults in those counties had inadequate literacy skills. In St. Francis and Monroe counties, also part of the Delta Region, thirty-five to 39% of the adults had inadequate literacy skills (Dillaha & Rodgers, 2007).

Furthermore, as cotton and manufacturing jobs disappeared, so did the Delta Region's economic base. As a result, many counties in this area had double-digit unemployment percentages. More than half of the residents in the Delta Region lived below the federal poverty line. Twenty percent of the Delta Region's population relocated due to high unemployment, which currently left the area with an unskilled labor force (Elliot, 2005). Thus, the Delta Region had the highest level of poverty and dropout rate, and the least number of college graduates in Arkansas.

Charter Schools

Researchers of charter schools had concluded that little innovation had taken place in terms of curriculum or instruction (Good & Braden, 2000). According to the research provided by Good and Braden, there was little difference in charter schools and regular public schools. One exception was the KIPP Schools, a charter school founded in inner-city Houston, Texas, in 1994 by co-founders Mike Feinberg and Dave Levin. KIPP Schools had received national attention for increasing student achievement among minority students, who were previously failing in public schools (McDonald, Ross, Abney, & Zoblotzky, 2008). KIPP Schools were located throughout major urban cities with large populations of minority and low-socioeconomic students.

Advocates of KIPP Delta Public Schools would agree that Arkansas was fortunate to have KIPP Delta Public Schools in the Delta Region (KIPP, 2012). Future plans included chartering 13 additional KIPP Schools throughout Arkansas in communities similar to the Delta Region by 2019. KIPP Schools were normally found in urban areas. KIPP Schools in the Delta

Region were anomalies. The question remained, “What conditions in KIPP Delta Public Schools allowed them to be successful with minority students, who were originally deemed to fail in traditional public schools?”

Background of KIPP Schools

KIPP Schools started in 1994 with co-founders, Mike Feinberg and Dave Levin in inner-city Houston, Texas. KIPP Schools were non-profit charter schools with a large population of minority and other students from poverty-stricken backgrounds. More than 85% of KIPP students qualified for the federal free and reduced-price meal program, and 95% were African American, Hispanic, or Latino. Students entered KIPP Schools one or two grades below in both reading and mathematics.

Nevertheless, these same minority students made tremendous improvements in academics, discipline, and motivation with the KIPP Program. They became the American success stories that public schools were striving to deliver. Students who entered KIPP Schools below grade level dramatically increased from below basic to proficient or advanced students (McDonald, Ross, Abney, & Zoblotsky, 2008). KIPP students earned \$21 million dollars in scholarships to attend some of the top high schools in the nation. At the time of the study, there were 141 KIPP Schools throughout the nation and in Washington, DC (KIPP, 2012).

KIPP’s Mission

The mission of KIPP Schools was to provide a high-quality education for underserved minority students who graduate with the skills, knowledge, and character to be successful in the 21st century global market (KIPP, 2012). KIPP Schools operated on central beliefs known as the Five Pillars:

1. Students had a longer school day, beginning at 7:30 A.M. and ending at 5:30 P.M. Students attended Saturdays bi-weekly from 8:00 A.M. until noon. They also attended Summer School.
2. Students completed two to three hours of homework daily.
3. Teachers, parents, and students signed a Commitment to Excellence form, holding all three parties accountable for students’ attendance, homework, and behavior at KIPP Schools.
4. Students participated in extracurricular activities, such as chess, band, orchestra, athletics, and martial arts in the afternoons.
5. Students attended field trips to college campuses and important national historical sites (KIPP, 2012).

Students were expected to achieve, behave, and excel at KIPP Schools. Incentives were in place for student achievement. For example, they were awarded points toward a weekly paycheck that they could spend in the school’s bookstore for various items, such as t-shirts, backpacks, and pencils. Other incentives include skating, bowling, and end-of-year field trips.

The rules for student behavior were strict. Consequences for students who misbehaved or did not complete their assignments were given. For example, students who talked without

permission or failed to complete an assignment lost points toward their weekly paycheck. Some students stayed after school or forfeited field trips for their misbehavior.

KIPP Critics

Creaming Argument

Critics of KIPP Delta Public Schools accused the school officials of creaming or skimming the best and brightest students from the Helena-West-Helena Public Schools. However, the researchers at the University of Arkansas Educational Policy found that KIPP students were “slightly more successful than their prior peers, but were no means the best and brightest upon entering KIPP” (Office of Educational Policy, 2011, p. 3). KIPP students who attended were more likely to be female, African American, and from low-income and high poverty backgrounds. Ninety percent of the KIPP student body in 2009-2010 were eligible for free or reduced lunch, as compared to 60% of students across Arkansas.

More importantly, these students entered KIPP Delta Public Schools at academic levels lower than the average student performance in mathematics across the state. For instance, students entering KIPP scored in the bottom 30% of the state’s distribution in mathematics prior to KIPP’s entrance. However, they scored slightly higher than their classmates who remained at the Helena-West Helena Public Schools. For example, 46% of KIPP students were proficient or advanced in mathematics compared to 35% of their peers who remained at the traditional public schools. “However, once at KIPP, these students outperformed other students with a similar record of academic performance within the state” (Office for Education Policy, 2011, p. 7).

Creaming through Attrition Argument

Similarly, KIPP Delta Public Schools had been accused of creaming through their attrition and returning those students who were not likely to be the best and brightest, or those students who were discipline problems back to their former schools. The University of Arkansas found that on average 15% of KIPP students left each year, with 17% leaving after fifth grade. They found that KIPP students who left were more likely to be a male, black, white or Hispanic, and from higher poverty backgrounds than their peers who remained at KIPP. They also found that the students who chose to leave KIPP were not performing as well as the KIPP students who remained. The students, however, had improved tremendously upon entering and studying at KIPP Delta Public Schools and as a result, were doing as well as the average student in mathematics upon leaving the KIPP Schools. For example, 38% of the students who left KIPP were in the 50th percentile of state’s distribution on the math assessments. Similarly, 45% of those students who left KIPP scored in the upper half on the literacy assessments (Office for Education Policy, 2011).

Theoretical Framework

In designing a qualitative research study, not only should researchers develop the research question to be studied, but also adopt a framework from which they will conduct the study. In qualitative research, theories are used as a broad explanation for people’s behavior and attitudes.

The theory becomes a lens or a perspective from which researchers conduct the study (Creswell, 2007).

According to Creswell, theoretical lenses shaped the research questions to be asked, indicated how the researchers should position themselves in the study, informed how data should be collected and analyzed, and concluded with how the final paper should be written. Sometimes a call for action or change was needed. (Creswell, 2007). Creswell recommended identifying a theory that was applicable to the study, and its relevance.

The theory used for this study was based upon research from Gene Bottoms' *High Schools That Work* Initiative that stated rigor, relevance, relationships, and high expectations increased student achievement (Bottoms, 2005). The study explored whether or not the factors that influenced the improvement of previously at-risk students were the high expectations of literacy teachers, rigor of the KIPP Program, relevance of the lessons, positive teacher-student relationships developed, and accountability of all stakeholders.

Methodology

In terms of qualitative research, the study was an illustrative, case study describing in-depth details of the KIPP Delta Public Schools, the learning environment, and the people within the school. A case study was appropriate because KIPP Schools in the Delta Region were anomalies that allowed the researchers to gain previously inaccessible knowledge about the schools and confirm or disconfirm the theory that high expectations, rigor, relevance, and relationships increased student achievement.

To conduct this illustrative, case study and obtain a complete and accurate picture of the KIPP Delta Public Schools, multiple quantitative methods were used, including semi-structured interviews of administrators and literacy teachers, classroom observations, and document analysis. Behaviors that motivated and encouraged students to excel in literacy were documented and included making lessons rigorous and relevant to students, conferencing with students on their writing, spelling, vocabulary, and oratory skills, and modeling the skills they needed to be proficient or advanced in literacy and writing (Little Rock School District Literacy Protocol, 2009).

Research Site

The researchers chose the KIPP Schools because they had been recognized for their academic success with students in the Delta Region (Office for Education Policy, 2011). KIPP Delta Public Schools opened in 2002 in Helena, Arkansas. The school opened with 75 fifth-grade students who were recruited from local housing projects. The following year the school added sixth-grade students. In 2004-2005, they added an eighth grade class. At the time of the study, there were approximately 700 students in elementary, middle, and high schools. KIPP planned to open 13 additional schools throughout communities similar to the Delta Region by 2019. Ninety-seven percent of KIPP students were African American, and 87% of them qualified for free or reduced price meals. KIPP Schools were located in Phillips County, the second poorest county in Arkansas. According to the United States Department of Agriculture, less than 63% of adults in Phillips County had high school diplomas and 12.4% had college degrees.

Nevertheless, in 2008, the KIPP School was named as a Blue Ribbon School by the United States Department of Education because of the academic success it had demonstrated on

the state’s benchmarks and end-of-course examinations. KIPP Delta Collegiate High was also ranked second in Arkansas by the Washington Post High School Challenge Index for preparing students for college and university readiness (Maranto & Shuls, 2011; see Table 1 and 2).

Table 1
*KIPP Proficiency or Advanced Percentages
 Grades 5-8 Literacy Benchmarks and 11th Grade End of Course Examination*

Grade	5	6	7	8	11
Year 2006-2007	71	56	57	78	
Year 2007-2008	68	53	60	82	
Year 2008-2009	57	67	73	82	91
Year 2009-2010	69	62	74	88	80
Year 2010-2011	67	82	65	80	64
Year 2011-2012	82	66	78	81	93

Source: NORMES (2012).

Table 2
*Helena-West Helena School District Proficiency or Advanced Percentages
 Grades 5-8 Literacy Benchmarks and 11th Grade End of Course Examination*

Grade	5	6	7	8	11
Year 2006-2007	43	49	29	35	17
Year 2007-2008	48	39	30	39	21
Year 2008-2009	54	51	38	44	27
Year 2009-2010	65	57	56	52	37
Year 2010-2011	62	52	50	60	36

Year					
2011-2012	66	45	67	64	34

Source: NORMES (2012)

Research Participants

The selection of research participants included the Executive Director, principals of the school, and literacy teachers. In semi-structured interviews, administrators and literacy teachers shared the instructional strategies they utilized at the KIPP Schools and believed were influencing increased student achievement in literacy, according to their professional experiences and perceptions.

Data Collection

The results of interviews and classroom observations were transcribed and analyzed to identify factors that were influencing academic achievement in literacy. This data was meaningful in confirming or disconfirming the theory of high expectations, rigor, relevance, and relationship to encourage student achievement posited by Gene Bottoms' *High Schools That Work* Initiative as it related to this study (Bottoms, 2005).

Data Sources

Observations. More importantly, researchers observed the KIPP Delta Public Schools during the summer months. Field notes of the classroom observation and professional development were recorded using the observation protocol adapted from Creswell (2008). The researchers recorded their observations in the literacy classes and professional development sessions in order to understand the influences that were possibly contributing to the increase of literacy skills (Yin, 1989). Items researchers documented included interaction, language, routines, and nonverbal communication.

Documents. Documents were the third data source used to triangulate findings of the study. Documents, such as lesson plans, professional development handouts, and master schedules were collected during the three week observation.

Interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the Executive Director, principals, and ELA teachers. According to Gall, Borg, & Gall, (2003), semi-structured, open-ended interviews were the preferred form and were utilized in qualitative research, because they allowed participants to fully express themselves in response to the questions being asked. The semi-structured, open-ended interview had the same questions for each participant (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 2003). The open-ended questions allowed participants to share as much detailed information on factors they believed were influencing enhanced student achievement in literacy, according to their professional experiences and perceptions.

Interview Protocol: Interview Guide for Administrators and Teachers

1. Background Information

2. Tell me about KIPP Delta Public Schools.
3. How do KIPP Delta Public Schools differ from the public school you previously taught or attended as a student?
4. Describe the leadership's role in increasing student achievement at KIPP Delta Public Schools.
5. How do teachers motivate students to achieve and excel in their academic studies at KIPP Delta Public Schools?
6. As an instructor at KIPP Delta Public Schools, please explain the best teaching practices utilized at this school.
7. What interventions do KIPP Delta Public Schools have in place to prevent KIPP students from failing or falling through the cracks?
8. What is the role of parental involvement at KIPP Delta Public Schools?
9. Compare and contrast the parental involvement at KIPP Delta Public Schools versus public schools.
10. How do KIPP Delta Public Schools prepare students to be successful in high school, college, and the workplace?
11. What literacy strategies do the ELA teachers utilize with KIPP students to increase their literacy skills in reading comprehension, vocabulary, and writing?
12. How is it possible for KIPP students to have very different academic outcomes on the same assessments, that they scored basic or below basic previously a year or two ago at a traditional public school?
13. How has the KIPP Program affected teachers' practice, role, and professional development?

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Researchers used steps to ensure validity and reliability. Those steps included methodological triangulation, data source triangulation, member check, and audit trail. Triangulation was defined by researchers as the confirmation of research findings through several sources. Multiple data sources of the observation and interview transcriptions were used for triangulation. Silverman (1993) defined triangulation as comparing different kinds of data, such as quantitative and qualitative data, and different methods, such as observations and interviews, to determine whether or not they corroborate one another.

Methodological triangulation was the most common form utilized by qualitative researchers (Stake, 1995). According to Stake, for research findings to be valid, similar themes must emerge through multiple sources. The multiple sources used in this qualitative research were interviews, observations, and document analysis. These sources were used to strengthen the researchers' argument for validity.

Second, data source triangulation was utilized during the classroom and professional development analysis and interpretation. Observations of literacy classes and professional development were conducted over three weeks. Data from interviews and observations were compared to determine if there were similar findings or discrepancies within the data.

Third, member checks were conducted in this research. Participants were given the opportunity to review the analyses and interpretation to confirm the findings of the research.

Fourth, an audit trail was conducted, tracing any inferences or conclusions to the semi-structured interviews, taped classroom observations, or documents.

Additionally, the research was written in thick, rich detail to describe the KIPP Delta Public Schools, classroom observations, professional development, and the interviews. Attempts were made to be as objective as possible.

Lastly, two college professors familiar with schools that had success with minorities and students from high poverty backgrounds, read the research findings to search for inaccuracies (Yin, 1989). The peer debriefings allowed the researchers to clarify discrepancies within the data.

Findings

Main Research Question: What factors influenced the increased academic success of at-risk students in the KIPP School in Literacy in the Delta Region, according to administrators' and teachers' perceptions?

The researchers wanted to know what factors KIPP administrators and ELA teachers perceived to be positively making a difference in the literacy success of students from the Delta Region. In other words, what were the ELA teachers doing in the classrooms that appeared to be enhancing student literacy at the KIPP Schools in this area of the state that is known for its high illiteracy rate? KIPP Delta Public Schools had received a lot of public attention for its high academic achievement scores and had gained the interest of other educators throughout Arkansas. The data collected in this research study suggested that the administrators and ELA teachers believed the following factors positively impacted student achievement in literacy: (a) KIPP's commitment to academic excellence, (b) KIPP's culture of high expectations, (c) a rigorous, college preparatory curriculum and practices, and (d) accountability of all stakeholders. For example, one participant discussed the significance of the commitment by stating:

Parents sign a Commitment to Excellence form. It's basically like a contract between the school, the student, and the parents. I think the one thing we do have that is different from traditional public school is that, I think, we have a unique opportunity of getting everybody on the same page at one time (ADM3).

Another participant discussed the significance of KIPP's culture of high expectations by stating:

We put culture above everything else. It is expectations. We expect our students to achieve. That's our attitude all the time. The higher you put your expectations, the further students will climb. They may not always reach the bar, but it's a heck of a lot better to aim high and miss than to shoot low and hit. Expectations, that's the thing you immediately pick up on when you walk into our school (ADM1).

Still, a participant discussed the positive, teacher-student relationships developed at KIPP Delta Public Schools by stating:

The teachers form relationships here with their students. These relationships not only build trust amongst teachers and students, but they also help achieve student learning (ELA2).

Yet another participant discussed the significance of a rigorous, college preparatory curriculum by stating:

We expect that everyone will go on to a four-year college or university. One hundred percent of our kids will be college-ready. One hundred percent will attend a rigorous college, rigorous in terms of their own academic achievement. One hundred percent of students, that's the goal. One hundred percent will be accepted into a type of rigorous college or university... Not everyone is going to go to an Ivy League school, but we're going to find a school that's appropriate given their area of interest and their academic abilities that they have when they graduate (ELA1).

Last, another participant discussed the role of accountability at KIPP Schools

“KIPP differs from the public schools in terms of accountability” (ELA1). It was a general consensus among all of the staff participants interviewed that everyone was held accountable at KIPP including the students, teachers, and parents.

In summary, administrators and ELA teachers truly believed that the commitment of the staff, the culture of high expectations, the positive teacher-student relationships, a rigorous, college preparatory curriculum, relevance of the lessons, and accountability among all stakeholders significantly impacted student achievement in literacy at the KIPP Schools. Figure 1 illustrates those factors (See Figure 1).

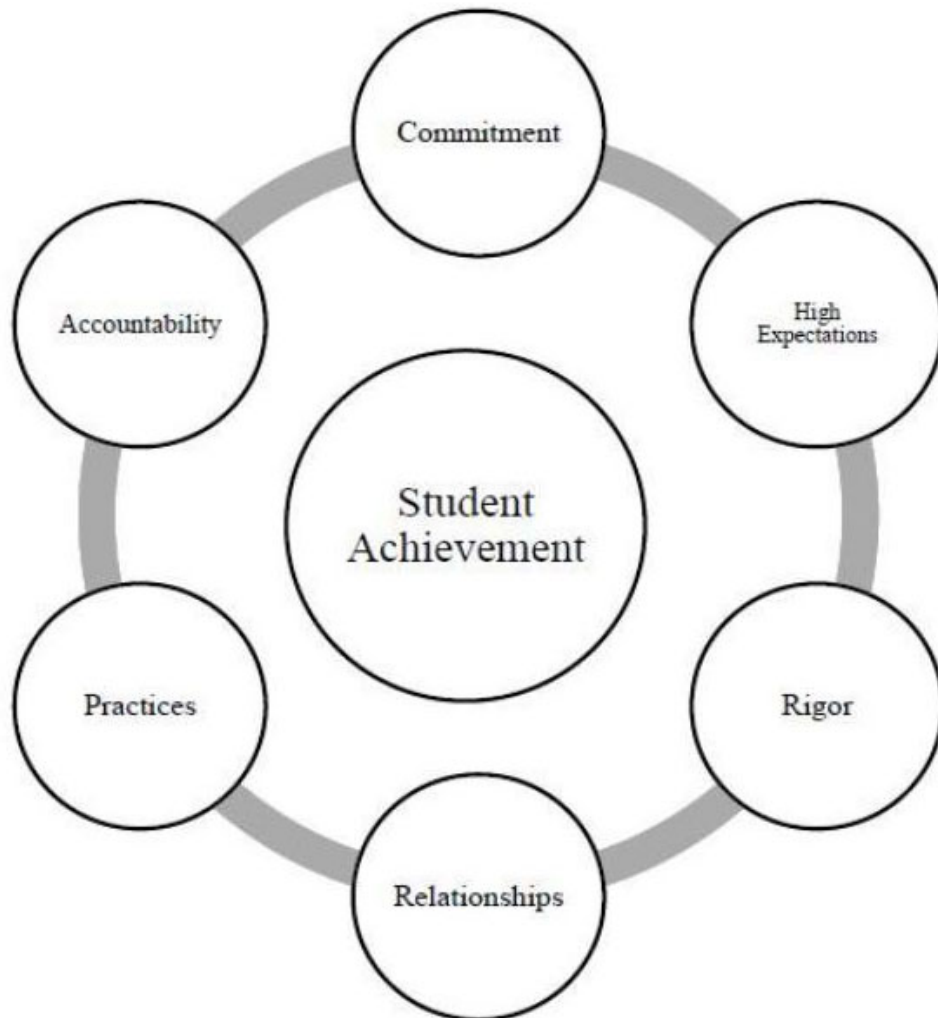


Figure 1. Factors enhancing student achievement according to administrators' and English language arts teachers' perceptions.

Theory Link

The theoretical framework driving this research study was *Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships plus High Expectations Theory* by Bottoms (2005). Bottoms and the Southern Regional Educational Board believed the combination of rigor, relevance, relationships, and high expectations of students increased and sustained student achievement. According to Bottoms (2005) over 1,000 schools were using the theory of rigor, relevance, relationships, and high expectations to raise student achievement.

High Schools That Work Schools used the following factors to increase student achievement: (a) a rigorous college preparatory curriculum, (b) high expectations, (c) lessons relevance (d) best teaching practices, (e) interventions (f) instructional leadership, and (g) professional development to sustain increased student achievement (Bottoms, 2005).

Furthermore, the SREB conducted a study analyzing 43 *HSTW* Schools in Arkansas to determine the program's effectiveness in 2008. Items that were analyzed included state report

cards, achievement data, stakeholders' surveys, and graduation rates. The 43 schools were categorized as high implementation, moderate implementation or low implementation schools. The categorizations were based upon how familiar the students were with the eleven indicators of the HSTW's design.

The most significant gain in the *HSTW* schools was the increase in the graduation rate. All HSTW schools' median graduation rate (82%) was higher than the state's mean graduation rate of 68% (Bottoms & Han, 2010). Bottom's theory was applicable in this research study. The adult participants identified high expectations, rigor, relevance, relationships, and accountability as factors increasing and sustaining student achievement in literacy at the KIPP Delta Public Schools.

Recommendations to KIPP Schools

Attrition Rate

One potential problem that may negatively impact the KIPP Delta Public Schools' ability to sustain its positive academic momentum long-term is its attrition rate of 22% since 2002 and currently 15% for the 2011-2012 school year. The attrition rate is measured yearly by using the enrollment on October 1 of each school year to determine the number of students who did not return. KIPP's goal was to retain a minimum of 85% of the students each school year. The beginning of 2011 school year had 84.6% of its students return. KIPP's highest mobility rate was in 2003 with a 28% attrition rate and in 2006 with a 27% attrition rate. Figure 2 shows the percentage of students leaving KIPP Delta Public Schools from inception to August 2011 school year (See Figure 2).

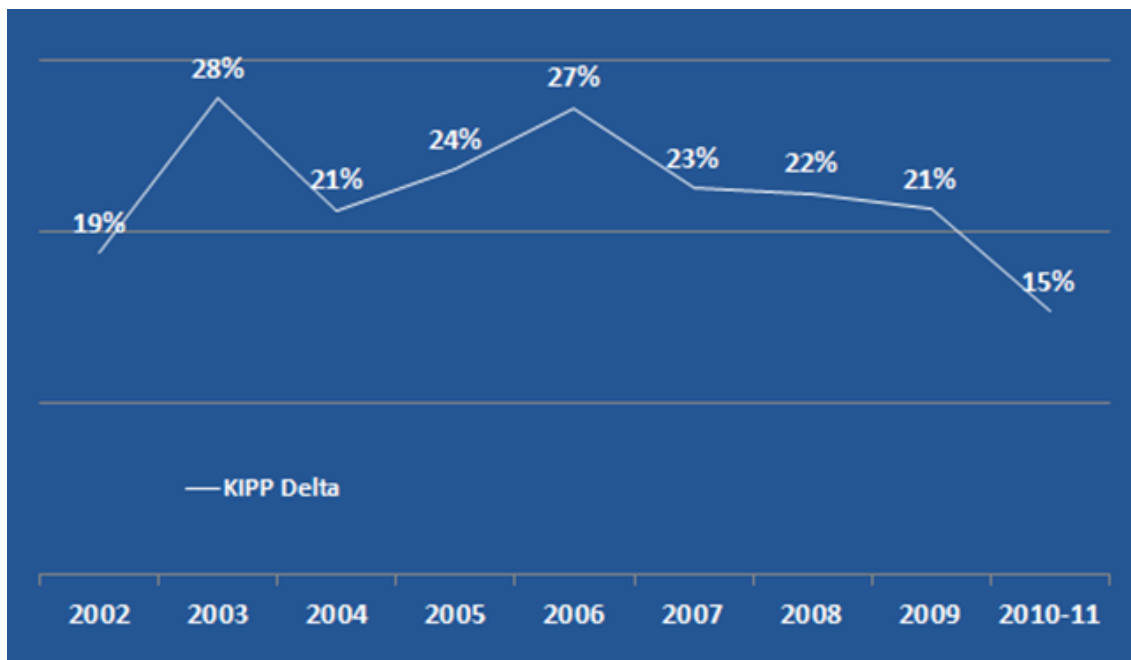


Figure 2. KIPP attrition rate from 2002- 2011 (KIPP Schools, 2012).

The Executive Director of KIPP Delta Public Schools stated,

We see the highest mobility at our entry grades of 5th, 9th and Kindergarten. We also see higher attrition at newer schools. From this data, it is clear that we need to do a better job orienting new families. Once they make it through the first year, they are much more likely to stay; therefore, we are focusing some of energies there. The other challenge is giving a school time to build its reputation. Last year, Blytheville had the highest attrition which was to be expected.

The other piece of information is that you could subtract 5-10% each year for students who moved. We consider this non-regrettable attrition as it was beyond our control. If we exclude movers, last year 90% of our KIPPsters decided to return and we were pleased with that progress (KIPP Interview, 2012).

Contribution to Field of Education

Public school administrators may want to replicate the components of the KIPP model that are cost-effective and feasible such as having high expectations, implementing a rigorous, college preparatory curriculum, developing positive teacher-student relationships, teaching relevant and practical lessons, and holding all stakeholders accountable. According to KIPP's stakeholders, these factors, when implemented collectively, significantly impacted student achievement.

Recommendation for Future Research

The researchers recommended KIPP Delta Public Schools to explore the factors contributing to the high student attrition rate among the students and develop a plan of action to prevent students leaving KIPP Delta Public Schools. Factors may include the reasons or causes the students or parents identified in their exit conference. If KIPP Schools do not have an exit conference to gather this information, they may implement one to gather additional information from the students and parents. KIPP administrators may ask for suggestions on what they may do to improve or rectify the problem, if it is something that the school feels is feasible. KIPP administrators may also want to revisit the interventions they have in place for struggling students who left. Also, in the exit conference, the administrative staff may want to ask the students or parents what interventions they could implement or improve on in order to help the students become more successful academically in literacy at KIPP. This information should be gathered and presented to the staff. The researchers recommended KIPP administrators to develop a plan of action for each school to explore the causes, effects, and implication of the high attrition rate.

Future research studies may include examining the causes and effects of student attrition upon student achievement of KIPP students. What effect, if any, is student attrition affecting student achievement from one year to another? How consistent is student achievement if high mobility and attrition are concerns of the schools? Lastly, what long term residual effects do KIPP Delta Public Schools have upon students who left and returned to the traditional public schools?

Conclusion

It was difficult to claim one factor such as high expectations alone may be influencing the increased student achievement of KIPP students. The researchers found that not only were high expectations influencing student achievement at KIPP Delta Public Schools, but also additional factors such as a rigorous, college preparatory curriculum, relevant lessons, positive teacher-student relationships, and accountability were present and influencing the overall enhanced student achievement among the students at the KIPP Delta Public Schools in Helena, Arkansas. Similarly, Woodworth et al., (2008) posited that the five KIPP Pillars or guiding principles of high expectations, choice and commitment, more time, power to lead, and focus on results contributed to the increased student achievement and positive student behavior at KIPP Schools.

Regardless, more longitudinal research is needed to conclude that the KIPP Delta Public Schools will maintain their effectiveness in increasing student achievement in the years to come. Potential problems such as high student attrition, if not addressed, may stifle the long-term results of the KIPP Delta Public Schools.

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University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) Academic Department Chairs' Self-Perceived Utilization of Bolman and Deal's Four-Frame Theoretical Model

This manuscript has been peer-reviewed, accepted, and endorsed by the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA) as a significant contribution to the scholarship and practice of school administration and K-12 education.



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This study examined the Bolman and Deal leadership orientation preferred by academic department chairs (ADCs) of Educational Leadership or Administration programs at member colleges and universities of the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA). A secondary purpose of the study was to examine how the preferred frame of the chairs varied according to the ADC's gender, age, racial/ethnic identification, and years of experience in their current chair position. Data were collected from 48 ADCs of 74 UCEA public and private member institutions using the Leadership Orientations Survey; a questionnaire that measures leadership behaviors, style, and the overall effectiveness of the respondent as a leader and as a manager. The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. This study found: (a) the Human Resource Frame is the preferred leadership orientation among ADCs; (b) the second preference is the Structural Frame, the Symbolic Frame was the third preferred orientation, and the least preferred frame was the Political Frame, and (c) there were no statistically significant differences in preferred frames based on personal and professional variables. An additional finding was that all ADCs in this study saw themselves equally balanced as a faculty member and administrator or they perceived themselves as more of an administrator than a faculty member.

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In colleges and universities, up to 80% of decisions are made by academic department chairs (ADCs) (Carroll & Wolverton, 2004); therefore, it is essential for them to have effective decision-making skills in order to successfully serve their institutions. Decision-makers, when faced with uncertainty, may often rely on familiar ways of making decisions, thereby locking themselves into flawed ways of making sense of their circumstances (Bolman & Deal, 2008); such a short-sighted perspective allows for an increase in the chances of missing alternative opportunities for solutions to complex problems within their organization. Limited information is available on leadership relating to the chair position. Bolman and Deal (2008) proposed that managers have an awareness of how they frame situations and how they view the workplace: as a factory, a jungle, a family, or a temple, because this perception can have an effect on how they make decisions. Much of the research reported in higher education on ADCs focused on the responsibilities and stressors of the position. Moreover, gender is a common variable used in leadership studies (Barbuto, Fratz, Matkin, & Marx, 2007); however, the study of the variables on age, racial/ethnic identification, and years of experience in the current chair position have not been extensively researched. An examination of the effects of these variables on how ADCs make decisions needs to be included in scholarship on the chair position, as well as the discourse on practical training in decision-making for chairs. This study adds to the body of knowledge on how the views of those in university department chair positions impact their decision-making. For university preparation programs, this study may provide a basis for recommending leadership training to department chairs. This study provides a deeper understanding of the four frames developed by Bolman and Deal: Human Resources, Structural, Political, and Symbolic, and their application in university departments.

Research Questions

Quantitative research methodology was used to analyze each research question:

1. Which leadership frames established by Bolman and Deal are the most frequently used by academic department chairs (ADCs) of Educational Leadership and Educational Administration programs at University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) member institutions?
2. How does the utilization of Bolman and Deal's leadership frames by academic department chairs in Educational Leadership and Educational Administration programs at University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) member institutions vary by the ADCs' gender, age, racial/ethnic identification, and years of experience in their current chair position?

Method

All data were collected by administering the Leadership Orientations Survey (Self)[®] instrument to ADCs at UCEA member institutions. The data were analyzed using the descriptive statistics of frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, and inferential statistics of Independent Samples *t*-tests and Analysis of Variances (ANOVAs). The pooled variances version of Cohen's *d* was also used to examine the existence of any differences in mean scores and the practical implications in the variances.

Procedure

The Leadership Orientations Survey (Self)[®] version was electronically mailed to the population of 74 UCEA member ADCs. Each ADC received, by email, a letter detailing the purpose of the study, a request for participation, a description of the survey instrument, and a link to complete the survey using the online *Survey Monkey* program. The data were collected online and analyzed using SPSS software. Ethical standards were met in conducting the research and reporting the findings. No identifying information was collected.

Instrumentation

Only the *Self* version of the survey instrument was used to collect data from chairs about their own performance. This version of the instrument consists of three major sections to measure *Behaviors*, *Leadership Style*, and the *Overall Rating* of the ADCs effectiveness as a manager and as a leader. The instrument is designed to measure individuals' orientations toward leading through each of the four frames (structural, human resource, political and symbolic) originally developed in the late 1970s by Bolman and Deal. Additional personal and institutional demographic questions were included in the survey with the authors' permission. This instrument has been used in research studies related to leadership orientations in higher education, including: Chang, 2004; Crist, 1999; Eick, 2008; Gilson, 1994; Griffin, 2005; Guidry, 2007; Johanshahi, 1992; Kotti, 2008; Mathis, 1999; Matra, 2007; Meade, 1992; Pritchett, 2006; Probst, 2011); Sy pawka, 2008; Thomas, 2002; Thompson, 2000; Tobe, 1999; Toy, 2006; and Welch, 2008.

Data Analysis Scheme

In the preliminary analysis, descriptive statistics for the overall sample, including the frequency, percentages, mean, and standard deviation, were computed for each of the leadership frames: structural frame score, human resource frame score, political frame score, and symbolic frame score. The research methodology used to analyze Research Question 1 follows: Cohen's *d* was used to determine if any practically significant differences existed between mean scores of respondents.

Research Question 2 was answered using inferential statistics of Independent Samples *t*-tests and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to answer if any statistically significant differences in preferences by gender, age, racial/ethnic identification, and years of experience in their current chair position existed. The differences in mean scores are significant at a .05 set Alpha level.

Results

Data collection from the *Leadership Orientations Survey (Self)*[®], designed by Lee G. Bolman and Terrence E. Deal and electronically administered through Survey Monkey, began July 2013 and was completed by the end of August 2013. Of the 74 UCEA member institutions surveyed, 48 academic department chairs of educational leadership programs responded, resulting in a response rate of 65%. From the 48 responses, 3 (.06%) were excluded from the leadership orientations assessment because the respondents skipped the questions in Section Two, *Leadership Style*. The same three respondents, however, submitted demographic information and

were included in the descriptive analysis for the population. In total, 45 (61%) valid responses were used to determine leadership orientations of respondents, while 48 valid responses were used to depict the demographic characteristics of the population. Of the population, 25 men responded (52.1%), and 23 women responded (47.9%).

Regarding the question of age, of the 47 usable responses, all of the men and women ADCs were over 41 years of age, whereas the largest majority were 61 years of age or older.

Respondents were asked how they racially or ethnically self-identified, and the majority of respondents self-identified as White (83.0%). The remainder identified as Black or African American (8.50%), Asian/Pacific Islander (2.1%), and Hispanic or Latino (2.1%). For those respondents who chose *Other* for this item, one identified as “Black/White,” (2.1%), and the other as “Jewish” (2.1%).

The majority (76%) of respondents who answered the question on the number of years have been a faculty member in an Educational Administration or Leadership program reported at least 10 years. Of these, at least 35% have over 15 years of experience in this type of program.

Included in the survey was a question regarding the total number of years the ADCs had in administration in any organization. Of the ADCs who responded, most (57%) had under 15 years of total experience. Twenty respondents (43%) reported having over 15 years, whereas only 8 (17%) reported having 5 years or less of experience in any organization.

Regarding classifications of ADCs, more than half (68%) of the respondents are full professors, whereas 28% are at the associate professor level. Most (68%) of the respondents reported that they have been chairs in their current department at the respondent’s current institution for five years or less. Only 4% reported being in the chair position for over 15 years. Of the remaining 13 respondents, 8 have been in the chair position 6 to 10 years ($n = 8$; 17.0%), whereas 5 have been ADCs 10 to 15 years.

Of the respondents’ number of faculty supervised, 46% reported that they supervise 18 or more faculty, followed by 35% who reported that they directed departments where 12 or fewer faculty were supervised. Also reported, 19% of the ADCs supervised 13 to 18 faculty in their departments.

Additionally, overall, 79% of the ADCs reported that they were either equally balanced as a faculty member and administrator or they perceived themselves as more of an administrator than a faculty member. Only one indicated that he or she saw his or her current role as solely an administrator.

Section One of the instrument, *Behaviors*, provided an overall description of leadership behaviors as self-reported by the population only. The largest number (73%) of respondents to this section of the survey chose the ability to “Develop and implement clear, logical policies and procedures” as a practice they conduct *Often*. Also in *Behaviors*, in the Human Resource frame, 44% of respondents reported on both questions that they “Give personal recognition for work well done” and “Show high sensitivity and concern for others’ needs and feelings” *Always*. Only 1 participant (2%) reported being a highly participative manager *Occasionally*.

Included in *Behaviors*, the Symbolic frame indicated that the ability to “Generate loyalty and enthusiasm” scored the highest percentage (61%) of *Often* users. The second highest scores in this section were tied between “Communicate a strong and challenging sense of vision and mission” and “Serve as an influential model of organizational aspirations” with 57% of the respondents reporting *Often* exhibiting this behavior. Only one respondent (2%) reported to *Never* being “highly charismatic.” Incidentally, this is the only reported *Never* answer from any respondent in this section on *Behaviors* in regard to any of the four frames.

Estimating Practical Significance

Effect sizes range from 0.0 to 2.0; the closer the effect size is to 2.0, the larger the difference is in the scores. Overall, in each of the sections where a Cohen's *d* was used to further examine the level of significance in the reported differences in mean scores, a medium effect was indicated; however, there was a low standard deviation only slightly over one step from the mean in all areas. This dispersion showed that the individual scores of ADCs in each section of the study were closely grouped and indicated similar responses and rankings to the questions in the survey.

Research Question Two

The second research question asked how the frame preferences varied by the ADC's gender, age, racial/ethnic identification, and years of experience in their current chair position.

The Independent *t*-test analysis was used to determine if a difference exists in the mean score of the two groups, men and women. There were no statistically significant differences in preferred frames based on the gender. There were also no statistically significant differences in preferred frames based on the racial or ethnic identification (White or non-White).

To test if there were any statistically significant differences in the mean scores of each frame by age groups, a One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted by dividing the population into age groups. There were no statistical significant differences between the mean scores of the age groups in the study.

An Independent Samples *t*-test analysis was used to determine if there was a significant difference between the equality of variance of those who had been in their current position of academic department chair for five or fewer years, and those who have been in their current position as academic department chair for six or more years. There were no statistically significant differences in preferred frames based on the years in current position.

In addition, an Independent Samples *t*-test was used to compare scores between those ADCs who had up to 10 years of total administrative experience in any organization and those ADCs who had accumulated more than 10 years of total administrative experience in any organization. No statistically significant difference was found between the scores of the two groups.

Relating to participants' overall effectiveness as a manager, of the 45 responses, all participants rated themselves to be at least in the middle 20% of overall effectiveness as a manager when compared to other individuals they have known with comparable experience and responsibility. Of the 45 participants, 31 (69%) rated themselves in the top 20% of overall effectiveness as a manager.

The 45 participants were also asked to rate themselves on overall effectiveness as a leader when compared to other individuals they have known with comparable experience and responsibility. Regarding effectiveness as a leader, 37 (82%) rated themselves in the top 20%, whereas 8 (18%) participants rated themselves in the middle 20%. None of the participants responded that they were in the bottom 20%.

An Independent Samples *t*-test was used to compare the mean scores of males and females to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between the gender groups. Both genders rated themselves higher in overall effectiveness as a leader than how they rated themselves on overall effectiveness as a manager.

Of the four variables, no statistically significant differences were found to signal variances in the utilization of the leadership frames by ADCs in (UCEA) member institutions personal or professional variables.

Additional Findings

An additional question in the survey asked ADCs to indicate the level he or she saw himself or herself as an administrator and/or a faculty member in their current role as department chair. All 48 respondents reported that they, at a minimum, saw themselves equally balanced as faculty and administrator or perceived themselves as more of an administrator than a faculty member. None of the respondents saw themselves solely as a faculty member, and only one respondent indicated that he or she perceived the chair position as solely an administrator position.

Discussion

The results of this study are in accordance with previous research conducted on leadership frames; the Human Resource frame tends to be the leadership orientation that most administrators perceive as their preferred frame and also as the leadership behaviors they exhibit the most (Bolman & Deal, 1992; Guidry, 2007; Kotti, 2008; Palestini, 1999; Probst, 2011, Sypawka, 2008; Welch, 2002). The research in this study and the literature for this research suggested that regardless of gender, age, racial/ethnic identification, or the number of years in the chair position, the respondents preferred the Human Resource Frame (Bolman & Deal, 1992; Guidry, 2007; Kotti, 2008; Palestini, 1999; Probst, 2011; Sypawka, 2008; Welch, 2002). As in previous studies, the second preference for participants in this study was the Structural Frame (Bolman & Deal, 1992; Probst, 2011). One possible cause for this phenomenon could be as researchers Bolman and Deal (1992) and Bensimone (1990) pointed out, that the less experienced an administrator is, the more likely he or she will revert to operating within the Human Resource and Structural Frame. The least preferred frame was the Political Frame, which is in accordance with the literature (Guidry, 2007; Kotti, 2008; Palestini, 1999; Probst, 2011; Welch (2002).

The composition of the responding ADCs was consistent with the data on age, race, and rank of studies on faculty and administrative positions in higher education. As the literature stated, in 2004, the findings of a national study showed that chairs were 96% White, 3% Asian, and only 1% Black (Carroll, 1991; Carroll & Wolverson 2004). In over 20 years, the only visible growth is in the increase of women in the chair position. The biggest disparity in the responding group, although in keeping with the literature, was in the racial component of the chairs – minorities were less than 8% of those who responded.

In this study, all of the respondents were at least 41 years of age and the number of men (52%) and women (48%) were closely split. Research suggested that many administrators in higher education are 40 years of age or older (Brower & Balch, 2005; Carroll & Wolverson, 2004; Mills, 2006). Carroll (1991) suggested that chairs are about 10% women.

The largest group of chairs in this study reported being new to the position, having only been in this role for five or fewer years at their current institution. They are new to the chair position, but 73% surveyed reported having a faculty career that spans 10 or more years. The next largest group reported that 24% of the chairs had 10 or fewer years experience as faculty in an education program. As the literature predicted, 71% of the chairs are full professors, and 29%

are at associate professor rank. None of the respondents reported being a lower rank. This is also in line with the literature which suggested that due to the nature of the chair position, for legal reasons, chairs are often at higher ranks and tenured in institutions (Carroll & Wolverton, 2004).

Walzer (1975) found that over 83% of chairs viewed themselves as faculty members and not as administrators; but, in this study only 19% viewed themselves as more of a faculty member than an administrator. The largest group of respondents (44%) considered themselves to be equally balanced as a faculty member and an administrator and the second largest group (35%) viewed themselves as more of an administrator than as a faculty member. Only one chair reported that he or she viewed the chair role as solely an administrator (2%). This result aligned with Carroll and Wolverton (2004), who stated that less than 5% of will define their role as exclusively.

Additionally, this research study also focused on demographic variables (gender, age, racial/ethnic identification, and the years of experience in the current chair position) and how they might relate to the preferred frame and leadership behaviors exhibited by academic department chairs. The results of this study showed that no statistically significant differences were found between the scores of the respondents by any of these variables. This finding is consistent with the research of Kotti (2008) and Guidry (2007). However, Palestini (1999) did find a difference in how men reported themselves as being more Structural more than the females. Both Palestini (1999) and Sypawka (2008) found that number of years in the administrative position showed no significance.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study are that the surveyed individuals hold academic department chair positions at UCEA member institutions; therefore, findings of this study are not intended to be generalized to other categories of schools or administrators. As with self-rating instruments in general, but specifically as it relates to the use of the Leadership Orientations Survey (Self)[©] instrument in this study, Bolman stated, “the instrument’s reliability is high but the validity is not so high,” and “Self-ratings of leadership tend not to be highly valid, and the forced-choice nature of the instrument creates limitations as well” (leebolman.com, n.d.). Bolman and Deal (1992) stated that the validity of the instrument is a limitation because it depended on the respondents to rate themselves honestly and accurately. Bensimone (1989) stated that in studies on higher education Presidents that, self-ratings in the Human Resource Frame are often inflated by respondents. Another limitation was that ADCs often return to their full-time roles as faculty members making the identification of UCEA ADCs at the time of the study difficult.

Recommendations for Further Research

As indicated by the findings of this study, future research on leadership frames in higher education can benefit from these recommendations: (1) The research indicated that most academic department chairs often rely on the Human Resource and Structural frames; thus, a study of the attitudes and opinions of new chairs compared to chairs within retirement range could provide insight into attitudinal shifts, and (2) a qualitative study giving voice to administrators’ reasoning for how they manifest their preferred leadership frames could provide a better understanding of ADCs’ decision-making.

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Perceived Impact of a Character Education Program at a Midwest Rural Middle School: A Case Study

This manuscript has been peer-reviewed, accepted, and endorsed by the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA) as a significant contribution to the scholarship and practice of school administration and K-12 education.



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Today concern exists for the safety and success of students in the public education system. Families, educators, and community members are concerned with the physical, emotional, and mental well-being of students in an environment where incidents of violence are growing. Events like the school shootings at Jonesboro, Arkansas, and at Columbine High School left our nation concerned with the problems within the school system. Numerous people believe that character education can be an effective solution. The purposes of this study are to describe key elements of one school's character education program, and to determine the impact that this program had on academics, attendance, and discipline incidents within that school. The data in this study provide a document analysis in a single rural middle school consisting of students in grades 5-8, in a school where the teachers and community members perceived that discipline issues were out of control. The study centered on the belief that character education has a positive impact on attendance, academics, and the number of discipline incidents. This research was valuable because this research supports that character education is effective. Character education positive impact was seen in attendance; students learn that when they are absent from school they really miss important opportunities in their educational experience. Character education has a positive impact on discipline; they understand what types of behavior are socially accepted not only in school, but in the global community that they reside. Real world applications of character education is extremely important for student understanding of the program.

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Introduction

March 24, 1998, was a day that gained both local and national recognition for Westside Middle School in Jonesboro, Arkansas. Unfortunately, the recognition was not what stakeholders dreamed of achieving. This recognition exists because of a massacre that two middle school boys created. Two students in Jonesboro, Arkansas, killed 5 people (1 teacher and 4 students) and wounded 10 others in an ambush-style school shooting.

On April 20, 1999, the Columbine High School Massacre occurred. Two seniors killed 12 students and 1 teacher, injured 21 other students and an additional 3 people who were trying to escape. Although Columbine was not the first incident of school violence, Columbine is the one that caught the attention of the American public. *Pulling a Columbine* is a phrase that didn't exist 30 years, or even 20 years ago. Now, almost every student and adult knows the implications or intention of that phrase.

Timelines reveal that since the 1990's school shootings have happened every year. Not all school shootings are listed on the timeline. On October 9, 2006, a 13 year-old student walked into a Joplin, Missouri middle school carrying an assault rifle and fired one shot. Luckily this situation was handled quickly and no one was injured. However, the site of the Joplin shooting was approximately one hour from the school where I, the researcher, was employed. Likewise, the impact of the 1998 Jonesboro incident is important because Jonesboro, Arkansas, is approximately 200 miles from my school district within the geographical area where this study was conducted and is less than a 4-hour drive. Shootings in schools continue throughout America. On Feb. 10, 2012, a 14-year-old student shot himself in front of 70 fellow students. As recently as February 27, 2012 at a high school, a 17 year old student shot and killed three students and injured six others (U.S. News, 2008). Violence being displayed in schools has been linked to long-term bullying and social ostracism. Bullying in schools is escalating and becoming a key concern throughout the nation. "No school is free from the pervasive problem of peer aggression and bullying" (Cornell & Mayer, 2010, p. 10). Schools are recognizing how widespread bullying is and how serious the consequences for those who are the victims and those who victimize others (Espelage, Swearer, Hymel, & Vaillancourt, 2010). In addition to school bullying another concern was cyber-bullying among school-age children. Technology and social media have given both victims and perpetrators an additional way to interact (Willard, 2007). My concerns over the possibility of school violence and bullying occurring in my school district escalated after the school shooting incidents in neighboring districts. I wondered if my new students and their families would have similar feelings. As I made inquiries of the teachers I would be working with in the Fall of 2005, my unease grew when I received confirmation from the teachers that, in their opinion, discipline was out of control. Because of my concerns and the expressed concerns of the teachers, we began to search for strategies to reduce the potential of school violence within the school where I would be serving as principal.

In the fall of 2005, I became the principal of Greyson Middle School and, immediately, the staff and I discussed the need to find a program that would be a positive influence on the attitudes and behavior of our students. The faculty and I, as educators, loosely defined *character education* as educational experiences that helps students to develop behaviors that the local community would consider moral, well-mannered, non-bullying, and typical of a good citizen. As we reviewed character education programs we were astonished to find the quantity of programs available. During the 2005-2006 school year, the teachers and I, as a committee, reviewed many commercial character education programs. The committee reviewed 15 different

character education programs and narrowed the field down to four. Of the final four, we identified the program that we hoped would be most beneficial for our school and prepared to implement the program within the next school year. During the second year, 2006-2007, the staff participated in four trainings to learn strategies for implementation of the character education program. We began publicizing the character education program within the local community in an attempt to build awareness among students, parents, and community members. As principal, I met with three community groups in order to present our rationale for a character education program. We sought support from local organizations to help publicize the character education program we chose. The three groups I met with were: Ministerial Alliance, Rotary Club, and Chamber of Commerce. The local newspaper representatives attended the Chamber of Commerce meeting. Internally, I met with our school district administration team, including our assistant superintendent and superintendent, in order to incorporate the program district-wide as well as community-wide. The character education program was fully implemented in the third year, 2007-2008, within the school. In the fourth year 2008-2009 of the program, I transferred to another school and a new principal, my assistant principal was appointed to the principalship I held for three years.

Background of the Study

School procedures have changed as a result of school shootings. Now schools must have a crisis procedure in place in case of school shootings or other forms of violence occur. Likewise, schools are looking for ways to improve school climate and ways to educate students in character traits that help ensure fewer incidents of violence. Researchers say attitude and character can have a great impact on the school environment (Lunenburg & Bulach, 2005; Murphy, 1998; Ryan, Bohlin, & Thayer, 1996; Shriver & Weissberg, 2005; Tatman, Edmondson, & Slate, 2009). Negative attitudes can become contagious among students because “contagious youth culture of academic negativism and misconduct can thwart learning and disrupt the school routine” (Simons-Morton, Crump, Haynie, & Saylor, 1999, p. 99). In the school environment, those attitudes can spread quickly throughout the student population becoming difficult to correct before they result in heinous behavior. Researchers have shown that school climate improves when character education programs are implemented (Murphy, 1998). Implementing a character education program that is carefully organized can have positive results on student behavior as Bennett (1991) indicated that, “If we want our children to possess the traits of character we most admire, we need to teach them what those traits are” (p. 133). Character can have a positive effect individually and on the student population as a whole.

“Most Americans will tell you that character education is a good idea. According to pollsters, 90% of us want schools to teach core moral values” (Matera, 2001, p. 191). This study is important because the educators teach to reach the whole child and part of meeting the needs of the whole child is incorporating universal character education traits within the curriculum. Adults serve as role models for students with whom they interact (Tatman, et al., 2009). Teaching these traits is an integral part of education because not all students are exposed to the same behaviors at home that are expected in public schools. “While the development of a child’s character is clearly not the sole responsibility of the school, historically and legally schools have been major players in this arena” (Ryan, 1993, p. 16). Because of that understanding, “Teachers, administrators, and even parents resonate to the idea of teaching the students the core values deemed essential for cultural survival” (Lasley, 1997, p. 654). Violence that once seemed to be

nonexistent within the educational system has appeared more frequently during middle school age children than in the past. “The dramatic increase in the prevalence of problem behaviors during adolescence is a national concern” (Simons-Morton, et al., 1999, p. 99). Schools are not seen as the *safe* places they were in the past.

The statistics gathered by Tatman et al. in 2009 regarding violent student behaviors such as “...attacks, shakedowns, robberies, attempted suicides and gun related crimes...” (Tatman, et al., para. 3) demonstrates a real need to improve student attitudes and character. Education is impacted daily by tardiness, lack of respect, defiant behaviors, and the stress these impose on the teaching staff. Violence in the school setting requires additional security measures and personnel to ensure safety and protect instructional time (Tatman et al., 2009). Through the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) survey revealed 68% of teachers saying pupil behavior had worsened in the last two years (Taylor, 2008).

Theoretical Framework

As a middle school principal preparing to work at a new district, I wanted to see how teachers and staff perceived the climate and culture of the building they worked in. The faculty and staff felt that discipline was out of control, and that attendance was a problem as well. This revelation motivated me to research possible solutions for the problem. Beginning with Kohlberg’s Theory of Moral Development, the work of Lickona, Berkowitz, and Bier on character education, I saw that implementing a character education program was a solution that was yielding positive results. I also saw character education as an effective tool to yield not only positive results in culture and discipline, but attendance and academic achievement as well. I started my study by researching moral development theories to serve as a foundation for the implementation of a character education program.

Lawrence Kohlberg approached psychological and philosophical assumptions to develop his Theory of Moral Judgment. He worked with Anne Colby to create the Moral Dilemma test to measure and recognize how moral development changes and progresses as people progress through life (Kohlberg & Colby, 1987). Moral Dilemma test became a definite foundation to build character development. Utilizing Kohlberg’s Stages of Moral Development for a foundation to refer to gives researchers a guide to develop a character education program that coincides with the stages as student’s progress through the stages on Kohlberg’s theory (*Figure 1*).

Level One: Pre-conventional Morality	Stage 1: Punishment-Obedience Orientation
	Stage 2: Instrumental Relativist Orientation
Level Two: Conventional Morality	Stage 3: Good Boy-Nice Girl Orientation
	Stage 4: Law and Order Orientation
Level Three: Post-Conventional Morality	Stage 5: Social Contract Orientation
	Stage 6: Universal Ethical Principle Orientation

Figure 1. Kohlberg’s theory of moral development (Wong, 2000, para. 2)

Working from an educational stand point, several utilized Kohlberg's theory to research and study to see how moral development should be incorporated and utilized within the education system for an effective character education program. Lickona laid the early foundation of character education's impact. Berkowitz, Bier, Tatman, Edmondson, and Slate began the dynamic study of character education. Researchers has shown that character education, when implemented effectively, does produce results with moral development (Lickona, 2003; Berkowitz & Bier, 2005; Tatman, Edmonson, & Slate, 2009).

Working with all of the research and studies mentioned here, my research has shown that character education not only impacts school culture and security, but can also have a positive impact on attendance, academic achievement, and discipline referrals. This study is important to the field of character education to reflect that character education has benefits beyond creating an environment that improves the well-being, both physically and mentally, of the students involved. This research shows that character education is an important part of the education system. This study starts from the implementation stage and provides a guide through each step of the implementation process of a character education program. This research is both significant and relevant to educators, the community, and the parents. This research serves as an effective tool for making positive changes through character education. This research has advanced understanding of character education's importance to student success and adds to previous studies by providing knowledge useful to the implementation of character education programs.

Implementation of Character Education Research and Theories

Many experts agree that focusing on character, as a part of any curriculum, is necessary for student growth and development. Dr. Lickona, author of *Educating for Character*, states that moral education is not a new idea. Moral education is, in fact, as old as education itself (Davidson, Lickona, & Khmelkov, 2007). Down through history, in countries all over the world, education has had two great goals: to help young people gain important knowledge and to help them use that knowledge to become good citizens (Davidson, et al., 2007). "If students do not know how to function in society, what good are academics" (Lickona, Schaps & Lewis, 2003, p. 11)?

Within Dr. Lickona's view of character education, 10 essential virtues exist that he feels are universal and can easily be focused on without crossing the lines of culture, philosophy, and religion. Wisdom, fortitude, love, justice, gratitude, positive attitude, hard work, self-control, integrity, and humility are the 10 that Dr. Lickona speaks about.

According to Lickona, two very important parts are present when implementing a character education program. His program is virtue-centered and focused on character traits, their definition and application. Therefore, Part One is to have the staff create a comprehensive list of essential values. Secondly, is to expand the ownership of the program. Ownership needs to be within the school as well as owned by the parents and community members in order to be effective. Next, the staff must believe in the program in order to create surveys to gain student, parent, and community involvement. In return input from parents, community and students' ideas can be heard and incorporated for ownership by them as well (Lickona, 2003). Even Aristotle, over 2000 years ago, realized that the part that adults play in the growth and development of children and adolescents is very important. Children's growth and development can be made or broken by all the adults that interact with that child (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005, p.

ii). Character education is important for the desirable traits to be recognizable and modeled in society so that the students can easily recognize the *real life* applications of these traits.

I

Impact of Character Education Programs

Character education can be evaluated and researched in several ways. In this section, the focus will be on how character education effects attendance, academics, and discipline referrals.

Decrease the Numbers of Discipline Referrals

A discipline referral is a situation that requires immediate consequence resulting in a student immediately being sent to the principal's office. However, "By moral communities we mean school cultures with justice, caring and developmental discipline, all of which are interrelated and central to a modern theory of civic and moral education" (Lee, 2009, p. 167). Many programs address discipline referrals. Huitt agreed with theorists like Damon and Bandura, that changing someone's ways of thinking doesn't always change the way that person behaves (Huitt, 2004). The Character Education Partnership discusses the successes of the CEP's National Schools of Character. "They see dramatic transformations; prosocial behaviors such as cooperation, respect, and compassion are replacing negative behaviors such as violence, disrespect, apathy and underachievement" (Character Education Partnership, 2012, para. 1).

The Center for the Fourth and Fifth R's addresses *character-based discipline* this discipline by the students with sound values are skillful at resolving conflict without resorting to physical violence. If we teach students not only to solve problems on paper but also to solve problems with peers, then we are providing them with the tools to be successful (Lickona, 2003). At an intermediate school in the southwest region, discipline referrals decreased by 50%. At another middle school in the northwest area, discipline referrals were reduced from 100 to 35 per month (Devine, Ho Seuk, & Wilson, 2000).

Improve School Attendance

"School attendance increases, sometimes drastically in schools where character education was part of the curriculum" (DeRoche & Williams, 1998, p. 23). At one intermediate school in the Southwest, in one of the poorest communities in the state, a five-year character education initiative was responsible not only for a decline in the number of student absences but also for that of the teachers. Approximately 50% of staff absences that went over 10 days decreased (Devine, Ho Seuk, & Wilson, 2000).

Increases in Academics

"A growing body of research supports the notion that high-quality character education can promote academic achievement," (Benninga, Berkowitz, Kuehn, & Smith, 2006, p. 449). Several programs claim an increase in academic performance when character education is part of the curriculum. Child Development Project, Peaceful Schools Project and the Seattle Social Development all claim to link character education to an increase in academics (Benninga et al., 2006). Berkowitz and Haynes give examples that show that character education is having a positive effect on academic success (Berkowitz & Haynes, 2007). They relate the success of a

small middle school in the Midwest where new administration brought a character education program into the school and had an increase in academic performance (Berkowitz & Haynes, 2007). “Academic performance is up, disciplinary referrals are down by more than 70%, and the students failure rate has dropped to zero” (Berkowitz & Haynes, 2007, p. 13A).

Changes Within the School Culture

Dr. Berkowitz believes that character education is more than just a program; character education is a change in the culture and the life within a school. Most character education programs recommend a holistic approach to character education. A holistic approach involves everyday aspects of school, as well as support from parents and community. Within this approach, character education is considered part of the curriculum, everyday lessons, and part of every activity within the school system. Teaching values in every subject is important so that the students can recognize the expectations of good character, and how those expectations are recognized and implemented (Elkind & Sweet, 2004). Taking a holistic approach helps to make the students aware of the importance of character attributes, and allows them to gain ownership of the program since they are able to see that good character is expected in every aspect of life (Elkind & Sweet, 2004).

Many character education programs embrace this sentiment and promote a character education word of the month for each month (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005; Elkind & Sweet, 2004; Stirling, McKay, Archibald, & Berg, 2002). Each word directly deals with one’s character. These words, when incorporated into the daily lessons, teach students how to treat others, how to have a positive outlook, and how to be responsible. “Character traits that are defined, discussed and modeled become internalized when students put them into practice” (Stirling et al., p. 259). Utilizing the word throughout the month as often as possible in lessons allows students to internalize and familiarize themselves to the concepts by hearing them throughout the school on a consistent basis. The entire school staff models this behavior for students as well as encourages the behavior in students.

Improvement in Mental Health

So many children today feel as if they have no control over their lives because they do not know how to deal with people or issues. This feeling often leads to students accepting whatever happens to them. Both parents and educators realize the importance and understand other aspects of our children’s school experience that matter (Cohen, 2006). Educating students and focusing on student’s mental health, social emotional learning, and character education is critical. Mental health can play a vital part in helping children learn and develop in healthy ways. “There are over 300 empirical studies that support the notion that when schools make these core processes integral facets of school life, student achievement increases and school violence decreases” (Cohen, 2006, p. 7). “President Bush’s act No Child Left Behind (NCLB), which drives today’s educational policy and practice, is filled with rhetoric about the importance of character education and school climate” (Cohen, 2006, p. 2).

According to a study conducted by several institutions, including Stanford Research Institute and Harvard University, “One’s attitude, degree of motivation, and people skills constitute eighty-five percent of the reasons people get ahead and stay ahead. One’s skills or expertise constitute only fifteen percent of the reasons” (McElmeel, 2002, p. 170). If students

believe in themselves, they are much more likely to achieve success. When a student comes to class with a positive outlook and an attitude that he can accomplish anything, then anything can be accomplished (McElmeel, 2002). McElmeel's work took 17 character traits and linked them to books and stories that re-enforced the meaning and application of each trait (McElmeel, 2002). The researchers show, as follows, that character education programs can be successful. Many programs were researched by Berkowitz and Bier, where they looked for common practices and common outcomes from the programs and research available.

Research Findings and Issues

According to Murphy, children reflect what they see in society, and through their reflections, we see the reflections of ourselves (Murphy, 2003). That disturbing image has caused schools in increasing numbers to unite in order to return to the ideals that education should also form good character (Murphy, 2003). Although teachers have been teaching an informal type of character education since public education was introduced, today character education has become even more necessary as a formal part of the curriculum. Thus, character education is a relevant topic on the forefront within journals and academic research. Research shows that character education programs do have a significant effect on student's behavior, when implemented effectively (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005). One school reportedly experienced success in helping students and staffs possess a more positive outlook (Lickona, Schaps, & Lewis, 2003). After noticing an ever-increasing decline and pessimism in the attitudes of students, this school decided to implement a character education program. For two years, this school implemented several changes with the hopes of seeing a more positive attitude from students and faculty (Lickona et al., 2003). Likewise, a 2000 report on South Carolina's four year Character Education initiative, which is a pilot program funded by the United States Department of Education, related that school attitudes improved 91% (Lickona et al., 2003).

Character education programs raise countless questions concerning the impact of the program. For example, what guidelines are available to judge whether a character education program works? Are standards required to be reached before a program is deemed successful? However, the question most frequently asked is, "Does Character Education work?" (Berkowitz & Bier 2004, p. 74). That is in and of itself is not the correct question to ask. That question will be hard to answer until more research addresses the topic. Countless programs label themselves character education that such a generic answer is difficult to give. The effectiveness of the initiative to incorporate character will have to reflect how the initiative impacts students as they become global citizens (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004). "Character education can work, but its effectiveness hinges upon certain characteristics" (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004, p. 74).

Summary of Review of Literature and Conclusion

Daily Lickona's statement concerning "a crisis of character" is seen to be true (Lickona, 1994, p. 1). Moral development theorists, educational researchers, and educators agree that character education is an important part of the development and education process. This belief has led to research studies, such as this one, to see how character education was an integral part of development and the education process. This study was based on work previously done to see how character education impacts attendance, academics and discipline incidents. As stated, character education was one part of the original curriculum present in the colonial and American

schools until the beginning of the twentieth century. Today education is focused on content curriculum only. However, teachers are finding that they need to help young people gain important knowledge concerning important character traits and their use to assist students in becoming good citizens (Davidson, Lickona, & Khmelkov, 2007).

Research Design

The research design in this study was a case study. According to Creswell (2007), “Case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case-based themes” (p. 73). The organization of this study was a single school building’s character education program representing a bounded system comprising the case.

This single case study involved an analysis of documents of a character education program at a selected middle school in the Midwest. The purpose of this research study was to develop understanding of how the character education program impacts academic progress, attendance, and discipline, by utilizing documents and trend data from pre-implementation stages, planning stages, implementation stages, post-implementation stages, and transfer of leadership stages. The case study approach was selected because I identified a case and desired to develop an in-depth analysis of this program using multiple sources of information.

I believe that the information gained from this case study is beneficial to others who want to incorporate character education programs in their building. Multiple sources of information were analyzed to reveal the impact this program had at the selected middle school. I provided detailed description of the case by sharing the process of developing the program through the different planning stages, history of the case and the chronology of events. Analysis of documents from the case allowed me to report the impact of the case as reported by others. Since the research was primarily based on using multiple sources of documents including, archival records, and physical artifacts, I had to guard against over interpreting the documents.

Researcher’s Role

I chose document analysis to assist me in guarding against inappropriate use of personal knowledge and data concerning the case. I avoided interviews with students, teachers, and community members at the selected school where I previously held the position of principal. The perceived status of former principal, and now researcher, could result in the manipulation or coercion of subjects. I maintained an audit trail of activities related to the document analysis including all steps from obtaining, reviewing, coding, and analyzing the documents. I further participated in peer debriefings as a process of managing the document collection and data analysis processes.

The criterion for a single instrumental case study is when the researchers “focuses on issue or concern and then selects one bounded case to illustrate this issue” (Creswell, 2007, p. 74). I wanted to know if the character education program impacted academic progress, attendance, and discipline of students at a selected middle school. I planned to create an in-depth understanding of the case.

Researcher's Theoretical Lens

This research study is best described as a “paradigmatic” case study (Creswell, 2007). This study was shaped by my inquiry paradigm or worldviews because I brought a set of beliefs, or “philosophical assumptions” that guide the qualitative research (Creswell, 2007, p. 19). I would consider my worldview as a researcher to be that of a pragmatist. I was focused more on the problem being studied than the questions being asked about the problem. I was the key instrument to collecting the data as the researcher and must recognize the importance of the subjectivity of my own views when interpreting the data. I used an interpretive lens that is subjective to the documents analyzed.

Data Analysis

This study was designed to conduct a document analysis. Using Creswell’s definition of framework, “an organizing model for the research questions or hypothesis and for the data collection procedure” (p. 55) the document analysis added to the framework already available. In the beginning step was the creation of a chronological listing of all documents. Then creating a listing process of sorted documents according to the five stages. Secondly, I began the process of reviewing documents thoroughly for evidence related to the character education program. Next step began the data analysis process and utilized open coding strategies to identify evidence related to academics, attendance, and discipline. The fourth step utilized the categorizing strategies approach by “Rossman & Rallis,” (2003) where codes were grouped according to similarities and differences among the data. Lastly, I began sorting the categories by each phase of implementation of the program so that the impact of the character education program on academics, attendance and discipline could be assessed.

I analyzed the data for common themes to determine if the program impacted student academic progress, attendance, and discipline at the designated middle school. I have analyzed the data collected by utilizing open coding strategies and identified the themes that emerged from the different documents. Results from the study were used to determine if character education impacted academic progress, attendance, and discipline in the current capacity. If the results of the study do not show improvement, then the information will be valuable to character education participants and partners in order to re-evaluate and make changes to the existing program based on research results concerning the program’s impact.

Reliability and Validity

The following methods were used to ensure the reliability and validity of the study:

1. Maintenance of audit trail to document all research activities including obtaining, reviewing, coding, and analyzing data.
2. Participate in peer debriefings with colleagues and experts throughout the data analysis process.
3. Utilization of source triangulation through the use of documents from multiple sources including the school, school district, and state agency.
4. Disclosure of the researcher’s role as a stakeholder in theoretical lens in the design of the study as previously stated.

An extensive and comprehensive process of data collection has been provided by this qualitative research study. Using a triangulation of surveys, documents related to attendance, academics, and discipline, and data from the state department. The data collection identified trends and major themes within the study. The theoretical framework and data collection provided the progress of the data analysis. Lastly, the research design and analysis have provided a foundation for the study.

Summary of the Findings

The researcher presented the major categories and themes that were identified through the document analysis process. After analyzing all the documents, the major themes were: communication, discipline, attendance, academics, character education, incentives for students, and professional development for teachers. Themes were discussed under each document that was analyzed. This article will present the introduction, summary, research questions, interpretation of data, program recommendations, recommendations for future research, and the conclusion.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to use document analysis to discover how character education impacted student academic progress, attendance, and discipline at a designated middle school. The research plan guiding this study analyzed data that covered a five-year period including pre-implementation, planning, implementation, and post-implementation stages as well as the two years after the transfer of leadership of the school. This article includes interpretations from the data reported earlier in this article as well as research questions, summary, program recommendations, recommendations for further research, and conclusion.

Summary

The review of literature refers to “a crisis of character” that is having an impact on our nation. Character education is a popular tool that educators utilized to address the crisis within the education system. The goal of the study was to see if character education could produce positive results in regards to attendance, academics, and discipline. The review of literature explained that the education system has focused on content curriculum only in the 20th century, and that changes needed to be made to address character in schools. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation was seen as content curriculum driven, and the standardized test score requirements, such as Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) tests, were seen as directly linked to the requirements of NCLB. An important question seems to be how character education could impact the rigorous standards of No Child Left Behind legislation.

The purpose of this study was to use document analysis to discover how character education has impacted student academic progress, attendance, and discipline through the stages pre-implementation, planning, implementation, post-implementation as well as the two years after the transfer of leadership of the school. Historical and trend data documents were used to assess the impact that character education had on attendance, academics, and discipline. The goal of the researcher is to discover effective methods of addressing the following questions:

1. How did the character education program develop, evolve, and continue after the transfer of leadership?
2. Did character education program impact academics at said middle school?
3. Did character education program impact attendance at said middle school?
4. Did character education impact discipline at said middle school?

Interpretation of the Data

This study revealed the impact of character education on attendance, academics, and discipline at Greyson Middle School. In order to see how the character education impacted those results, the pre-implementation, implementation, and post-implementation processes and applications were analyzed to reveal how the program impacted attendance, academics, and discipline.

After analyzing all the documents, the major themes were: communication, discipline, attendance, academics, character education, incentives for students, and professional development for teachers. Themes were discussed under each document that was analyzed. The researcher found that attendance rates increased from the 2005 school year until the second year (2010) of the transfer of leadership. Improved attendance is seen as a positive factor. In addition, discipline incidences decreased by over half the total number of discipline incidents from the first year of awareness in the year (2006) until the second year (2010) of transfer of leadership. In 2010, the discipline incidents increased by half. However, the increase during the second year (2010) of transfer of leadership raises questions as to why the discipline incidents increased. This negative trend might have been a result of changes in teaching assignments, change in leadership, and less focus on the character education program.

The Communication Arts MAP scores increased at every grade level during the implementation years. However, during the transfer of leadership the scores were random with some grade levels declining and some increasing. The academic trend appears random in the majority of the grade levels for the Math MAP scores. At some levels the scores remained consistent as previous years and other years they would increase and decrease. The biggest positive with the academics is the total percent of proficient/advanced in communication arts and math increased significantly at the seventh grade level during the 2008 year and the second year of the character education program.

Program Recommendations

The researcher reveals that character education provides positive results when implemented consistently. Eleven program recommendations were uncovered. (1) Create a needs assessment or survey to understand the climate of the building. Creating a survey to understand the students, parents and community member's perspective and gain insight to their needs is beneficial. (2) Create a committee that involves all stakeholders and share results of the surveys in order to make a data driven decision of the type of program that is needed for your school and community. (3) Build awareness and educate all stakeholders so they understand the need and purpose of such a program. (4) Choose a character education program that embraces the needs of your school and community. (5) Provide training for all involved in implementing the program. (6) Have multiple leaders and involve the students throughout the entire process. (7) Get the program visible throughout the community and get the community involved in implementing the program as well as throughout your school. (8) The committee should create goals and create a

plan to carry out those goals (9) Hold staff accountable for implementing the program (10) Continuous evaluation and monitoring of the program (11) Sustainability so the program will continue when staff changes and new students enter building.

The use of a survey enables leaders preparing a character education program to identify the common concerns from the view of staff, students, parents and community members. Involvement of staff, students, parents, and community leaders develops a stakeholder ownership through all stages of implementation. Creating a committee to make decisions concerning character education programs reinforced the feeling of ownership. Building awareness for the need of a character education and communicating the positive results allowed stakeholders and community members to understand the need for a character education program and the positive results the program can provide. Researching character education programs to identify the themes for each community and stakeholders is important. If no program can be embraced by all stakeholders, then creating a character education program that satisfies all stakeholders is an option. All stakeholders including, students should be included when developing a vision.

Based on my research, I found this program has provided the school with strategies that support increased attendance, academics, and discipline. The research will be valuable as schools look for programs to help with positive behavior, attendance, and academic strategies. This study is important because educators must teach and reach the whole child. By teaching the universal character traits within the curriculum, assists with meeting whole child's needs. This study is relevant to the research of the effectiveness of character education because of the timeframe implemented and the evaluation of all the stages. The evaluation of the project through all stages will be helpful to principals, teachers, and others who are involved in the selecting and implementing a character education program.

Recommendations for Further Research

The key to a successful comprehensive character education program requires the support of the faculty leadership, parents, and the community. Therefore, continued research in character education that focuses on faculty roles, service, leadership, process, willingness to facilitate character development in students, and other issues will be essential to future efforts of discovery. Further study should be done to discover how character education impacts other areas of school improvement, such as parental and community involvement, school climate, school staff perceptions, community and parental perceptions. Further research is needed to better understand if character education has impacted academics, attendance, and discipline of the students during their high school years. Because character education was implemented at the Middle School in 2006-2007 school year the next study could be at the high school using 2010-2013 data and compare the high school data to the four years prior to the character education implementation from 2003-2006 in order to compare if the character education program made an impact on these students.

In addition, researchers should examine the extent of training for character education prior to implementation and to examine to what extent the staff is onboard with implementing the program. Another recommendation would be to conduct more research on the implementation stages of character education programs. Finally, the role that community leaders, teachers, and parents have on the character education of students' needs to be further researched. Research also needs to address how their roles and actions impact student discipline,

academics, and attendance both with and without the application and use of a character education program.

Conclusions

With growing violence within the American school system, and Lickona's statement concerning "a crisis of character," many schools are looking for solutions to these issues. Character education is in the forefront as a possible solution to the lack of character education that was once embedded into school curriculum. Elements of successful programs have made progress towards teaching our students to be tomorrow's leaders in government, work places, and successful and productive members of society. Elements of quality character education programs bring together school staff, students, parents, and community members to embrace and implement a chosen program. The more support received from all stake holders in the program, the more successful a program can be on academics, attendance, and discipline.

The purpose of this study was to discover how character education impacted students' attendance, discipline, and academics. The data showed that all three (3) areas were impacted positively to some degree. The implementation of the character education program has made a positive difference in students' experiences at school.

On the basis of the data presented in this paper, the following conclusions are offered:

1. The character education awareness initiative did have a positive impact on student attendance at Greyson Middle School.
2. Discipline incidents significantly declined in the total number of incidents with the exception of the transfer of leadership year (2010) when the discipline incidents returned to a high number.
3. MAP scores positively increased in the total number of proficient/advanced scores in all grade levels of the Communication Art scores until the transfer of leadership. The math scores show constant decreasing and increasing and do not reflect any consistent pattern.

After analyzing the documents, obviously an implementation process facilitates a successful program. The implementation process should be research based and thorough. With NCLB, this study is important because of the impact on academics, attendance, and discipline. This study supports that character education can successfully be implemented into the curriculum without being an interruption to the content fields. Not only is the program not an interruption of one's studies but, when implemented correctly, the program is successful in positively impacting academics, attendance, and discipline. Based on my research character education clearly has positive results. This research is valuable because the research supports that character education is effective. Character education has a positive impact that is reflected in academics; students learn that character is related to work ethics. Positive impact is seen in attendance; students learn that when they are absent from school they really miss important opportunities in their educational experience. Character education has a positive impact on discipline; they understand what types of behavior are socially accepted not only in school, but in the global community in which they live. Students must make real world applications of character education in order to have a better understanding.

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What Expert Teachers Think: A Look at Principal Leadership Behaviors that Facilitate Exemplary Classroom Instructional Practice

This manuscript has been peer-reviewed, accepted, and endorsed by the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA) as a significant contribution to the scholarship and practice of school administration and K-12 education.



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The purpose of this study was to rank order 21 leadership behaviors originally identified by the work of Waters, Marzano & McNulty (2003) and the impact they have on teacher instructional practice using questionnaire responses provided by past recipients of the National Teacher of the Year award at the state level (n=178) in order to expand the research base on principal leadership behaviors that improve instructional practice. Statistically significant rank order differences were found based on gender, school grade level and SES.

Introduction

In the last 15 years, research consistently supports the premise that school leadership is essential to a successful academic program. Findings by Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, Anderson and Wahlstrom (2005) support the premise that school leadership is an essential factor for improving student achievement. Cotton (2003) asserts that the school principal is critical to a school's success. Strong instructional leadership on the part of the school principal is among the essential characteristics of a successful school (Tschannen-Moran, 2013; Waters, Marzano & McNulty, 2003). The research base continuously confirms that school improvement is rare without instructional leadership delivered by principals and teachers who are effective and dynamic (Cray & Weiler, 2011; Hallinger, 2011; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008).

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Others, including Hallinger & Heck (1996), suggest that the academic life of everyone in the educational community is primarily the responsibility of the school principal. Consequently, the increased need for finding expert and quality principals experienced in creating a culture of increased student achievement is difficult to do and very much in demand (Cray & Weiler, 2011).

Accordingly, in the past ten years, principals have been held to higher standards and are much more accountable for the overall success of the school building, specifically when it comes to student academic performance. Their role has evolved more from simply being a manager of operations for the school plant to assuming the role of an overall instructional leader who is responsible for meeting all aspects of the mandates outlined by federal and state legislation that focuses on student performance (Bottom & O'Neill, 2001).

Added into the mix are both teacher evaluation and principal evaluation national initiatives that have changed the educational landscape for both the everyday practice of teachers in the classroom and the daily leadership capacity of school principals. This increasing level of state and federal scrutiny has resulted in a new generation of school administrators that grapple with the question of how to meet state and federal mandates yet find formative and effective evaluation models that improve classroom instructional practice, which will result in overall school growth. We posit that if current principals are held more accountable for overall student academic achievement then it is imperative for them to identify the most effective leadership behaviors that will facilitate exemplary teaching practices in order to improve student academic achievement and overall student efficacy.

Problem

As previously mentioned, teachers are also hailed as equally, if not more, responsible for student academic success than that of the school principal. According to Wong (1999) the primary contributor for increasing student achievement is the teacher. Supovitz, Sirinides & May (2010) posit that it is not the main impact that principals have on students but the day-to-day interactions that teachers have with students that contributes to their overall learning. The leadership of the school principal is considered a key factor in improving schools and research supports the importance of the school principal on school reform and student academic achievement (Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012).

Consequently, teachers will primarily look to the leadership of the school for assistance and support with their craft, which places more of a demand on the instructional leadership capabilities of a principal. Yet, principal leadership behaviors which could potentially facilitate quality instructional practice and provide much needed support for teachers are not clearly identified in the literature.

While it has been established that instructional leadership is important to improve student achievement as well as improving the instructional practice of teachers, leadership behaviors which model both areas have not been specifically identified. Blasé and Blasé (1999) suggest that published studies on the everyday behaviors of the instructional leader from the perspective of teacher are few and far between and those that do exist provide only a scant description of effective behaviors that might impact a teacher's classroom instructional practice

Research on principal leadership behaviors conducted by Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003) identify and define 21 leadership behaviors that are related to student and school performance, which could potentially influence the quality of classroom instructional practice.

However, what do teachers say about these behaviors as it relates to their own practice? Are these behaviors also important to teachers and what they do in the classroom? Do some behaviors more than others better facilitate quality classroom instructional practices? Blasé and Kirby (2009) indicate that teachers want and need effective principals who can model and provide exemplary instructional leadership behaviors.

By examining the teacher perspective on the 21 leadership behaviors and how they might influence classroom instructional practice, school leaders might be better informed on how to improve their own behavior and practice, which in turn might possibly influence classroom instructional practice and student performance. Insight from teachers may, in fact, provide opportunities for school leaders to reflect upon their current behaviors and consider changes to improve their day-to-day leadership activities and practices to assist them in becoming the instructional leaders that they need to be in this new era of educational accountability.

Purpose

The primary purpose of this research project was to attempt to identify the most important leadership behaviors a principal needs to practice in order to facilitate quality classroom instructional practices as perceived by a national sample of exemplary teachers. The 21 leadership behaviors, as identified and defined by the work of Marzano, Waters and McNulty (2005), were used as the construct model for preferred leadership behaviors that are related to improving overall student and school efficacy. The primary research question addressed in this study was: From the expert teachers' perspective, which of the 21 leadership responsibilities and behaviors identified by Marzano, et al. (2005) are most important for school leaders to demonstrate in practice in order to facilitate exemplary classroom instructional practice?

Methodology

Survey Construction and Data Collection

The 21 leadership behaviors identified in the 2003 study by Waters et al and later codified in a publication entitled, *School Leadership that works: From Research to Results* by Marzano et al (2005), served as the construct model for all survey items. This work was based on a meta-analysis that drew from over 5,000 previous studies and identified specific behaviors and characteristics of principal leadership, which are significantly associated with student achievement. The instrument was constructed using a forced response design in an attempt to identify leadership behaviors practiced by principals, as perceived by an expert sample of teachers, that best facilitate exemplary classroom instructional practice.

Survey item response design incorporated a Likert scale methodology. Respondents were asked to express their level of agreement for each survey item by answering Very Important (4), Important (3), Somewhat Important (2), or Not Important (1). In addition to facilitating and determining the overall mean rank of teacher participants' responses on each leadership behavior, the instrument also included a detailed demographic questionnaire that enabled categorical comparisons of these leadership behaviors. The data for this study were collected from elementary, middle and secondary school teachers using an online survey tool provided through Survey Monkey (surveymonkey.com).

Survey content validity was established through expert panel review and input from the pilot study participants. The survey pilot study used a purposeful sample of K-12 teachers from a local school district who were recognized as past Teachers' of the Year at their respective schools. Survey reliability was tested using Cronbach's Alpha and found to be .83.

Sample

Participants in the study were selected from a national database representing all 50 states and United States territories that had been selected as National Teachers of the Year winners over the past six years. The potential respondent sample was comprised of 365 teachers who received the award from their respective state or territory between the years 2006 - 2012. Recipients of the National Teacher of the Year Award are selected every year based on the criteria of the National Selection Committee, which represents major educational organizations nationwide ([ccsso.org/ntoy](http://www.ccsso.org/ntoy)). Selection Committee criteria includes, but is not limited to, having exceptional knowledge, being a skilled, articulate and dedicated teacher and one who inspires students to learn. The National Teacher of the Year Award is the oldest and one of the most prestigious programs which honors teacher excellence in the United States.

(see http://www.ccsso.org/ntoy/About_the_Program/html)

Teachers in the study completed an online, web-based survey and rated the importance of the 21 leadership behavior characteristics of school leadership and their potential influence on exemplary classroom instructional practice. Correspondence explaining the nature of the research was sent electronically and outlined the purpose of the study along with a link to the online survey. A total of 365 invitations to participate were delivered with 178 teachers choosing to participate resulting in a response rate of 48%.

Limitations

Limitations to the present study included a sample that was restricted to public school teachers and therefore could not be generalized to other teachers from other types of schools. Survey findings were based on the perceptions of the Teacher of the Year recipients and therefore, could not be generalized to all types of teachers nor controlled for teacher bias.

Assumptions

It was assumed that every teacher in the survey selected as a National Teacher of the Year recipient was selected based on the rigor of the selection process. (see http://www.ccsso.org/ntoy/About_the_Program/html) Additionally, it was assumed that all respondents answered all survey questions as candidly and honestly as possible.

Delimitations

Although the survey was subjected to expert review and piloted, a possible delimitation to the study was the use of a survey instrument as an accurate measurement of the perception of teachers regarding leadership responsibilities and behaviors of school leaders based on an existing, albeit accepted by the field, leadership schema as posited by Marzano et al. (2005).

Categories created for the survey were based only on the 21 leadership behaviors discussed in Marzano et al. (2005).

Results

Demographic Results

The demographic information compiled by the survey indicated a sample of predominately female respondents who are highly educated with 60% having earned a master's degree and at least 10 years of teaching experience. These teachers work in diverse school settings with mostly male principals (55%) and where 70% of those responding work in school populations of 1,000 students or less. Slightly more than 40% of the respondents work in school districts where almost half of the students or more come from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Of the sample of teachers who took part in the study, 75% were female and 25% were male. The principals of the respondents were predominately male, 55%. The age categories of the respondents varied between the ages of 21 - 60+ with the largest response rate from those between the ages of 41-50 years old, 33.1%; ages 31 - 40, 26.4%; ages 51 - 60, 25.3%, over 60, 8.4%, and ages 21 - 30 was 4.5%. Less than 3% did not indicate an age category. Twenty-five percent reported having between 16 - 20 years of experience and over 75 percent had 15 or more years of experience. Forty-four percent identified themselves as coming from a suburban school, 32 percent indicated a rural school and 22.5% an urban school. Approximately 60.1% indicated their school met Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) while 32% responded that their school did not meet AYP. Less than 8% did not indicate whether or not their school met AYP.

School populations varied with over 70 percent of the teachers from schools with student populations up to 1000 students. The other 30 percent ranged between 1001 and 2500 students. Respondents from the high school level comprised 41% of the sample with approximately 22 % from elementary and 38% from middle school. The response rate from teachers who worked in predominantly low SES classified schools was 15.7%.

Findings

Findings from this study attempt to provide some insight on the 21 leadership behaviors identified by Marzano et al. (2005) as to what are the most effective toward improving classroom instructional practice as perceived by a national sample of exemplary educators. Table 1 provides a brief definition for each of the 21 leadership behaviors.

Table 1
Marzano, Waters & McNulty 21 Leadership Behaviors

Leadership Behavior	Description
Affirmation	Recognizes and celebrates school accomplishments and acknowledges failures.
Change Agent	Is willing to and actively challenges the status quo.
Contingent Rewards	Recognizes and rewards individual accomplishments.
Communication	Establishes strong lines of communication with and among teachers and students.
Culture	Fosters shared beliefs and a sense of community and cooperation.
Discipline	Protects teachers from issues and influences that would detract from their teaching time and focus.
Curriculum, Instruction, & Assessment	Directly involved in the design and implementation of curriculum, instruction and assessment. Practices.
Flexibility	Adapts leadership behaviors to the needs of the current situation and is comfortable with dissent.
Focus	Establishes clear goals and keeps those goals in the forefront of the school's attention.
Ideals/Beliefs	Communicates and operates from strong ideals and beliefs about schooling.
Input	Involves teachers in the design and implementation of important decisions and policies.
Intellectual Stimulation	Ensures that faculty and staff are aware of the most current theories and practices and makes the discussion of these a regular aspect of school culture.
Involvement in Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment	Is directly involved in the design and implementation of curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices.
Monitoring/Evaluation	Monitors the effectiveness of school practices and their impact on student learning.
Optimizer	Inspires and leads new and challenging innovations.
Order	Establishes a set of standard operating procedures and routines.
Outreach	Is an advocate and spokesperson for the school to all stakeholders.
Relationships	Demonstrates an awareness of the personal aspects of teachers and staff.
Resources	Provides teachers with materials and professional development necessary for the successful execution of their jobs.

Situational Awareness	Is aware of the details and undercurrents in the running of the school and uses this information to address current and potential problems.
Visibility	Has quality contact and interactions with teachers and students.

(Marzano et al., 2005)

The statistical analyses used was the non-parametric Friedman test for related samples (Huizingh, 2007) to determine if the mean rank ordering of these 21 leadership behaviors by a sample of expert teachers as to what best promotes effective classroom instructional practice was statistically significant. The Friedman test was the appropriate non-parametric test for statistical significance to determine what expert teachers deem to be the most important behaviors a principal needs to practice and demonstrate to facilitate their instructional practice.

Additionally, Kendall's tau-b was used as a follow-up statistical analysis to explore the nature and strength of the relationship between the mean rank ordering of the behaviors by specific categories and/or groups (e.g., Gender – males/females; AYP Status – met/not met, etc.). Kendall's tau-b is a statistic that measures the strength and nature of a relationship between two or more variables/categories when the sample size is small and/or the level of measurement is ordinal (Field, 2009).

Table 2 shows the leadership behaviors identified by Marzano et al. (2005) and how 178 respondents rated the behaviors. All of the behaviors had a mean value between 4.0, Very Important, and 3.0, Important. The higher the mean scores were, the higher the percentage of teachers who responded that this behavior was Very Important to instructional practice. The standard deviation (SD) ranged between .26 - .82. As mean scores decreased, SD increased, indicating that inverse relationship between mean and standard deviation.

Table 2

Exemplary Teacher Respondent's Mean Rank Results of the 21 Leadership Behaviors (n=178)

Behavior	Very Important (%)	Important (%)	Somewhat Important (%)	Not Important (%)
Contingent Rewards	93.8	4.5	.6	
Relationships	85.4	12.4	.6	.6
Visibility	84.3	12.9	1.7	
Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment	80.9	15.2	2.8	
Intellectual Stimulation	78.1	19.1	1.1	
Optimizer	75.8	20.2	2.2	
Discipline	74.7	21.3	2.8	

Involvement in Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment	71.9	23.6	2.8	
Communication	69.7	24.7	3.4	.6
Affirmation	69.1	25.8	3.9	
Monitoring/Evaluation	64.0	29.2	4.5	
Outreach	62.9	29.2	5.6	
Order	61.8	33.7	2.2	
Culture	61.8	28.7	6.7	1.1
Change Agent	57.3	34.8	6.7	
Resources	53.9	38.8	3.4	.6
Situational Awareness	53.9	33.7	9.6	1.1
Flexibility	48.3	41.0	7.3	
Input	47.2	42.7	7.3	
Ideals/Beliefs	42.1	46.6	9.0	
Focus	36.0	37.1	21.9	3.4

The behavior which earned a ranking of Very Important by 93.8% of the respondents was *Contingent Rewards*, indicating a high priority by teachers of a preferred principal characteristic that facilitates exemplary classroom instruction. Other behaviors which were rated as being important to improving instructional practices of teachers included *Relationships*, an awareness of the personal aspects of teachers and staff, which was rated at 85.4% (160), and a mean score of 3.86 (SD=.41). *Visibility* was identified at 84.3 % (160) and a mean score of 3.84 (SD=.41). Out of 178 responses, *Contingent Rewards* and *Visibility* had no responses indicating Not Important, while *Relationships* had one Not Important response. Three other behaviors were rated as Very Important by more than 75% of those teachers responding. These included *Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment*, 80.9%, M=3.78, SD=.48; *Intellectual Stimulation*, 75.1%, M=3.78, SD= .44; and *Optimizer*, 75.8%, M=3.74, SD=.47. Teachers identified the behaviors which were Important to impacting instructional practice. The 178 teachers responding identified as Important, *Ideals/Beliefs* (46.6%), followed by *Input* (76%), *Flexibility* (73%), *Resources* (69%), and *Focus* (66%).

Behaviors marked as Somewhat Important by teachers rated *Focus* the highest, 21.9%; (39), *Situational Awareness*, 9.6% (17), *Ideals/Beliefs*, 9% (16); *Flexibility*, 7.3% (13); and *Outreach*, 5.6% (10).

Lastly, out of the 21 leadership behaviors, very few behaviors received a Not Important rating by teachers. There were 6 behaviors that received a Not Important rating, including *Focus*, 3.4% (6) which also had the lowest mean score (3.07) and the highest standard deviation (.82). This possibly indicates that the respondents consider *Focus*, establishing clear goals and keeping those goals in the forefront of the school, as the least important of the 21 leadership behaviors needed to improve instructional practice. Other, Not Important, ratings included: *Situation*

Awareness, 1.1% (2); *Culture*, 1.1 (2); *Resources*, .6% (1); *Relationships*, .6% (1); and *Communication*, .6% (1).

Table 3 presents the Friedman test for mean ranking of the 21 surveyed items, which was found to be statistically significant (χ^2 (20, N=160) =434.965, $p < .001$).

Table 3
Mean Rank for all Teacher Respondents (n = 160)

Behavior	Mean	Mean Rank
Contingent Rewards	3.93	13.99
Relationships	3.86	13.28
Visibility	3.84	13.13
Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment	3.78	12.55
Intellectual Stimulation	3.78	12.47
Optimizer	3.76	12.43
Discipline	3.71	11.90
Involvement in Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment	3.70	11.79
Communication	3.65	11.37
Affirmation	3.65	11.29
Outreach	3.61	11.12
Monitoring/Evaluation	3.60	10.88
Order	3.60	10.80
Culture	3.53	10.45
Change Agent	3.51	10.06
Resources	3.50	10.03
Situational Awareness	3.42	9.65
Flexibility	3.41	9.27

Input	3.38	9.01
Ideals/Beliefs	3.32	8.27
Focus	3.12	7.29

A comparison of the rankings of 21 leadership behaviors by gender produced statistically significant results for both female teacher respondents and male teacher respondents. According to female respondents, the mean rank of the behavior *Focus* (7.73) was the least important behavior while *Contingent Rewards* (13.90) had the highest mean rank. The chi-square associated with the Friedman test for female responses was $\chi^2(20, N=119) = 293.960, p < .001$. Table 4 shows the ranking of the behaviors based on gender. The same test showed the responses of male teachers and was found to be statistically significant and the behavior *Focus* (5.79) and *Contingent Rewards* (14.21) also received the lowest and highest ranking of importance. The chi-square associated with the Friedman test on male responses was $\chi^2(20, N=40) = 155.718, p < .001$.

Table 4
Mean Rank of Female and Male Teachers

Behavior	Female Mean Rank (n=119)	Male Mean Rank (n=40)
Affirmation	9 (tie)	11
Communication	11	10
Change Agent	15	16
Contingent Rewards	1 (highest)	1 (highest)
Visibility	3	4
Situational Awareness	17	17
Resources	16	14
Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment	5	3
Culture	14	13
Discipline	7 (tie)	7
Flexibility	18	18

Focus	21 (lowest)	21 (lowest)
Outreach	9 (tie)	15
Optimizer	6	2
Monitoring/Evaluation	13	8
Input	19	19
Involvement in Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment	7 (tie)	9
Ideals/Beliefs	20	20
Intellectual Stimulation	4	6
Order	12	12
Relationships	2	5

As previously mentioned, Kendall's tau-b was used to explore the nature and strength of the relationship between the mean rank ordering by gender and found a significant, positive relationship between male and female teachers mean rank ordering of the 21 Leadership behaviors ($\tau(21) = .813, p < .001$). This indicates that the rank ordering of these behaviors by both genders was quite similar.

A Friedman test by teacher respondent grade level was also performed. Teacher respondents self-identified as either grade k-5; grade 6-8; grade 9-12. Any response that would potentially cross between two categories was excluded from the data. The chi-squares associated with the Friedman test for each grade level were all found to be statistically significant: grades k – 5, ($\chi^2(21, N=38) = 246.840, p < .001$); grades 6 – 8, ($\chi^2(20, N=35) = 239.408, p < .001$); and grades 9 – 12, ($\chi^2(20, N=66) = 307.794, p < .001$). The results for the mean rank of the 21 leadership behaviors by teacher respondents according to grade level are outlined in Table 5.

The Friedman Test conducted by grade level showed *Focus* was the least important behavior to impact instructional practice in all three categories: grades k-5 (8.11), grades 6-8 (8.41) and grades 9-12 (7.23). The highest mean rank for grades k-5 was *Contingent Rewards* (14.47) along with Grades 9-12 (15.80). The highest mean rank for grade 6-8 was *Relationships* (14.36).

To determine if the rankings were similar across grade levels a series of Kendall tau-b analyses were performed. A statistically significant, moderately strong positive relationship was discovered between k-5 and 6-8 teachers ($\tau(21) = .625, p < .001$) k-5 and 9-12 teachers ($\tau(21) = .771, p < .001$) and 6-8 and 9-12 teachers ($\tau(21) = .758, p < .001$). Curiously, the strongest relationship in mean ranking by grade level was between k-5 and 9-12 teachers and the weakest between k-5 and 6-8 teachers.

Table 5
Mean Rank Comparisons of Teachers in Elementary, Middle and High School

Behaviors	k-5 Teachers (n=38) Mean Rank	MS Teachers (n=35) Mean Rank	HS Teachers (n=66) Mean Rank
Affirmation	11	11	10
Communication	9	14	9
Change Agent	12	15	16
Contingent Rewards	1 (highest)	2	1 (highest)
Visibility	5	4	3
Situational Awareness	13	16	17
Resources	19	17	14
Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment	6	5	4
Culture	17	10	15
Discipline	10	3	7
Flexibility	18	18	19
Focus	21 (lowest)	21 (lowest)	21 (lowest)
Outreach	8	8	11
Optimizer	2	12 (tie)	5
Monitoring/Evaluation	14	12 (tie)	13
Input	16	19	18
Involvement in Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment	7	6	8
Ideals/Beliefs	20	20	20

Intellectual Stimulation	3	7	6
Order	15	9	12
Relationships	4	1 (highest)	2

Table 6 displays the ranked results of the behaviors based on the teacher respondents varying school populations of students who receive Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL). In all four FRL categories the findings indicated a statistical significance. The chi-square statistics associated with each level were: FRL \leq 24%, (χ^2 (20, N=44) =139.661, $p < .001$); FRL 25-49%, (χ^2 (20, N=45) =154.468, $p < .001$); FRL 50-74%, (χ^2 (20, N=41) =131.691, $p < .001$); and FRL \geq 75%, (χ^2 (20, N=28) =78.398, $p < .001$). In all four categories the mean ranking for the least important behavior was *Focus* and the top behavior was *Contingent Rewards*.

Table 6
Free and Reduced Lunch Categories

Behavior	FRL \leq 24% (n=44)	FRL 25-49% (n=45)	FRL 50-74% (n=41)	FRL \geq 75% (n=28)
Affirmation	12	12	5	10
Communication	14	11	10 (tie)	3
Change Agent	18	16	13	13
Contingent Rewards	1(tie)	1	1	1(tie)
Visibility	4	2(tie)	3	4
Situational Awareness	16	18	15	18
Resources	13	14	17	17
Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment	5	2(tie)	6	8(tie)
Culture	9	15	18	11
Discipline	6	6	7	14
Flexibility	17	17	19	19
Focus	21	21	21	21
Outreach	8	10	14	12

Optimizer	7	6	4	1(tie)
Monitoring/Evaluation	15	9	16	8(tie)
Input	20	20	12	16
Involvement in Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment	10	5	9	7
Ideals/Beliefs	19	19	20	20
Intellectual Stimulation	3	8	8	5
Order	11	13	10(tie)	15
Relationships	1(tie)	4	2	6

As with the previous two analyses, the strength and nature of the relationships between school FRL status of respondents and their respective mean rank ordering of the behaviors was explored. Because of so many different combinations the results of the Kendall tau-b analyses on this category is displayed in Table 7.

Table 7
Kendall's tau-b Results Based on Respondents School FRL Status

School FRL Status	25% – 49%	50% - 74%	≥ 75%
≤ 24%	tau (21) = .724 p<.001	tau (21) = .612 p<.001	tau (21) = .561 p<.001
25% – 49%		tau (21) = .667 p<.001	tau (21) = .663 p<.001
50% - 74%			tau (21) = .609 p<.001

The table clearly shows that the mean rank relationships between respondents within schools of close FRL status were stronger than those farther apart, suggesting the possibility of a similar emphases on specific behaviors based upon the school's socioeconomic status, for which FRL serves as a proxy indicator.

Table 8 indicates the results for the Friedman Test of Mean Ranking based on whether a teacher came from a school that met AYP or did not meet AYP. Responses indicated that schools meeting AYP were found to be statistically significant ($\chi^2 (20, N=99) = 316.182, p<.001$). For schools not meeting AYP the Friedman test results were also statistically significant ($\chi^2 (20, N=49) = 122.040, p<.001$). The results show *Focus* as the lowest ranked leadership behavior and *Contingent Rewards* as the top ranked leadership behavior.

Table 8
Schools Meeting and not Meeting Annual Yearly Progress (AYP)

Behavior	Mean Rank of Schools Meeting AYP (n=99)	Mean Rank of Schools Not Meeting AYP (n=49)
Affirmation	10	11
Communication	9	9
Change Agent	16	16
Contingent Rewards	1 (highest)	1(highest)
Visibility	2	3
Situational Awareness	17	15
Resources	15	14
Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment	4	4
Culture	12	17
Discipline	7	8
Flexibility	18	19
Focus	21(lowest)	21(lowest)
Outreach	11	13
Optimizer	6	6
Monitoring/Evaluation	13	12
Input	19	18
Involvement in Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment	8	10
Ideals/Beliefs	20	20
Intellectual Stimulation	5	5
Order	14	7

Relationships	3	2
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The top three ranked behaviors included *Contingent Rewards* (13.98), *Visibility*, (13.53) and *Relationships* (13.38) the lowest ranked behaviors included *Focus* (7.25), *Ideals/Beliefs* (8.25) and *Input* (8.51). Using the Friedman Test with the overall mean rankings, the three highest behaviors were the same as the three highest in this category and the three lowest ranking behaviors were consistent in this category with the three lowest behaviors compiled in the overall Friedman test.

The Kendall's tau-b correlation analyses of the mean ranking of the leadership behaviors based on the respondents' school AYP status revealed a statistically significant, strong positive relationship between groups ($\tau(21) = .848, p < .001$). Clearly, regardless of whether the school met or did not meet AYP had no influence on the respondents' mean ranking of the 21 leadership behaviors.

Conclusions and Discussion

The results from the Friedman tests displayed in tables 2 thru 6 and 8 show that there is a hierarchical rank order of what expert teachers believe to be the most important principal behaviors that impact classroom instructional practice. From the assessed outcomes of these rankings, it was determined that more than half of the sample of expert teachers ranked 18 of the 21 behaviors as being Very Important. At least 73.1% of the teachers ranked all 21 behaviors as either Very Important or Important leadership behaviors which promote exemplary teacher instructional practice. There were six behaviors identified by teachers as Not Important, which was indicated by 3.4% of the teachers or less, depending on the leadership behavior. This indicates that all 21 leadership behaviors are important to teachers. These particular leadership behaviors were selected because they are highly correlated to improve student achievement (Marzano et al., 2005). This is noteworthy because principals can focus their attention on the specific behaviors which, from the expert teachers' viewpoint, could assist them in improving instructional practice by modeling those that are most significant.

Female and male teachers both ranked *Contingent Rewards* as the most preferred behavior, and *Focus* as the least preferred. However, further statistical analysis (i.e., Mann – Whitney test) found there to be statistically significant difference between male and female responses for the mean rank ordering of the behavior, *Focus*. This finding minimally supports past research on gender differences in educational leadership (Cleveland, Stockdale & Murphy, 2000).

Based on the rankings *Contingent Rewards* was ranked first or second by all three grade levels. *Relationships* and *Visibility* were also ranked with the top five leadership behavior by teachers for all three grade levels. The least important leadership behavior, which was ranked the same by all three groups, was *Focus*. Elementary teachers ranked *Optimizer*, a leadership behavior which promotes innovative ideas and creativity as the second most important while the middle school teachers ranked it number 12 and high school teachers ranked it number 5. Middle school teachers ranked *Discipline*, protecting teachers from issues and influences that often interfere with the regular teaching time, as the third most important behavior while elementary and high school teachers ranked it 10 and 7 respectively.

The findings which were based on teacher grade level might be considered important to the selection of principals by districts with multiple grade levels. Based on differences in the perceptions of teachers as to which leadership behaviors are most important to facilitate the instructional practice of teachers, school boards and other stakeholders involved in the hiring process may want to formulate questions during the interview process which would help gain an understanding of the leadership behavior priorities of their candidates. By having a clear understanding of the needs of teachers in terms of which leadership behaviors are most desired to help improve instructional practice, the candidate who appears to be the ‘best fit’ can be hired to fill the position for a particular grade level school. This supports the work of Valentine (2010) on the focus of middle school leadership and the need for a continuous vision among teachers who share common values and beliefs. Principals in a particular school, depending on the grade level of their students, can focus their attention on modeling those leadership behaviors which appear to be most effective based on teacher responses.

Based on the Free and Reduced Lunch categories, FRL plays a significant role in the perception of teachers and leadership behaviors, which impact classroom instructional practice. The results found *Contingent Rewards* ranked first and *Visibility* was also noted in the top five by all FRL categories. *Focus* and *Flexibility* were identified as least important in all four FRL categories. *Input*, which involves teacher in the design and implementation of important decisions and policies, was ranked number 12 and 16 respectively by teachers in schools with the highest two FRL levels than by teachers in schools from the lowest two FRL categories, ranking it 20 in both. This might suggest that teachers from the higher FRL school populations might have ideas they think could be beneficial and want to become more involved in the processes and plans for positive change.

Teachers from schools meeting or not meeting AYP was the last category. In both categories, teachers from schools meeting AYP and not meeting AYP ranked *Contingent Rewards* first and *Focus* last. This possibly indicates that regardless of whether the school meets or does not meet AYP, teachers across the categories are in agreement as to what leadership behaviors facilitate quality instructional practices.

The 21 leadership behaviors identified in the literature (Marzano et al, 2005; Waters et al, 2003) as the most effective for improving student and school performance were ranked in this study in twelve different ways. A final comparison among the behaviors concludes that among all 21 leadership behaviors ranked, *Contingent Rewards*, the leadership behavior identified as “recognizes and rewards individual accomplishments” (Marzano et al., 2005, p.42), was consistently ranked first among all categories explored. Based on this finding, it appears to be imperative that teachers be rewarded for their accomplishments by the principal leader of the school. This sample of expert teachers found this to have the greatest impact for improving instructional practice.

Identified as the least important of the 21 leadership behaviors was *Focus*, which is defined as “establishes clear goals and keeps those goals in the forefront of the school’s attention (Marzano, et al., 2005, p.42). This ranking was also consistent across all twelve categories that were studied. These findings suggest that while it is important for school leadership to have a set of clear goals when it comes to facilitating exemplary classroom instruction, *Focus* as a leadership behavior has the least impact. Table 9 shows the highest and lowest ranked leadership behaviors for each category.

Table 9
Comparisons of Highest and Lowest Ranking Principal Behaviors

	Highest Ranked Leadership Behavior	Lowest Ranked Leadership Behaviors
Overall	Contingent Rewards	Focus
Female	Contingent Rewards	Focus
Male	Contingent Rewards	Focus
K - 5	Contingent Rewards	Focus
6 – 8 (MS)	Relationships	Focus
9 – 12 (HS)	Contingent Rewards	Focus
FRL ≤ 24%	Contingent Rewards/Relationships	Focus
FRL 25 % - 49%	Contingent Rewards	Focus
FRL 50% - 74%	Contingent Rewards	Focus
FRL ≥ 75%	Contingent Rewards/Optimizer	Focus
Met AYP	Contingent Rewards	Focus
Did not Meet AYP	Contingent Rewards	Focus

Although much of the research on leadership behaviors and traits over the past twenty years adequately supports a position that tells us that leadership is very much influenced by context (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998; Senge, 1990), results reported here seem to indicate that concerning the facilitation of exemplary classroom instruction there may be a cadre of common behaviors school principals need to practice across all contextual platforms.

It has been suggested that successful school leaders practice a common set of behaviors, which have a positive effect on student learning. Many of these common practices are included in the 21 leadership behaviors. These include the ability to provide a vision, develop relationships, provide staff development, facilitate intellectual stimulation, build relationships and promote and nurture a productive school culture (Harris, 2007; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008).

Leithwood and Riehl (2005) clearly indicate the importance of school leadership as an essential factor for improving student achievement and posits that school leadership influences the school, classroom conditions, and teachers, which all directly and indirectly influence student learning. Cotton (2003) also confirms how critical the principal is to the success of the school. It is our hope that the results of this study benefit principals by providing a suggested hierarchy of importance of leadership behaviors that have been associated with improving student achievement (Marzano et al., 2005).

It is the hope that the results of this study provide current practicing principals with a starting point as to the specific leadership behaviors that contribute to a sound instructional leadership practice. Principals can use these rankings to help them reflect upon their own leadership behaviors, actions and practices in order to better facilitate the instructional practice of teachers in their schools. Additionally, results from this study may also inform principal preparation programs by providing them with an archetype for potentially defining instructional leadership or at the very least a starting point for a collaborative discussion with principal candidates about the construct.

The selection and hiring process of a school principal for any school district is an important one and a huge responsibility for all stakeholders. Ideal candidates must possess the knowledge and skills that it takes to meet the increasing challenges. They are accountable for student achievement as never before in the history of education. Consequently, it is the intent

that the results of this study will serve as a guide for school boards in that selection process by providing a better and more practical understanding of the types of leadership behaviors that are essential to improving the instructional practice of teachers which in turn, will help their students to be successful both academically and socially and in the end afford each of one of them the opportunity to reach their overall individual potential.

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School Administrators' Perceptions of the Achievement Gap between African American Students and White Students

This manuscript has been peer-reviewed, accepted, and endorsed by the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA) as a significant contribution to the scholarship and practice of school administration and K-12 education.



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This study included an analysis of principal perceptions of the achievement gap between African American and White students. School administrators from campuses with a substantial number of African American students within the subgroup were interviewed to explore their perceptions of the achievement gap. The study revealed factors within the principal's role that affect academic achievement with African American students. The three themes that developed from structured analysis of interview data were: (a) staff must build authentic relationships to increase students' intrinsic motivation, (b) needs-driven instruction generates higher individual student achievement, and (c) staff members require professional development to meet students' needs.

Introduction

The consistent underperformance of African American students casts a disparaging shadow on the success of American public schools. African American students have performed at a rate far below White counterparts since the beginning of formal American educational history (Kunjufu, 2005). Academic progress for students in this subpopulation has improved significantly since the beginning of the 1900s, however, as of 2012, African American students continued to maintain an average achievement gap of close to 30 points lower than their White counterparts between

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1978 and 2008 (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2012). The issue remains, despite “real gains in academic achievement. . . too many African American students still are not getting the quality education they need and deserve, and the performance of African American students lags far behind that of white students” (The Education Trust, 2014, p. 2).

The existence of the achievement gap has puzzled researchers since the beginning of American educational history (Butchart, 2010; Kunjufu, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2012). Researchers have agreed that data show an achievement gap continued to persist throughout the 21st century and was a significant problem to student progress nationwide (Butchart, 2010; Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Johnson, 2002; Kunjufu, 2000).

Researchers have shown the extensive history of neglect of resources toward African American students contributing to an achievement gap between African American and White subpopulations in education (Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Kozol, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2012; NCES, 2012). African American students “receive fewer of the within-school resources and experiences that are known to contribute to academic achievement” (The Education Trust, 2014, p. 2). The achievement gap continues to plague American public schools (The Education Trust, 2014).

Administrators have the influence to establish a culture of excellence and craft campus policies affecting student achievement (Bulris, 2010; Papalewis & Fortune, 2002). Principals focus on many different aspects of management and instruction to create a campus culture where scores increase (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). Developing staff, hiring and maintaining staff, and creating a culture of excellence are examples of the impact the school principal has on student achievement scores and success (Bulris, 2010). While a wealth of research exists pertaining to the achievement gap (Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Kunjufu, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2009), supportive techniques in closing the gap (Denbo, 2002; Kunjufu, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2009), and even understanding the power of principal leadership (Bulris, 2010; Gay, 2004; Papalewis & Fortune, 2002), limited qualitative research has explored the perceptions of principals in narrowing the achievement gap.

Theoretical Framework

This research project emphasized race as an important factor in exploring administrators’ perceptions of the achievement gap, thus critical race theory was utilized as a framework for investigating the voices of the school leaders (Ladson-Billings, 1999). Critical race theory provided the theoretical framework for comprehending how the discourse of racism and race operate with social structures (in this case, schools). One component of critical race theory includes the telling of stories and accounts to “analyze the myths, presuppositions, and received wisdoms that make up the common culture about race and that invariably render blacks and other minorities one-down” (Delgado, 1995, p. xiv).

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore administrators’ perceptions of the achievement gap. The intent was to determine the level of influence principals possessed on narrowing the achievement gap between African American and White subpopulations. Understanding the strategies or practices successful in providing an increase in student achievement can help administrators make valuable changes to the practices and culture on their campuses and affect student academic performance. Armed with a realization that principals do, in fact, have the power to narrow the achievement gap on their campuses, principals can continue to address the complex problem.

Background Literature

The importance of understanding the reasons behind the gaps in achievement between racial subgroups has been the driving force of much research to improve education (Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 2012). Researchers have shown that social/emotional obstacles of self-worth and confidence, teacher perceptions of student ability, test bias, and instructional strategies or techniques used to implement instruction have contributed to the gap (Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 2009). Kunjufu (2005) agreed that “teacher expectations, tracking, parental involvement, student self-esteem, curriculum, learning styles, test bias, and peer pressure” (p. 1) contribute to maintaining an achievement gap.

Using Researched Poverty Strategies

Schools and districts combine poverty with race when designing strategies to combat low achievement of African American students (Kunjufu, 2006). A concern that was raised with the awareness of poverty in education was that low socioeconomic students are viewed as “deficit-laden. . . less capable, less cultured, and less worthy as learners” (Sato, 2009, p. 365). Comparing students in the African American subpopulation to students who fall into the low socioeconomic category has not proven to close the gap effectively (Kunjufu, 2006).

Poverty does not seem to be a precipitating factor of the achievement gap. Yoshikawa, Aber, and Beardslee (2012) found that “the effect of poverty is independent of associated factors such as levels of parental education or race/ethnicity; there is little evidence that the harmful impact of poverty on child or youth M-E-B [mental-emotional-behavioral] health differs by race/ethnicity” (p. 280).

Impact of School Leadership

To clarify the role of an administrator and his or her impact, “we must understand how a principal can shape the mediating factors such as school climate, culture, and instructional organization, ranging from school policies and norms, to the practices of teachers” (Bulris, 2010, p. 29). Reeves (2009) posited that the principal has an important impact on student success by shaping the climate and making changes on the campus that affect not only the students, but the teachers as well. In another study, Porter, Polikoff, Coldring, Murphy, Elliott, and May (2010) concluded, “leadership is the central ingredient in school success defined in terms of value added to student achievement” (p. 282).

Bulris (2010) determined that if “principals are often the first to be held accountable for a school that fails to meet state and/or federal accountability standards and find themselves at the center of the accountability movement” (p. 1), then it would seem that efforts to close the achievement gap would be focused on the principal. Other researchers have highlighted positive campus changes when student scores were within a principal’s scope of power, such as principals’ impacts on hiring and maintaining effective teachers, building and implementing strong staff development plans that maintain successful teachers on campus, and creating a culture of excellence on campus (Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Johnson, 2002; Kozol, 2005; Kunjufu, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2012).

Marzano et al. (2005) explored the importance of supporting and maintaining effective teachers and generating a positive school climate and culture that values education through the

use of a leadership team developed by the school leader. Bulris (2010) found, “a strong moderate effect of school culture on student achievement” (p. 158), noting the importance the principal plays in creating that culture.

High-quality schools have an effect on the achievement gap; “community investments coupled with high-quality schools drive these results, but community investments alone cannot” (Dobbie & Fryer, 2009, p. 28). As the leader of the campus, the principal has a tremendous effect on the quality of the school.

Method

This phenomenological study included an analysis of the reasons for the achievement gap and solutions through the lens of campus principals. Interview data were collected from 11 school principals in the state of Texas. The administrators had substantial populations of African American students on their campuses and direct input into the supports chosen and implemented on the campus level. A variety of sampling methods were used to select participants for the study. Snowball, criterion, and convenience sampling were used to select participants in this study.

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What do principals perceive as the factors or actions that lead to an increase in African American students’ academic test scores?
2. What do principals perceive as the factors or actions that lead to a decrease in African American students’ academic test scores?
3. What do principals perceive are the characteristics of an effective teacher of diverse groups of learners?
4. What do principals perceive are administrators’ roles in affecting the success of African American students?

Semi-structured interviews were conducted. Field notes, interview transcriptions, and statistical information from Texas’s Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) were used to provide a picture of the phenomenon of the achievement gap. The data were highlighted and coded through transcribed interviews; themes emerged following the analysis of codes.

Findings

Each participant was given a pseudonym to protect his or her identity. Joan, Matthew, Abigail, Elisabeth, Paul, Leslie, Ruth, Kellie, Gina, Deena, and James were the names selected to represent the participants. Principals ranged in age from 32 to 54 years of age. Three males and eight females were interviewed. Three principals were African American principals and eight were White. The participants were leaders of elementary, intermediate (grades 5 and 6), and high school campuses. All of the principals had earned their master’s degrees; two principals were in the process of obtaining doctoral degrees and three had recently earned doctoral degrees.

Participants attributed positive and genuine relationships between teachers, students, and parents as integral parts of increasing student scores. Joan summarized, “I believe the number one thing we have to do is build relationships.” Instructional strategies that are strategically

designed with the individual student's needs in mind are most successful in improving student test scores. Some of these practices involved analyzing data to determine student needs, designing specific strategies, and implementing them effectively. The participants described staff development as vital to providing necessary changes in staff perspectives to improve the instruction that is implemented. The better the teacher is able to determine the specific needs of students, the more likely the teacher will be able to increase student performance. According to the principals, building authentic relationships with students, individualizing instruction to meet the diverse needs of students, and providing professional staff development contribute to an increase in students' test scores.

According to the principals interviewed, when teacher-student or teacher-parent relationships break down the student suffers lower academic achievement. *Forcing* a relationship through false intentions was ineffective at building the authenticity necessary for successful relationships with students. Student academic performance also decreased when teachers did not analyze data regularly or attempt to know well the student and his or her specific needs. The teacher is unable to provide prescribed and individualized instruction to students in a manner that allows students to improve test scores if he or she has not analyzed data. According to the principals, retention, ineffective tutoring, a lack of genuine relationships built on trust, and class size in excess of 22 students were a few of the ineffective practices and strategies that continued to impact the achievement gap negatively.

Throughout the interviews, the principals referred to the characteristics effective teachers need to be successful in teaching diverse groups of students. Kellie indicated that her teachers were effective when they considered the positive results of using visuals in their classrooms and attempted to bridge the cultural gap. Paul viewed the impact of understanding data to find the specific and individual needs of students and prescribe instruction based on student needs. James shared the importance of motivating students intrinsically by providing a reason to further their education. According to James, teachers must ask specific questions of students: "are those students intrinsically motivated? Do they see the connection and the value of having a good strong education? If they do, then the other piece would be having those support mechanisms in place to help those students." According to the principals, effective teachers exhibit these characteristics and are innately able to develop the authentic relationship concurrently.

A common thread found throughout the principals' responses was the intense sense of responsibility the principals had toward the instruction occurring on their respective campuses. Equally as important, said the principals, was the value of making authentic connections with students and their parents. Paul referred to this when he explained how he would gain the trust of the parents, then, "I could tell the parent whatever I needed to and they would support me the best they could." His ability to generate trust with parents gave him permission to do whatever was necessary to help students succeed. Gina reflected, "I just think if we continue on the path of keeping them engaged, continue on the path of building relationships, continue on the path of disaggregating data, and seeing where they are weak," then she could make the changes necessary to affect the achievement gap.

Analysis of interview data produced three overarching themes: (a) staff must build authentic relationships to increase students' intrinsic motivation, (b) needs-driven instruction generates higher individual student achievement, and (c) staff members require professional development to meet students' needs. Each theme was subdivided into supporting subthemes.

Staff Must Build Authentic Relationships to Increase Students' Intrinsic Motivation

The theme most prevalent in this study was the significance of staff members building authentic relationships to increase students' motivation to succeed. The theme of authentic relationships also was woven into the fabric of other themes as principals described the importance of instruction based on the specific needs of students, or professional development training. Participants believed that authentic relationships were the key to increase intrinsic motivation in students. Shaping an authentic relationship takes time and energy in order to incorporate the trust and respect necessary for authenticity.

The principals described the power of authentic relationships that motivated intrinsically. Leslie expressed concern with the amount of time needed to build genuine relationships. Kellie believed African American students would, "work for someone and not something." According to the principals, students seemed to produce better results academically when they worked for the teachers with whom they enjoyed a genuine relationship. Ruth noted positive changes in performance for a difficult student on her campus. She attributed his significant academic gains to "the relationship [the teacher] has with that particular student." The participants shared that teachers must create genuine relationships to improve achievement among students. Matthew summarized, "essentially it's about relationships."

Participants repeatedly remarked that building a genuine relationship was significantly important to improving academic success with students. Students would respond to an authentic relationship with, "now I want to work for you because I like you, and I want you to be proud of me because I like you. . .I don't want to disappoint you, I don't want to embarrass you because I like you," said Joan. Leslie further described the power of authentic relationships:

I think all people in general when they feel like you are investing in them as a person and you're attempting to create a relationship. . . .They're going to be more open to you and to what it is you're trying to share with them or teach them.

The participants agreed that while a genuine relationship took time to build, the benefits outweighed the effort involved.

The principals shared that genuine relationships between teachers and students successfully improved test scores. They provided multiple examples of how student performance increased because an authentic relationship existed between a student and his or her teacher. According to Kellie, both principal and teacher play an integral part in helping a student overcome challenges. She told the student, "bad news is you haven't passed. . .the good news is. . .you can." Kellie continued, "she. . .busted out crying, sitting in my office, and. . .said, 'no one ever told me anything like that.'" That student moved several times and finally enrolled in Kellie's campus again, this time in high school. Kellie visited with the student about her scores as a junior. The student told Kellie, "My counselor just called [my last school] and got my scores, and I passed." This student had never been told that she could succeed.

Analysis of interview data relating to the theme *staff must build authentic relationships to increase students' intrinsic motivation* supported two subthemes: (a) authentic relationships require authentic actions, influential communication, and essential provisions, and (b) relationships must be built with parents. Ladson-Billings (2009) advocated for genuine and authentic relationships between teacher and students and believed that the process involved seeking out student activities outside of the classroom; going to a student's practice or game,

watching a performance, or attending an awards ceremony were a few examples. Ladson-Billings (2009) and Singleton and Linton (2006) posited that the instruction had to be culturally relevant to improve student achievement.

Needs-Driven Instruction Generates Higher Individual Student Achievement

The necessity to provide specific instruction to students was the second most prevalent theme. Principals believed that teachers had to understand students well enough to provide curriculum and instruction tailored to meet the specific needs of students. Students who needed repetition, smaller group instruction, or even visual representations were common examples of needs-driven instruction.

Elisabeth's most academically successful teachers were considered to be at the "top of their game." Those teachers were able to achieve better scores than other teachers on her campus. Elisabeth described their effective instruction: "I think it comes back to how intentional the teacher is. How well the teacher knows. . . content, how creative they can be in presenting the content, how much the teacher values the student's time in the classroom." Leslie supported the notion that good instruction is effective at supporting the diverse groups of learners, regardless of race. Her teachers were focused on the needs of each individual student and analyzed data regularly in an effort to provide instruction tailored to help him or her specifically. Leslie explained, "good quality instructional strategies are going to work with whatever kid you put them in front of."

The theme *needs-driven instruction generates higher individual student achievement* was divided into supporting subthemes: (a) data should be used to drive instructional decisions, (b) high expectations should be established to encourage student success, and (c) small groups should be utilized to personalize instruction. Marzano et al. (2005) indicated that the responsibilities of the principal are to be directly involved in the design of the curriculum used in the classroom, review data and generate an action plan, and confront issues in instruction not conducive to improved student achievement. Ladson-Billings (2009) and Singleton and Linton (2006) believed that the instruction must be culturally relevant to improve student achievement.

Staff Members Need Professional Development to Meet Students' Needs

The third overarching theme was related to the professional development necessary to improve student achievement. Principals shared that closing the achievement gap between African American and White students on their campuses meant that changes were in order. Some of the changes required teachers to be more aware of data. Other changes necessary to narrow the achievement gap required that principals provide staff development on mindset changes or perspectives. Principals tended to agree that change was necessary because the achievement gap continued to exist on each of their campuses.

The theme *staff members need professional development to meet students' needs* exposed the need for staff development in three areas: (a) tear down teacher-created barriers, (b) provide training on the importance of building relationships, and (c) provide training on cultural differences.

Singleton and Linton (2006) provided significant steps for administrators attempting to close the achievement gap on campus by bridging the racial differences. Ladson-Billings (2009) supported the need for teachers to develop culturally relevant instruction which included the art

of getting to know the students well enough to be able to provide effective instruction. This requires that principals delve deeper into the professional development presented to staff members who have the most direct effect on student achievement scores.

Discussion and Implications

According to The Education Trust (2014), “gaps exist before children enter school, but inequitable and insufficient opportunities to learn exacerbate the gaps between African American students and their white peers and contribute to African American students’ low performance” (p. 9). Federal legislation, state legislation, and local districts have been unsuccessful in their attempts to close the gap. As the achievement gap between African American and White students persists, questions persevere, begging for answers to close the gap. In attempting to explain the gap, political arguments involving diversity and the socioeconomics of students have been futile in narrowing the gap.

Principals are faced with difficult decisions daily—decisions concerning facility upkeep; financial decisions; and decisions pertaining to student discipline, instruction, and more (Marzano et al., 2005). By far, the most important decision that a principal can make involves building a culture of excellence on campus (Bulris, 2010). Educators have to determine the action items that are within their control. The complex problem of the achievement gap between African American and White students needs solutions that are practical and effective.

Participants in this study and the teachers they described seemed genuinely concerned about finding solutions to improve scores among African American students on their campuses. Responses were heartfelt; principals attempted to provide possible reasons and solutions to the problem of underachieving subpopulations on their campuses. In the well-meaning intentions of participants, the reasons for the persistence of an achievement gap were exposed.

Principals attempting to narrow the achievement gap between African American and White subpopulations on their campuses must apply three practical measures with staff members. These measures coincide with the three themes in this study. Staff members must build authentic relationships to increase students’ intrinsic motivation. Needs-driven instruction must be fostered, which generates higher individual student achievement. Staff members should be provided with professional development to build capacity and better meet students’ needs. Each measure needed to close the gap is a basic and general focal point guiding principals in the decisions that occur at the campus administrative level.

Building genuine relationships based on the authentic actions, influential communication, and essential provisions was found to have a profound impact on student performance. Principals shared that students worked for the teachers they loved. Authenticity was a necessary component of the relationship if the teachers intended to improve scores. Principals need to incorporate measures within this goal to encourage teachers to connect with students and their parents. Teachers should be held accountable for parent-teacher communications and meetings with students. Principals should facilitate training on building authenticity into relationships with students.

Instruction delivered to students was more effective when it was prescribed to meet their specific needs. To ensure instruction was specific teachers had to analyze data regularly, determine a plan to proactively remediate any problems, and implement the plan. Analysis of student achievement data required teachers to determine students’ strengths and weaknesses and to be specific when determining the most important issues to tackle. Prioritizing students’ skill

deficits helps teachers focus on the more important issues first. The most effective method of delivery, according to the participants, was instruction in small group settings where teachers were able to focus on specific student needs. Action items to help principals focus on instruction include teachers accountability with data analysis, meeting with teachers regularly to discuss data and ensure proper analysis, and incorporating training for teachers to understand and plan small group interactions and instruction more effectively.

An integral part of changing the persistent trend of the achievement gap was to determine the professional development necessary for staff members. Understanding the racial and social divide that may exist between teachers and students is a focal point for professional development. Changing some of the practices that contribute to the widening of the achievement gap is another focus for campus training. The principals shared that some of the most successful practices in closing the gap were found in building relationships and in needs-driven instruction. Singleton and Linton (2006) described necessary professional development to evaluate and possibly change the perceptions existing among staff concerning different cultures and races. The researchers proposed a deep analysis of cultural and traditional practices that characterize the campus. Singleton and Linton (2006) challenged principals to provide professional development that demands that staff members recognize and process perceptions that may be hindering success with students. As staff members evaluate personal perceptions, the training that Kellie discussed, with educational consultants such as Farrell Artis or Ruby Payne, becomes more effective and “life-altering.”

Recommendations for Further Research

This study explored the perceptions that existed among principals pertaining to the achievement gap between African American and White subpopulations. Viewing the phenomenon through the lens of the principal provided a voice to administrators attempting to narrow the achievement gap on their campuses. Further research is necessary to understand the perspectives of the achievement gap that exist among teachers, students, and parents. Further examination of their would provide a better and more complete insight into the achievement gap.

Kozol (2005) believed that educators want to make a difference. Sometimes, successful strategies tried in a new setting or attempted without the same demographics of students or staff fail; with each failure the achievement gap widens. Abigail related with empathy, “they do the things that we’ve been told to do but. . .our gap is not closing.” A gap is apparent between what is understood and what is accomplished. The questions that arise from this perplexing situation implicate a neglect of implementation of strategies or issues with the fidelity with which they are implemented.

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An Investigation of Ethical Leadership Perspectives among Ohio School District Superintendents

This manuscript has been peer-reviewed, accepted, and endorsed by the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA) as a significant contribution to the scholarship and practice of school administration and K-12 education.



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The purpose of this study was to investigate the ethical leadership perspectives of Ohio public school superintendents. Secondly, this study examined to what extent ethical leadership perspectives of Ohio public school superintendents vary according to school district characteristics. Furthermore, the study examined to what extent do ethical leadership perspectives of Ohio public school superintendents vary according to leader demographics. A survey was used to collect data of both superintendent demographics and school district characteristics. Included in this survey were an Ethical Leadership Scale (ELS) and Social Desirability Scale (SDS). The ELS was used to measure ethical leadership perspectives of the superintendents. The SDS was used to measure social desirability of the superintendents. The survey was sent to 606 public school district superintendents in the State of Ohio of which 231 responded. Additionally, this study included an ancillary study in which the researcher conducted interviews with 15 superintendents from across the State of Ohio. The goal of these small group and individual interviews was to gain further information regarding ethical leadership perspectives and social desirability of superintendents in the State of Ohio, and furthermore, to identify district characteristics and leader demographics associated with ethical leadership perspectives. Included in these interviews, the researcher administered the ELS and SDS instruments to each participant.

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Introduction

Over the last decade, the role of leadership in developing ethical conduct has become an area of increased interest due to the large number of ethical scandals by leaders across the globe (Brown, Harrison, & Trevino, 2005; Colvin, 2003; Mehta, 2003; Revell, 2003). Today, many employees search for ethical guidance from significant others versus the workplace (Kohlberg, 1969; Trevino, 1986). Researchers (Brown, Harrison, & Trevino, 2005; Colvin, 2003; Metha, 2003; Revell, 2003) suggested that leaders in the workplace should exhibit sound ethical leadership, and help guide the ethical leadership perspectives¹ of their employees. Too often, this is not the case. Even though ethical scandals continue to occur today, researchers know “little about the ethical dimension of leadership” (Brown et al., 2005, p. 117). Ciulla (1998) wrote “it’s remarkable that there has been little in the way of sustained and systematic treatment of the subject of ethical leadership by scholars” (p. 3).

In this study of ethical leadership, researchers and scholars can begin to better understand what may affect the ethical leadership perspectives of school leaders, and also how such perspectives relates to other variables throughout any given organization. Existing research of the ethical dimension of leadership has predominantly focused on transformational and charismatic leadership (Bass & Avolio, 2000; Brown et al., 2005; Burgess, 2002). In many cases, transformational leadership and charismatic leadership are separate entities, but theoretically they are somewhat similar. Oftentimes, researchers describe the two as if they are interchangeable (Bono & Judge, 2003; Brown et al., 2005; Conger, 1999; Shamir, 1999). The ethical dimension of leadership seems to represent a smaller component that “falls into the nexus of inspiring, stimulating, and visionary leadership behaviors that make up this transformational and charismatic leadership” (Brown, Harrison, & Trevino, 2005, p. 118). Thus, this research on the ethical aspects of the two (transformational and charismatic leadership) has been almost solely focused on, conceptualized as and conveyed from a normative perspective (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Brown et al., 2005; Kanungo & Mendonca, 1996; May, Chan, Hodges, & Avolio, 2003).

Although some literature does exist regarding ethical leadership, much is written from a philosophical and theoretical perspective, proposing how leaders should lead. Thus, the literature supports that “a more descriptive and predictive social scientific approach to ethics and leadership has remained underdeveloped and fragmented, leaving both scholars and practitioners with few answers to even the most fundamental questions, such as “What is ethical leadership?” (Brown & Trevino, 2006, p. 595).

Background and Relevant Literature

Today, school leaders continue to be held accountable for effectively responding to shifting societal issues that are the result of current social trends (Bryant, 2011; Campbell, 2008; Ebbs & Wilcox, 1992). In many cases, school leaders can use the values described in their school vision/mission statement as a source for ethical guidance and reflection in the decision-making process (Ebbs & Wilcox, 1992).

¹ Ethical leadership perspectives are defined as to how a leader perceives or views their own ethical leadership as well as what they consider to be ethical conduct versus what is not.

Research indicates that many aspects of leadership including leadership style, leadership effectiveness, and leadership ethics, may be associated with many school district characteristics. Such characteristics include the size of the school district, locale (i.e, rural, suburban, urban), and academic achievement (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985; Bowers, 2009; Campbell, 2008; Ebbs & Wilcox, 1992; Lyse & Lapointe, 2007; Temel, Ulukan, Sahan, Bay, & Sahin, 2011). Additional researchers (Bailey, 1997; Bowers, 2009; DeVore & Martin, 2008; Lyse & Lapointe, 2007; Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991; Neuman & Simmons 2000; Schultz, 2000; Senge, 1990; Starratt, 2004; Strike, 2007) showed us that school leader demographic variables such as the gender of school leaders, years of experience as a leader, and age, may also affect a school leader's leadership style, leadership effectiveness, and leadership ethics.

Because this study examined the ethical leadership perspectives of superintendents in the State of Ohio, some background information is necessary to explain the current environment in Ohio for public schools. In the State of Ohio, the push for school improvement and reform has increased (Burgess, 2002). This increase intensified mainly as a result of a series of laws passed by the Ohio General Assembly (Burgess, 2002). These laws are focused on raising academic standards as well as increasing accountability for individual school leaders, school buildings, and school districts.

Annually, district report cards are issued for all Ohio public school districts and buildings. With the annual release of the report cards, school districts' and a schools' performance and rank are released to the public and are easily accessible. As a result, public school superintendents are subjected to pressure to achieve and maintain the highest possible designation and performance index for their respective school districts.

In June 2011, further adding pressure to Ohio school district superintendents, Ohio approved "a provision that required the Ohio Department of Education to produce a ranking of all public schools, including joint vocational schools and privately operated charter schools" (Candisky, 2011, p. 1). In 2011, for the first time in history, ODE released the school rankings of all 936 school districts, including all public school districts, joint vocational schools, and private charter schools in the state of Ohio.

This focus on forcing school improvement through legislative mandate may be argued, but the current climate in Ohio has underscored the importance of effective school district leadership. Leadership that not only meets the immediate demands and challenges of the job itself, but leadership that will guide school districts toward genuine and lasting improvements in both teaching and learning (Burgess, 2002). Now more than ever, there is a push for school leaders in the State of Ohio to improve both teaching and learning.

Methodology

For this study, I focused on the ethical leadership perspectives of public school superintendents in the State of Ohio. Secondly, I examined the extent to which ethical leadership perspectives of Ohio public school superintendents vary according to school district characteristics. Furthermore, I examined to what extent do ethical leadership perspectives of Ohio public school superintendents vary according to leader demographics.

I used an on-line survey and in-depth interviews to collect data for this study. The Ethical Leadership Scale (ELS) was used to gather the ethical leadership perspectives of public school superintendents in the State of Ohio. The Social Desirability Scale (SDS) was used to measure the social desirability of public school superintendents in the State of Ohio. The

accompanying survey questions regarding school district characteristics and school leader demographics was used to gain pertinent information regarding both the school leader and the school district in which they serve. The goal of the small group and individual interviews was to gain further information regarding ethical leadership perspectives of superintendents in the State of Ohio, and furthermore, to identify district characteristics and leader demographics affecting those ethical leadership perspectives.

The questions guiding this study were:

1. What are the ethical leadership perspectives of Ohio public school superintendents?
2. To what extent do the ethical leadership perspectives of Ohio public school superintendents vary according to school district characteristics?
3. To what extent do the ethical leadership perspectives of Ohio public school superintendents vary according to leader demographics?

Results

To characterize the ethical leadership perspectives of Ohio public school superintendents, the ELS item mean score for all participants was computed (See Table 1). No norms for scoring on the ELS have been developed; however, enough research has been conducted using the ELS to provide some guidance and interpretation. On a five-point Likert scale response format (as used in my study), three is the mid-point. We can consider scores above three to be evidence of having positive ethical leadership perspectives, whereas, scores below three represent negative ethical leadership perspectives. We could further discriminate and consider four and above as having strongly positive ethical leadership perspectives and below two as having strongly negative ethical leadership perspectives. As shown in Table 1, the lowest ELS item mean score was ($M = 4.2$, $SD = 0.71$), showing little variation in the ELS item mean scores. That is, all ELS item mean scores were between 4.2 and 5.0.

Table 1
Ethical Leadership Scale Scores (N = 189)

ELS Statement	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>
S1. Listens to what employees have to say	0.61	4.53	189
S2. Disciplines employees who violate ethical standards	0.66	4.53	189
S3. Conducts his/her personal life in an ethical manner	0.58	4.70	189
S4. Has the best interests of employees in mind	0.70	4.43	189
S5. Makes fair and balanced decisions	0.61	4.57	189
S6. Can be trusted	0.54	4.80	189
S7. Discusses ethics or values with employees	0.71	4.20	189
S8. Sets an example of how to do things the right way in terms of	0.61	4.65	189

ethics			
S9. Defines success not just by results, but also the way they are obtained	0.59	4.64	189
S10. When making decisions, asks “What is the right thing to do?”	0.54	4.74	189

The SDS was included in this study to control for possible response bias on the ELS. A product-moment correlation was computed to assess the relationship between the ELS and SDS. The SDS was not significantly correlated with the ELS ($r = .027, p = .741$). Thus, respondents were not just answering the questions on the two scales in a socially desirable fashion. That is, it appears the respondents were being honest in answering the questions on the two scales. The ELS item mean scores are all strongly positive, but the SDS item mean scores varied from zero to 10.

Table 2
Social Desirability Scale Scores (N = 185)

SDS Statement	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>
S1. I like to gossip at times	0.49	0.72	185
S2. There have been occasions when I took advantage of someone	0.49	0.71	185
S3. I’m always willing to admit it when I make a mistake	0.42	0.10	185
S4. I always try to practice what I preach	0.39	0.05	185
S5. I sometimes try to get even rather than forgive and forget	0.45	0.84	185
S6. At times I have really insisted on having things my own way	0.42	0.27	185
S7. There have been occasions when I felt like smashing things	0.50	0.46	185
S8. I never resent being asked to return a favor	0.50	0.46	185
S9. I have never been irked when people express ideas very different from my own	0.43	0.72	185
S10. I have never deliberately said something that hurt someone’s feelings	0.50	0.41	185

To determine what extent the ethical leadership perspectives of Ohio public school superintendents varied according to school district characteristics and leader demographics, a regression was run with all school district characteristics and leader demographics in predicting the ELS scores. The analyses were run separately and together, but provided similar results both ways. Initially, a regression analysis was run with the school district characteristics and school leader demographics separately to answer research questions two and three. In this analysis, both models produced the same results as the full model, that is, when the school district characteristics and school leader demographics were run separately, the same variables were statistically significant in explaining variance in the ELS scores. The model with the school district characteristics predicting the ELS scores was statistically significant, $R^2 = .107$, $F(7, 149) = 2.557$, $p = .016$. The model with the school leader demographics predicting the ELS scores was statistically significant as well, $R^2 = .159$, $F(9, 147) = 3.089$, $p = .002$. Thus, both models were statistically significant when using school district characteristics and school leader demographics separately to predict the participants' ELS scores, the variance explained were significantly different than zero. Although a regression analysis was run with the school district characteristics and school leader demographics separately to answer research questions two and three, because they produced the same results as the full model, the latter was deemed more interesting to report. Additionally, more variables (both school district characteristics and school leader demographics) are being controlled in the combined model (full model). The same four strongest predictors (Age, State Designation, Highest Educational Degree [Doctorate Degree or No Doctorate Degree], and Gender) did not change when the other set of variables are added as predictors. However, it should be reported that when the school district characteristics and school leader demographics were run separately, there was a significant difference between rural and suburban school districts, but the significant difference became non-significant in the full model. That is, superintendents of suburban school districts had a higher score on the ELS after controlling for other school district characteristics.

The five largest school districts (15,000+ students) were all identified as outliers on the predictors using Mahalanobis distance. The regression analysis was run both with them, and without them. The only substantive difference in the results was that gender became not statistically significant when the largest districts were excluded. This may be because two of the largest five school districts in the State of Ohio have female superintendents. The decision was made to keep these districts in the sample because it was important to include large districts in the analysis.

Only the State Designation for 2010-2011 was used in the final regression analysis (See Table 3). This was completed intentionally because state designation years 2010-2011, 2009-2010, and 2008-2009 showed multicollinearity, that is, all three predictors together are highly correlated. This does not reduce the predictive power or reliability of the model as a whole, at least within the sample data themselves; it only affects calculations regarding individual predictors. That is, a regression model with correlated predictors (i.e., state designations for 2008-2009, 2009-2010, 2010-2011) can indicate how well the entire bundle of predictors predicts the outcome variable (ELS scores).

After the initial analysis of running the variables separately in predicting the ELS scores, this researcher made a decision to run a regression using all variables to predict the ELS scores (See Table 3). This model proved to be statistically significant, $R^2 = .233$, $F(15, 141) = 2.851$, $p = .001$. With all school leader demographics and school district characteristic variables accounted for, the results of the regression showed that State Designation, Gender, Highest

Educational Degree, and Age were the strongest predictors of the ELS scores. Table 3 indicates all variables, their beta (β), and their p-value (p) with the dependent variable set as the ELS scores. The four strongest predictors are bolded within Table 3

Table 3
Beta and p-value of Variables predicting Ethical Leadership Scale scores

Variable	β	p
Age	.251*	.020
State Designation 2010-2011	-.283*	.012
Highest Educational Degree (Doc or not)	-.193*	.026
Gender	-.166*	.044
Years of Experience in Administration	.101	.264
Years of Experience as a Superintendent	-.001	.992
Performance Index Scores for Years 2010-2011	-.104	.430
Number of Ethical Courses Completed	.043	.594
Completed Mentoring Program in Sup. Lic. Prog	.075	.381
Ethics Training or In-service in Sup. Lic. Prog	.069	.380
Enrollment Size	-.067	.807
Annual Budget	.003	.992
Locale Urban	-.051	.569
Locale Suburban	.098	.325
SDS Score	-.004	.955
R^2	.233	
F	2.851	

Note: * $p < .05$.

Although the regression analysis included all school leader demographic variables and school district characteristic variables, this researcher decided to run another regression using only the four strongest predictors (Highest Educational Degree, Gender, Age, and State Designation 2010-2011) in predicting the ELS scores. The SDS was included in this regression as a covariate in order to help control for any social desirability response set that might explain ELS. In the Four Strongest Predictors Regression Model below (See Table 4), the same subset of respondents were used as previously used in the first regression (See Table 3). This model proved to be statistically significant in predicting the ELS scores, $R^2 = .193$, $F(5, 151) = 7.217$, $p < .001$. Table 4 below indicates the model summary when Highest Educational Degree, Gender, Age, and State Designation 2010-2011 were used to predict the ELS scores. The beta (β) reported in Table 4 is the standardized coefficient.

Table 4
Four Strongest Predictors Regression Model

Variable	B	SE _B	β
Gender	-.163*	.064	-.188
Highest Educational Degree (Doc or not)	-.163**	.059	-.212
State Designation 2010-2011	-.115**	.030	-.280
Age	.114**	.030	.289
SDS Score	-.001	.011	-.006
R^2	.193		
F	7.217		

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Based on the unstandardized regression coefficients, as participants change from Female (0) to Male (1), the ELS mean score goes down by 0.16 on average after controlling for all other predictors. As participants change from no doctorate to doctorate (Highest Educational Degree), the ELS mean score differs by 0.16 on average after controlling for all other predictors. As participants change by 1 on the state designation, the ELS mean scores decrease by 0.12 on average after controlling for all other predictors. As state quality rating increases, the mean score on the ELS increases. Superintendents of higher-level school districts (i.e., Excellent with Distinction, Excellent) have higher ELS mean scores. In addition, the older the superintendent, the higher the ELS mean score. When moving up from one age range to another, the mean score on the ELS goes up by 0.11. The SDS is not significant.

The standardized coefficient for age is largest ($\beta = .289$). Age seems to be related to the largest change in ELS mean scores, when all variables are controlled and looked at on the standardized scale. The standardized coefficient for state designation 2010-2011 is the second largest ($\beta = .280$). State Designation 2010-2011 seems to be related to the second largest change in ELS mean scores, when all variables are looked at on the standardized scale. The standardized coefficient for Highest Education Degree (Doc or not) is third largest ($\beta = .212$). Highest Educational Degree (Doc or not) seems to be related to the third largest change in the ELS mean scores, when all variables are looked at on the standardized scale. The standardized coefficient for Gender is the fourth largest ($\beta = .188$). Gender seems to be related to the fourth largest change in the ELS mean scores, when all variables are looked at on the standardized scale.

Ancillary Study

This section will report all qualitative data collected from the ancillary study that included 15 interviews with active public school district superintendents in the State of Ohio. The interviews were conducted face to face both individually and within small groups. Of the interviews conducted, seven were individual, and the remaining eight were split amongst two groups.

In order to determine the ethical leadership perspectives of Ohio public school superintendents, this researcher produced the ELS mean score (M) for each of the superintendents that participated in the interviews (See Table 5). Each interviewee completed the interview form, which included the ELS. As shown in Table 5, the overall average score on the ELS by superintendents that were interviewed was ($M = 4.57$) out of 5. This suggests that

the superintendents interviewed have strong positive ethical leadership perspectives. Results of the ELS completed by the interviewees are included in Table 5. In addition to the ELS, the SDS was included within the interview form. The overall mean (M) on the SDS by superintendents that were interviewed was ($M = 6.0$). As shown in Table 6 below, the scores on the SDS varied from 3-10. Whereas the ELS scores were all strongly positive, the SDS scores varied from 3-10, thus, just as within the survey results, the ELS and SDS are not strongly correlated based on the data collected in the interview sessions. In Table 6, the SDS mean scores for each of the 15 superintendents that participated in the interviews conducted is reported.

Table 5
ELS Scores of Interviewees (N = 15)

ELS Scores	M	n
	4.2	1
	4.3	3
	4.4	2
	4.5	1
	4.6	3
	4.8	2
	4.9	2
	5.0	1

Table 6
SDS Scores of Interviewees (N = 15)

SDS Scores	M	n
	No Response	1
	3	2
	4	2
	5	3
	6	2
	7	2
	9	1
	10	2

Once the data from the various sources were carefully analyzed, several themes emerged. Below is a summary (including the interview open-ended questions) of the emerging themes from the interview transcriptions, field notes, and the open-ended questions from the surveys. An overview of the interview questions, the responses, and the emerging themes are reported below.

The first interview question was: Do you believe that your ethical leadership perspectives are affected by your school district characteristics (i.e., district size, locale, student achievement, budget, etc.)? Superintendents responded similarly to this question. Superintendents agreed that “it should not” affect ethical leadership perspectives overall, and furthermore, that their personal belief system, ethical compass, should not “sway” regardless of what school district they are in, and/or regardless of the school district characteristics. It should be noted, however, that the superintendents also agreed school district characteristics might affect style, but not their decision-making. For example, one response supported the idea that if an individual is in a larger school district where the media has a stronger presence, a superintendent may “choose my words more carefully because you have a few more cameras in your face and a few more reporters.” Another superintendent commented that, “in other words, there would be less talking

off the cuff, and I would probably have a little more prepared responses and information.”

Other themes that emerged was that although the superintendents did not believe that their ethical leadership perspectives were affected by school district characteristics; they did feel it was affected by other things such as “community norms...in terms of dress, culture, local folklore”, “budget” (see below - opposing themes), “school district culture”, and “disciplining of employees”. One superintendent responded to this question stating that “When you live and work in a fantastic community, you want to live up to those expectations.”

Beyond some of the general themes that emerged within the interview responses to this question, two oppositional verbal responses should be noted. One superintendent responded to this question saying that he believes “budget” (i.e., a school district characteristic) affects their ethical leadership perspectives, and another simply replied “Yes”, that they believe school district characteristics do in fact affect ethical leadership perspectives of superintendents. Finally, one superintendent responded that “Ethical leadership perspectives are shaped and molded by the institution you serve. What is acceptable practices in one district, can be completely unacceptable in another”. The overall general theme that emerged based on the interview responses to question one was that school district characteristics should not and did not affect ethical leadership perspectives.

The second interview question was: Do you believe that your ethical leadership perspectives are affected by your own leader demographics (i.e., age, years of experience, gender, etc.)? Superintendents responded similarly to this question as well. Many of the superintendents expressed that age and experience affected their ethical leadership perspectives. One superintendent simply responded by saying that “you might have done something in your past that you did not have the knowledge or experience to realize that it was unethical, but it is something you did because you did not know any better” with regard to age and experience. More than one superintendent said that “experience would help a superintendent/leader with ethical decision making.” Another superintendent responded by saying, “Yes, age and experience helps one to develop his or her ethical code.” Another superintendent responded, “With age and experience my perspectives have changed in a few areas. I have always been ethical in my decisions, but I may have done some things differently.”

The general theme that emerged based on the interview responses was that superintendents believed leader demographics affect ethical leadership perspectives. Thus, the overwhelming common theme emerging with regard to the responses for this question was ‘Age’ and ‘Experience’. This does not support the quantitative data entirely. In the survey results, ‘Age’ was a strong predictor of the ELS scores, but ‘Experience’ was not. However, based on the survey results, ‘Age’ and ‘Experience’ were significantly correlated, $r = .55$.

The third interview question was: What do you believe to be the most pressing issues facing school district superintendents? Many themes emerged with regard to the responses given by the superintendents to this question. The themes that emerged were “budget”, “finance”, “money”, “an anti-public education movement”, “fiscal accountability”, and “legislative changes.” Overall, the theme that constantly re-emerged was school funding in some shape or form. Another reoccurring item related to political agendas from local, state, and national entities. The feeling amongst the superintendents was that those entities were taking the approach of “an anti-public education movement.” This sentiment was felt by many of the superintendents in the interviews. One superintendent responded, “The potential extinction of public education...dwindling revenue in the face of political inertia toward privatizing education.”

The fourth interview question was: What do you believe most affects your ethical leadership perspectives in decision making? The most common reoccurring theme here was ‘upbringing’. That is, how an individual was brought up or ‘raised’. Respondents said, “How you were raised”, “the things that make up you as an individual; the values and beliefs, core values, how you grew up, your family, your relationships, and our experiences”, “The way I was raised by my parents” and “Product of my parental ethics, holding me to high standards growing up.” Another theme that emerged was “doing what is best for all students.” To this end, superintendents responded saying that “trying to do what is best for kids”, “asking myself, what is best for my students?”, “what is the best interest of the kids”, “Doing what is best for children”, “Student centered decision making”, and “What is best for kids, period” as the driving force behind their ethical leadership perspectives and decision making. Another response that I heard more than once was “honesty”, that is, “being honest to yourself, the community in which you serve, and the children in which you lead.” One superintendent stated “Superintendents should be honest, sincere, and trustworthy” and another said “Decision making based on truth and fairness.”

Interpretation and Conclusions

The purpose of this final section is to provide an overview of the study. This section places emphasis on the results as they relate to public school district superintendents in the State of Ohio, their ethical leadership perspectives, their leader demographics, and the school districts characteristics of the school districts in which they lead. The first research question was: What are the ethical leadership perspectives of Ohio public school superintendents?

The results of this research study suggest that public school district superintendents in the State of Ohio have strongly positive ethical leadership perspectives. This research question was tested using the ELS to describe the ethical leadership perspectives of superintendents in the State of Ohio. The ELS item mean score was calculated for each of the 10 items on the ELS from all public school district superintendents in the State of Ohio that participated in the survey ($N = 189$) and/or chose to participate in the interviews ($N = 15$). The ELS item mean scores from the surveys are presented in Table 1. The ELS mean scores from the interviews were presented in Table 5.

One of the potential limitations of this study was the possibility that all superintendents would rate themselves as having strongly positive ethical leadership perspectives. My results confirmed this limitation. According to Dr. Michael Brown, one of the creators of the ELS, scores below three are not very common on the ELS. Again, my results supported this, that is, individuals tend to rate their ethical leadership perspectives as being strongly positive when completing the ELS. In Table 1, the ELS item mean scores from all public school district superintendents in the State of Ohio who completed the survey are reported. In Table 5, the ELS mean scores from all public school district superintendents who participated in the interview sessions are reported.

The overall ELS mean score for all respondents who completed the ELS was strongly positive. The overall ELS mean score from the on-line survey was ($M = 4.57$) out of 5 ($N = 189$). The overall ELS mean score for all respondents who completed the hard copy version of the ELS during the interview sessions ($N = 15$) was ($M = 4.57$) out of 5, which is represented in Table 5.

The second research question was: To what extent do the ethical leadership perspectives of Ohio public school superintendents vary according to school district characteristics? State Designation was the only school district characteristic that was statistically significant in predicting the ELS mean scores of superintendents in the State of Ohio. State Designation proved to be the second strongest predictor of the ELS mean scores. As participants change by 1 on state designation, the ELS mean score decreases by 0.12 on average after controlling for all other predictors. As state designation increases, the mean score on the ELS increases. Thus, superintendents of school districts with higher state designations (i.e., Excellent with Distinction, Excellent, etc.), have slightly stronger positive scores on the ELS. It should be noted that state designation was an ordinal predictor. In the interviews, the emerging theme in response to research question two was that superintendents did not believe school district characteristics affected their ethical leadership perspectives whatsoever. However, they did agree that it might affect their leadership style.

Additionally, it should be reported that there was a significant difference between rural and suburban school districts (i.e., district locale). However, the significant difference only appeared when the regressions were run separately. Superintendents of suburban school districts had a higher mean score on the ELS after controlling for the other school district characteristics.

The third research question was: To what extent do the ethical leadership perspectives of Ohio public school superintendents vary according to leader demographics? Age, Highest Educational Degree [Doctorate Degree or No Doctorate Degree], and Gender were statistically significant in predicting the ELS mean scores of superintendents in the State of Ohio. Age proved to be the strongest predictor of the ELS mean scores. Highest educational degree was the third strongest predictor of the ELS mean scores, while gender was the fourth strongest predictor of the ELS mean scores.

The older the superintendent of a school district, the higher their ELS mean scores were. Age was an ordinal predictor in which this researcher used age ranges for age. When moving from one age range to another, the mean score on the ELS goes up by 0.11 on average after controlling for all other predictors. The common themes that emerged from the interviews supported this outcome. Superintendents in the interviews believed age did affect their ethical leadership perspectives.

Superintendents with doctorate degrees had higher ELS mean scores than superintendents who did not have a doctorate degree. As participants change from no doctorate degree to doctorate degree (Highest Educational Degree), the ELS mean score differs by 0.16 on average after controlling for all other predictors. The interviews did not support this outcome as no common themes emerged with regard to highest educational degree obtained.

Female superintendents had higher ELS mean scores than male superintendents. As participants change from female (0) to male (1), the ELS mean score goes down by 0.16 on average after controlling for all other predictors. The interviews did not support this outcome as no common themes emerged with regard to gender. That is, superintendents in the interview sessions did not believe gender to be a factor in their ethical leadership perspectives. However, it should be noted that as a limitation to this outcome, out of 207 respondents to this question in the survey, 37 (17.87%) were 'Female', and 170 (82.13%) were 'Male'. Additionally, only one female participated in the interview sessions.

Readers should note that two of the five largest school districts (with a student population of 15,000+) in the State of Ohio employ female superintendents. As previously reported, when the five largest school districts were determined outliers (because of their size), and excluded

from the regression analysis, the only significant difference in the results was that gender became non-significant. The decision was made to keep these districts in the sample.

This researcher grouped the last two research questions for the rest of this analysis because the variables (i.e., leader demographics and school district characteristics) were grouped together during the final analysis of the data. The results of this research study suggest that ethical leadership perspectives of public school district superintendents in the State of Ohio did in fact vary according to some school district characteristics and leader demographics. Although, it should be noted that all the ELS scores were strongly positive, and there was little variation in the ELS mean scores. However, some variation did exist. The second and third research questions were tested using a regression analysis. With all school leader demographics and school district characteristic variables accounted for, the regression showed that State Designation 2010-2011, Gender, Highest Educational Degree (doctoral or not), and Age were the strongest predictors of the ELS mean scores. The beta, p-value, and standardized coefficients for each of the variables with the dependent variable set as the ELS were presented in Table 3.

After it was determined that State Designation, Gender, Highest Educational Degree (doctoral or not), and Age were the strongest predictors of the ethical leadership perspectives (ELS mean scores) of public school district superintendents when accounting for all school leader demographics and school district characteristics, an additional regression was tested only using these four strongest predictors. Based on the results of my study (See Table 4), we could argue that Gender, Age, Highest Educational Degree (doctoral or not), and State Designation have the strongest relationships on ethical leadership perspectives of public school district superintendents in the State of Ohio ($R^2 = .193$).

As previously mentioned, an ancillary study was conducted as part of this research study in which 15 superintendents were interviewed. The common themes emerging from the individual interviews and small group interviews are reported. Of the interviews conducted for this ancillary study with public school district superintendents across the State of Ohio ($N = 15$), and responses to the open-ended questions within the on-line survey ($N = 531$), the common themes that emerged supported the survey results except for 'State Designation' and 'Experience'.

State Designation is considered a school district characteristic. In the interviews, the emerging theme in response to research question two, was that superintendents did not believe school district characteristics affected their ethical leadership perspectives whatsoever. However, they did agree that it might affect their leadership style.

The common themes that emerged in the responses to research question three supported the quantitative data as well, except for 'Experience'. In the interviews, superintendents felt age and experience did affect their ethical leadership perspectives. In the survey results experience was not a statistically significant predictor, but age was. However, it should be mentioned that Age and Experience were significantly correlated in the survey results, $r = .55$

The superintendents in the interviews believed their ethical leadership perspectives were affected by their own leader demographics. However, superintendents in the interviews did not believe that gender affected their ethical leadership perspectives. The on-line survey results determined that 'Gender' (also a leader demographic – as defined in this study) was also a variable associated with ethical leadership perspectives of superintendents. By using field notes, transcriptions of the recorded interviews, observations made during the interviews, audio recordings, and careful analysis of the open-ended questions from the on-line survey, the findings from the qualitative data do not entirely agree with the quantitative data.

Implications

Age is the strongest predictor of the ethical leadership perspectives of superintendents. Furthermore, this study determined that the older the superintendents were, the slightly more positive their ethical leadership perspectives were. If this result is a representation of the superintendents in the State of Ohio, this could be an item of concern, as there is an anticipated exodus by school leaders from their respective school districts across the State of Ohio. It is estimated that 23 or more districts across the state will lose their superintendents after this school year (Bush & Boss, 2012), not only because of the increasing pressure of their jobs, but also because of changes in their retirement that will potentially force them out. Jerry Klenke, Deputy Executive Director of the Buckeye Association of School Administrators (BASA) reported at the North Central Ohio Educational Service Center (NCOESC) 2012 conference that there were 102 new superintendents in the State of Ohio entering the 2012-2013 academic school year. This means that a total of around 125 superintendents (out of 614) across the State of Ohio will be relatively new superintendents (many as first time superintendents) to start the 2013-2014 academic school year. This estimation may be low based on the results of my survey. As reported in Table 1, 159 superintendents indicated that they were in the top three ages ranges² (46-65+), and 77 of them reported that they were in the top two age ranges (56-65+). This may imply that many of the superintendents in this survey are close to retirement age. This possible mass exodus by school leaders in the state could potentially lead to the hiring of many younger inexperienced superintendents in the near future.

The second strongest predictor of the ethical leadership perspectives of superintendents in the State of Ohio was state designation. Based on the results of this study, superintendents who lead school districts with a higher state designation rating had stronger positive ethical leadership perspectives than that of superintendents who lead districts with a lower state designation rating. Due to the new state school district rating system, this researcher was prevented from developing practical suggestions relating to this construct.

Highest educational degree obtained was the third strongest predictor of the ethical leadership perspectives of superintendents. Based on the results of this study, superintendents who had their doctorate degree (49) had more strongly positive ethical leadership perspectives than that of superintendents who did not have their doctorate degree (157). Of the 206 superintendents who responded, only 41 had taken three or more ethical leadership courses in their degree programs, 66 had taken two courses, 65 had taken only one course, and 34 had taken none. However, superintendents who had doctorate degrees did not necessarily complete more ethical leadership coursework. Of the superintendents who held doctorate degrees, 11 had taken only one ethical leadership course, 10 had taken only two courses, four had taken three courses, one had taken four courses, six had taken five or more courses, and four had taken none. Thus, it may be that with advanced doctoral coursework, superintendents develop better skills in reflection, abstraction, and personal practical theories. It may be that in Masters programs, superintendents are taught the tools they need to know how to be a superintendent. Whereas in doctoral programs, there is more abstraction, that is, superintendents start thinking about why they do certain things versus how. Furthermore, this outcome may suggest that individuals preparing future superintendents should look at standards within accreditation and pay closer attention to the standards that address ethical leadership and how they are taught, reinforced, and

² The ages ranges used within the survey of this study were: <35, 36-45, 46-55, 56-65, 65>. Thus, in reporting the results in text, some age ranges have been combined in order to better describe the respondents in this study.

cultivated within existing courses. Finally, 123 superintendents reported as to having completed a mentoring program/experience as part of their superintendent license program. This may suggest the need to evaluate how we train, develop, mentor, and provide meaningful experiences that prepare future superintendents.

Gender was the fourth strongest predictor of the ethical leadership perspectives of superintendents. According to the results this study, female superintendents have more strongly positive ethical leadership perspectives than male superintendents in the State of Ohio. Although the female superintendents had slightly more positive ethical leadership perspectives than male superintendent, both genders scored strongly positive on the ELS. Due to the limited number of females in this study, this researcher was prevented from developing any practical suggestions relating to this construct. Only 17.87% of the respondents in this study were female.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the possible connections between ethical leadership perspectives of superintendents in the State of Ohio, and how such perspectives may vary according to school district characteristics and their own leader demographics. More specifically, I attempted to identify how ethical leadership perspectives among Ohio public school superintendents varied with regard to their respective school district characteristics and their own leader demographics. The results of this study revealed the ethical leadership perspectives of school leaders across the State of Ohio, and furthermore how those perspectives might vary depending on the school district in which they lead, and their own leader demographics. This researcher hopes that this study will generate conversations in the educational community about the importance of ethical leadership perspectives of all school leaders, and furthermore, the relationship between those ethical leadership perspectives, and the school district in which they serve.

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Shifting Practices in Teacher Performance Evaluation: A Qualitative Examination of Administrator Change Readiness

This manuscript has been peer-reviewed, accepted, and endorsed by the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA) as a significant contribution to the scholarship and practice of school administration and K-12 education.



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This study examines the perceptions, attitudes and beliefs of administrators and teachers in a Southwestern Illinois School District regarding the recent reforms in teacher performance evaluation. This study uses a qualitative approach and provides data from individual and focus group interviews to determine the extent to which the district is prepared to make the changes effectively. The findings show that while teachers and administrators perceive potential benefits to teacher evaluation reforms, they also recognize barriers to successful implementation. Implications provide strategies that would benefit the district in an effective transition to the new model of teacher performance evaluation.

Introduction

The Illinois State Board of Education is requiring nearly 11,500 building-level administrators across the State of Illinois to change the way in which they evaluate teacher performance. Necessitated by Senate Bill 315, Public Act 96-0861, or the Performance Evaluation Reform Act of 2010 (PERA), performance evaluations across all districts in the state will soon include a four-category system of ratings, coupled with student growth indicators. These reforms amount to a mandated change in the evaluative practices and a shift in the primary role of the school principal from building manager to instructional leader (ISBE, 2012).

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This shift is happening at a time when many Illinois school districts are exploring every cost-cutting and revenue-generating option and facing late and/or prorated payments from the State. In this climate, when fiscal and personnel resources are shrinking, districts cannot afford to make the necessary investment to maintain fidelity with the new model of teacher evaluation without realizing returns in student achievement and improved teacher performance. This qualitative study examines the perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs of administrators and teachers in one school district located in Southwestern Illinois related to the recent reforms in teacher performance evaluation and the extent to which their district and schools are prepared for them. Specifically, we use the information gained in this study to identify potential barriers and develop strategies to help district-level administrators and teachers better understand and be better equipped to address the potential barriers to successful organizational change as it relates to the implementation of new teacher evaluation reforms. We sought to answer two research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of the district's building-level administrators and teachers regarding shifting teacher performance evaluation practices?
2. What do these perceptions tell us about the administrators' and teachers' degree of change readiness related to teacher performance evaluation reform?

Theoretical Framework

In order for school leaders to transform their environment and lead their schools through this transition successfully, they must understand organizational change and the dynamics of the change process. Organizational change occurs because the leaders and change agents deem it necessary. Implicit to organizational change is the assumption that an environment can be altered and that employees are capable and willing to adapt to the change (Kezar, 2011). Leadership is described as the most critical component in the development of the change process. The leader or change agent is responsible for managing the transition.

For leaders to help employees get motivated and prepared for change, they must create readiness for change. Change readiness, according to Jones, Jimmieson, and Griffiths (2005), is the "extent to which employees hold positive views about the need for organizational change as well as the extent to which employees believe that such changes are likely to have positive implications for themselves and the wider organization" (p. 362). Central to the process of preparing for change are stakeholder attitudes toward change (Walinga, 2008). This attitude, according to Elias (2009), will be a determining factor as to whether the change will be a success. Change readiness, according to Rafferty, Jimmieson, and Armenakis (2013), is "influenced by the individual's beliefs that change is needed, that he or she has the capacity to successfully undertake change, and that change will have positive outcomes for his or her role and by the individual's current and future-oriented positive affective emotional responses to a specific change event" (Rafferty et al., 2013, p. 116).

Review of Literature

Research indicates that educational reform efforts are focused on teaching practice because it is considered to be "at the heart of education" (Larsen, 2005, p. 292). Increased pressure for improvement in teaching has led to closer supervision of teachers and more accountability

through the teacher evaluation process (Larsen, 2005). The current generation of teacher evaluation models (e.g., Danielson's framework, Marzano's causal model) strives to fulfill better the need for institutional accountability and professional growth in a manner that is fair, reliable, valid, research-based, and data-driven (Marzano, Toth, & Schooling, 2012). In this literature review, we outline the historical roots and evolution of teacher evaluation and consider the context in which current evaluation reforms have unfolded.

The Evolution of Evaluation

Research on teacher effectiveness has demonstrated that there are specific teacher characteristics and practices that are related to student achievement (Wayne & Youngs, 2003). Recent research has demonstrated the importance of instructional practice in teacher effectiveness. As indicated by Munoz and Chang (2007), instructional practices, such as engaging classroom discussions and high-level questioning, have been related to growth in student achievement.

The first burst of interest in teacher evaluation in the US coincided with the launch of the Russian Sputnik satellite during the Cold War, as fears arose that students from the Soviet Union were better educated than students from the United States (Markley, 2004; National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983; Shinkfield & Stufflebeam, 1995). Administrators at this time began identifying desirable teaching skills that could be used to evaluate teachers and provide a more useful method for evaluation. With significant advances in evaluation skills and classroom observation techniques, teacher evaluation research became an increasing part of the educational landscape during the 1970s and 1980s. Researchers developed the clinical evaluation processes to have a greater impact on the instructional performance of teachers and student achievement.

The landmark report *A Nation at Risk*, published by the National Commission on Excellence in Education in 1983, represented the most significant challenge to public education (Shinkfield & Stufflebeam, 1995) since the launch of Sputnik. The committee wrote, "The educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and a people. What was unimaginable a generation ago has begun to occur - others are matching and surpassing our educational attainments" (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 9). Much of this report focused on the need for substantial improvement in teacher training and effectiveness. Accountability in education began to be the focus of a nation, and the push for standards-based evaluation of teachers' skills followed.

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 was likely the most significant catalyst for educational reform since the publication of *A Nation at Risk*. Among the major components of this act were requirements that all students have an opportunity to attend quality schools and be taught by highly qualified teachers. This legislation also mandated stronger accountability for increasing all students' academic achievement (Simpson, Lacava, & Graner, 2004). At the same time, as we moved further into the 21st Century, another catalyst for reform emerged: globalization and global competitiveness. In his first State of the Union Address, President Barack Obama warned that "the countries that out-teach us today will out-compete us tomorrow" (Obama, 2009, p. 5). How well students from the United States perform compared to these peers is the crucial component that drives accountability (Duncan, 2009).

Illinois Governor Pat Quinn signed the Performance Evaluation Reform Act in 2010, changing how the performance of Illinois teachers would be measured. While evaluations will continue to be based upon standards of effective practice, student achievement will become a

significant factor in every evaluation. Measurement of student growth is now a key criterion of teacher evaluation, and district-level administration and teacher unions are charged with developing a system of evaluation with this new criterion. According to the National Council on Teacher Quality (2011), the shift in the expectations of the evaluation towards the inclusion of student achievement measures puts a new light on teacher quality. This shift is critically important because the assessment and achievement of students had not been a factor in the evaluation of teachers in the past.

The New Illinois Evaluation System

By 2016, all school districts in Illinois must have in place a valid and reliable teacher evaluation system (ISBE, 2012). The Illinois State Board of Education recommends using the state model, which is comprised of 50% practice, based upon the Danielson's *Framework for Teaching*, and 50% student growth (ISBE, 2012). According to Danielson (2013), the *Framework for Teaching* identifies "those aspects of a teacher's responsibilities that have been documented through empirical studies and theoretical research as promoting improved student learning" (p. 3). This framework includes four domains (i.e., Planning and Preparation, The Classroom Environment, Demonstrating Flexibility and Responsiveness, and Professional Responsibilities), which are further divided into twenty-two components. At a minimum, however, district models must be comprised of at least 30% student growth. The Illinois State Board of Education (2012) defines student growth as a "demonstrable change in a student's learning between two or more points in time" (p. 22). To determine growth, it will be required that data from at least two assessments be used. These assessments are characterized by type (i.e., Type I, Type II, and Type III). At a minimum, one Type III assessment must be used. This assessment type, according to the Illinois State Board of Education (2012) must be curriculum-aligned and rigorous (e.g., teacher-made assessments). Additionally, at least one Type I or Type II assessment should be used to indicate demonstrable change in a student's learning. A Type I assessment (e.g., NWEA MAP tests) is defined by the State as an assessment which measures student achievement similarly across students, is widely administered outside of Illinois, and is not scored by a school district. Type II assessments (e.g., curriculum tests) are defined as "an assessment developed or adopted and approved by the school district and used on a district-wide basis that is given by all teachers in a given grade or subject" (e.g., ISBE, 2012, p. 23).

Change Readiness and Change Management in Schools

Although there is a substantial base of literature on change management in educational reform, and to a lesser degree research related to change readiness in education, there is a lack of research focused on teacher performance evaluation. Spillane, Parise, and Sherer (2011) longitudinally examined planned continuous change in work practices of both administrators and teachers over a four-year period. They concluded that organizational routines are a valid venue of changing school norms and culture. These authors reinforce the notion of a role-change of building-based administrators from maintaining current practices (i.e., management) to transforming practices (i.e., leader). What these researchers tell us about readiness for change within the context of an educational organization is that an organizational routine for evaluating teachers helps to "frame and focus interactions among staff, helping to define work practice" (p. 3).

The perspective of principals is particularly central to the process of change represented by these reforms because the principal is at the heart of these changes. Research shows that the principal's role is instrumental in the establishment of a successful school (Elmore, 1999). More specifically, Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003) conducted meta-analyses on leadership responsibilities (e. g., culture, monitors/evaluates) and found significant correlations between leadership and academic achievement. According to Elmore (1999), a role change from building manager to the instructional leader will result in higher accountability for improving the teaching and learning process and providing more guidance in developing teacher skills. O'Pry and Schumacher (2012) report that the support principals can provide teachers through the evaluation process is paramount. For all of these reasons, the support of principals may be the key to reforming the system of teacher evaluation successfully.

Methods

Research Design/Overall Approach

This study of the perceptions of school administrators and teachers regarding shifting teacher performance evaluation practices used qualitative approaches for gathering and analyzing data. The study followed Maxwell's (1996) interactive qualitative research design model, in which five components - purpose, conceptual context, research questions, methods, and validity - are interconnected and flexible in structure. The design "emphasizes the interactive nature of design decisions in qualitative research and the multiple connections among design components" (p. 4).

Community School District Overview

"Community School District" is located in Southwestern Illinois. Geographically, the boundaries encompass roughly 200 square miles. This particular district is comprised of several communities, from rural to small towns and villages to suburban communities. The student population (Pre-K through Grade 12) is approximately 8000 divided among over a dozen buildings. The school district has multiple primary elementary and intermediate elementary buildings, two middle schools, one high school and one alternative high school.

According to the Illinois District Report Card (iirc.niu.edu, 2014), this district is composed of approximately 84.2% White students, 7% African American, 2.3% Hispanic, 1.6% Asian/Pacific Islander, 0.4% Native American, and 4.3% multiracial and has a low-income rate of 16.2%. The school district has a high school dropout rate of 0.7%, truancy rate of 1.2%, and attendance rate of 95%. Student-to-Staff ratios are 19.5 at the elementary level and 19.1 at the secondary level. The Pupil-to-Administrator ratio is 249.3 (iirc.niu.edu, 2013). The Community School District is one of the largest employers in the area with over 1,000 employees, 600 of whom are "certified" staff members. The teaching staff is 94.6% White, 4.5% Black, 0.5% Asian, 0.2% American Indian, and 0.2% multiracial. The school district is comprised of 22.7% male teachers and 77.3% female teachers. The average teaching experience is 12.7 years. Forty-five percent of the teachers have a Bachelor's Degree, and 55% have a Master's Degree. All classes are taught by "Highly Qualified" teachers. The average teacher salary is \$58,439 (iirc.niu.edu, 2013).

Sample/Participants

Teacher data from this study came from a sample of seven elementary school teachers and seven secondary school teachers employed by the Community School District. The number of years participants had taught in the Community School District ranged from two years to twenty-three years ($M = 10.04$, $SD = 6.29$). The sample was racially heterogeneous (78% Caucasian, 14% African-American, and 7% Asian/Pacific Islander) and the gender distribution (64% female) was fairly representative of the district (77% female). The student academic level taught by the participants was nearly equally represented across grade levels: 21% at the primary level (grades kindergarten through two), 29% at the intermediate level (grades three through five), 21% at the middle school level (grades six through eight), and 29% at the high school level (grades nine through twelve).

Administrator data from this study came from a sample of two elementary school administrators and four secondary school administrators employed by the Community School District. The number of years serving as an administrator ranged from four years to seventeen years ($M = 10.83$, $SD = 6.08$). The sample was racially heterogeneous (66.67% Caucasian, 16.67% African-American, and 16.67% Multiracial). Gender was equally represented in the sample (50% female, 50% male). The grade levels the participants serve were as follows: 33.33% of the participants in an administrative role at the intermediate level (grades three through five), 33.33% of the participants in an administrative role at the middle school level (grades six through eight), and 33.33% of the participants in an administrative role at the high school level (grades nine through twelve).

Data Sources/Instruments

Demographic Form

Two separate demographic forms were used to gather basic information about administrators selected for the interviews and the fourteen teachers selected to participate in the two focus groups. The form for administrators asked for participant gender, race/ethnicity, highest degree achieved, number of years in the role of building-based school administrator, and academic level of the students served (e.g., primary, high school). The form for teachers asked for participant gender, race/ethnicity, number of years of teaching experience in the Community School District, and academic level they teach.

Interviews

We developed semi-structured interview protocols for the interviews and focus groups, which included 10 scripted questions and a number of suggested probes to assist the interviewees to further recall, reflect, and explore their experiences. We revised the protocol following a pilot interview with a Community School District administrator who was not familiar with the project. In the first section of the scheduled hour-long interview, participants were asked broadly about the new teacher evaluation model and the necessity of changes to the existing model and followed up with more specific questions targeting the perceived positive and negative impact of changes to the teacher evaluation model, perceived preparedness for the change, and utility of the new model.

Data Analysis

Qualitative analysis of the data drew on the recommendations of Hill, Thompson, Hess, Knox, Williams, and Ladany, (2005) and followed a three-stage format, which included segmenting the data into groups or clusters (i.e., domains), summarizing the data within the domains (i.e., core ideas), and formulating common themes across participants (i.e., cross-analysis). Consistent with Hill et al. (2005), we labeled categories as *general* results if they included all or all but one case, *typical* results if they include more than half of the cases and less than the demarcation for the “general” category, and *variant* results if applied to more than two cases (but less than half).

Findings

Three major domains surfaced from the interviews. First, participants, particularly administrators, perceived a need for a new teacher evaluation model. However, the need was felt to be less robust for the participants’ own district than for other districts and for public education in general. Second, participants believed that there were advantages in making the shift to the new evaluation system. Third, participants perceived that there were significant barriers to changing to the new model successfully. Overall, the data suggest that the district is somewhat ready to implement the teacher evaluation reforms but the level of change readiness is limited given 1) the relatively low perceived need for the change and 2) the barriers to change identified by the participants.

Perceived Need for a New Teacher Evaluation Model

In a global sense, participants generally identified a need to shift toward a new model of teacher evaluation. They felt that a new, more rigorous, more demanding teacher evaluation model is needed to increase credibility and improve the perception of the public regarding education. At the district level, administrators typically identified a need to shift to a new model while teachers reported with variance their perception of the need for the changes to the new model of teacher evaluation.

Participants noted that the new model increases accountability for student achievement, including test scores, and allows for poor performing teachers to be released more easily. This was seen as helping to address the public perception that schools are complacent about improving student growth and tolerant of mediocre teaching. As one teacher explained, “Public education has really taken a beating. I think the new model is needed to help change public opinion of the education profession.” Additionally, an administrator noted that “this model will reestablish credibility within the education profession.”

Administrators and teachers reported differing views about the extent to which there was a need to change the teacher evaluation model in their own district. Administrators typically identified a need for changes to the evaluation model in order to make the evaluation process more meaningful in the Community School District and to continue to improve the instructional process of all teachers and the education of all students within the district. Administrators commented that the new model would provide more of a focus on evidence of teacher performance for all teachers and have measures in place to address those teachers who are not performing up to standards. For example, one administrator stated, “I think the new process is a reminder to all of us that we should strive to improve each and every day and not take our jobs

for granted. The new evaluation model will impact all teachers and provide an avenue that we have not had in the past to address poor teaching in a meaningful way.” Administrators also believe the new teacher evaluation model provides more clarity for them as evaluators. Another administrator noted, “I think the changes are needed in that they enforce a more clear focus on the specific characteristics of an effective teacher, providing more consistency among evaluators.”

Teachers, on the other hand, reported that while the Community School District could benefit from the new model, there wasn’t a significant need to change from the traditional system. To the extent that they did see a need, teachers typically focused on the need for improved evaluation for the limited number of district teachers who are not performing up to standards. For example, one teacher reported, “I think these changes are needed for those teachers who have become too comfortable and aren’t doing anything to improve.”

Perceived Advantages in Making the Shift to the New Evaluation System

Although participants did not feel like a new system was especially needed, at least not in their district, both administrators and teachers perceived the new teacher evaluation model as having several advantages over previous approaches. Advantages included the decreased emphasis on teacher tenure, increased accountability for student growth for all teachers, greater focus on teacher professional growth and improved instruction through better identification of teaching strengths and weaknesses, more objectivity on the part of evaluators, and the emphasis on data-driven decisions.

Decreased emphasis on teacher tenure. Multiple teachers in this study expressed frustration and/or concern over a few of the veteran teachers within the district who have become complacent because they have tenure and are not concerned with being dismissed. Teacher participants shared their opinions that there are some teachers in the district who shouldn’t be teaching because they do the minimum, are teaching in the same manner they have for years, and they don’t want to change. The new model requires evidence of teacher performance and student growth and outlines dismissal procedures for any teacher, regardless of tenure, who is not performing up to standards. Several quotes illustrate teacher and administrator agreement with the de-emphasis on teacher tenure.

- One teacher stated, “I believe the current reforms will even the playing field between novice and veteran educational professionals.”
- Another teacher claimed, “Once some teachers obtain tenure, they feel that they no longer have to perform to high standards. Evaluating teachers with the same components will help level the playing field.”
- An administrator expressed, “Education is one of the few professions where your length of employment outweighs the quality of your performance. This, in my opinion, has led to a high number of staff members who have grown complacent and no longer work diligently each day to ensure student success, and this notion needs to change.”

Increased accountability for student growth. Both teachers and administrators generally expressed that the new model of teacher evaluation will lead to increased accountability for student growth for all teachers. They believe that not every teacher in the Community School

District is performing up to standards. The new model includes clear descriptions of professional excellence and accountability in the area of student achievement. One teacher specified a belief that the new teacher evaluation model “needed to be addressed in order to keep employees accountable for their productivity and contributions to the educational field. The new model appears to hold everyone more accountable.” Both teacher focus groups expressed concern that a few veteran teachers in the Community School District have lost sight of their responsibility for student growth and do not value student achievement with the current evaluation system. One teacher pointed to the impact of the student growth portion of the new model for teacher evaluation, stating, “Student growth can hold teachers responsible for a set of standards that each student should know and understand.”

Focus on professional growth and improved instruction. Participants indicated that the new model of teacher evaluation will have a positive impact on teacher professional growth and improved instruction in the Community School District. They felt that the new model would require more discussion between administrator and teacher to identify and enhance individual strengths and pinpoint areas for improvement. A middle school teacher stated that the new model “is the first real tool that seems to address teachers and help teachers be better and assist administrators fulfilling the role of master teacher.”

Administrators shared similar perceptions of the impact on professional growth and improved instruction. They indicated that the new model focuses on measuring teacher presentation of content rather than on the teacher. One administrator shared, “I think the criteria levels are very well thought out and most particularly in the areas of the development of the training and the education of the teachers to help them become better educators”

Participants felt that the new model would demand more specific feedback focused on various teaching practices as well as student achievement results. One teacher indicated that “lessons will be more effective because it will force us to look more at the dynamics of the class and I will be able to plan to more modalities and reach more students. I feel the new model will guarantee that this happens in all classrooms.” Several administrators felt that the addition of the student growth component in the new model would help teachers improve instruction. They felt that student data would help administrators and teachers identify areas of weakness, and they could focus their efforts to improve upon those weaknesses. One administrator said, “The new teacher evaluation model will lead to improved teacher practice due to teachers being held accountable for their performance as well as student growth.”

While both teachers and administrators acknowledged the dual focus of the new model of teacher evaluation on both accountability and improvement, the transcript analysis reveals a noticeable difference between administrators and teachers, with teachers citing the potential for a positive impact on teacher professional growth more frequently than administrators.

More objectivity on the part of evaluators. Administrators and teacher focus groups perceived objectivity in the new teacher evaluation model to be an advantage. Several administrators spoke to the new model’s clear descriptions of what excellent/distinguished instruction looks like, enabling administrators to conduct observations in a more standardized manner. Comments made by many of the teachers in the focus groups indicate a hope that evaluations will be less subjective and more objective on the part of the evaluator. One teacher felt that “a uniform model takes away the subjectivity that can occur across the district.” Another teacher related the importance of objectivity to decisions about a person keeping his/her job or not and stated, “I go back to the subjectivity of it all. I think that any time a person’s job or

livelihood is at stake and it is based on judgment on an evaluation, I think it needs to be as objective as possible. This model will provide more objectivity.”

Emphasis on Data-driven Decisions. Administrators and teachers reported with variance that there is an advantage in the emphasis of the new model on data-driven decision-making. A teacher noted, “I do like how the new model is evidence-based and research-based. We are a very data-driven school district and this will help us to use the data when making decisions.” Both teacher focus groups expressed the Community School District’s growth in the area of using data to make decisions over the past few years; however, not all administrators and teachers are on board with using multiple data sources to make decisions on a regular basis throughout the year.

Another teacher commented on the positive aspect of looking at data over a longer period of time and stated, “This will force us to look at data over time. Looking at five years of student data will help gauge where I need to go. The data will help us look at kids’ progress over time and make instructional decisions based on that data and not on our gut feelings.”

Perceived Barriers to Changing to the New Model Successfully

In spite of the advantages of a new teacher performance evaluation, participants felt that there are several barriers to the implementation of the new model. Administrators and teachers expressed concern over trust issues, the teacher union, lack of teacher training, apprehension about the student achievement component, and the amount of time for administrators to be potential barriers in the successful implementation of the new evaluation.

Trust. Participants reported with variance that they perceived the issue of trust to be a barrier in shifting to the new teacher evaluation model. When asked about barriers, one teacher noted, “I think there will still be a lot of trust issues between teachers and administrators.” Administrators supported the notion that the trust of all teachers was essential in making the shift to the new model. One administrator spoke to the notion of trust being a potential barrier, stating “If teachers feel threatened by the new evaluation process and the possibility of losing their job or position to a fellow colleague, it could foster a climate of mistrust and restrict the collaborative efforts among them due to a perceived threat of competition to be the “better” teacher.”

Unions. Participants in the teacher focus groups and administrators perceived teacher unions to be a barrier in implementing the new teacher evaluation model effectively. Two teachers spoke of situations which they were familiar with where the union supported teachers who were not performing. It was their opinion that the union sees it as its obligation to support all teachers, regardless of right or wrong, because all teachers pay union dues. A teacher expressed concern that unions would support teachers who received low ratings and indicated there would “likely be pushbacks from the educational union when/if veteran teachers are evaluated in a manner they do not believe to be accurate.” Similarly, an administrator reported that unions will attempt to use “loopholes to railroad poor evaluations based on technicalities.” The overall perceptions expressed by administrators and teachers suggest that they feel there will be resistance from unions when teachers are evaluated in a negative manner.

Lack of teacher training. Participants generally reported their perception that administrators were well-prepared for the changes to the new teacher evaluation model. In contrast, participants perceived that teachers were not as familiar with the changes and did not

have any formal training on the new model, which creates another barrier in the implementation of the new model.

Teachers felt they needed more training to understand the new model fully and to be ready to make the changes. Teachers reported that they didn't have a clear understanding of the new process and how it would impact them. One teacher stated, "I think we were made aware of changes, but I don't know specifically how the changes will impact my teaching or my evaluations." Two teachers at the secondary level expressed that they felt prepared for the changes to the teacher evaluation model. However, both of these teachers are taking classes at the university level and said that they have discussed teacher evaluation reforms extensively in class.

A few teachers anticipate that the district will at some point provide teachers the information they needed in order to prepare for the changes. One teacher expressed confidence in the district's ability to help prepare teachers for the changes stating, "Our district has always moved forward with things like PolyVision and Common Core so we are used to those kinds of changes. The district really sets us up for success in everything we take on."

Administrators felt that the teachers would benefit from participating in the same type of formal training that was provided them. Administrators participated in state required training sessions regarding the new teacher evaluation model. The State did not require teachers to participate in any training. Administrators took part in over 40 hours of training to enhance their knowledge in the new framework for teaching, getting familiar with the domains and the components of each domain in order to observe and evaluate teachers better. In addition, the district provided opportunities for administrators to have meaningful conversations about the evidence they collected in the observation videos they viewed. An administrator stated, "The discussion that took place amongst a large number of administrators about the teachers they saw in the practice sessions was extremely valuable. We were able to hear and understand the process others go through when observing teaching behaviors, and that was helpful. It gave me a better perspective and more of an open mind when viewing teachers in the classroom." Administrators believe this same type of formal training for teachers would be beneficial in helping teachers become more familiar with the new model and helping them understand the various components of the evaluation instrument.

Apprehension about the student achievement component. Typically, the participants expressed concern with the student achievement component of the new system. Teachers and administrators do not know how the district will define "student growth," and they have questions in particular about how the district will determine growth for students with special needs. One teacher shared, "I think a barrier may come into play for special education teachers. Some of the special students have so many other things going on in their lives, and with a disability on top of that, they could go in so many different directions. I don't think it would be fair to evaluate the special education teacher in the same manner as the regular education teacher." Participants were also concerned about how the student achievement component would impact teachers in special areas, such as speech pathologists, music teachers, art teachers, and other teachers outside of the regular classroom.

Administrators and teachers of both focus groups perceived the student growth component to be a challenge, and they expressed the need for the new model to be "fair and equitable." The concern regarding student growth was expressed more often by teachers than administrators. Surprisingly, both teachers and administrators spoke about the student growth

portion of the new model of teacher evaluation as if it were separate from the model itself and not a significant component of a unified model.

Time-Intensive for administrators. Administrators and teachers typically perceived an additional barrier to the new teacher evaluation model to be the amount of time it requires of administrators. One teacher stated, “I believe it will be a large undertaking for administration to keep up with the demands of the evaluation tool through observations, conferences, and evaluations. It will consume much of their time, and they have other things to do.” An administrator also commented about the time it would consume outside of the school day and stated, “The new model is very labor intensive and will require an administrator to spend more time outside the work day to organize and author a document that will be used to facilitate communication about improving instruction.”

Discussion and Implications

With new mandated changes in teacher evaluation on the horizon for all school districts across the State of Illinois, district-level administrators have an opportunity to transform this essential aspect of educational leadership. This study suggests that in Community School District, teachers and administrators see both the potential for and barriers to this transformation.

One of the study’s major findings is that administrators and teachers believed there is a need to shift towards a new model of teacher evaluation because they felt the new system would help to improve the public’s perception of public education. It is difficult to predict whether or not the new model of teacher evaluation will lead to a change in public perceptions of public education, even if the new model results in improved instructional practices and increases in student achievement. Teacher evaluation practices are one of many indicators that have the potential to shape the public’s perception of public education. And while it is a valuable objective of evaluation reform, it should not be its primary goal.

Teachers spoke to how a need exists mainly for district teachers who are underperforming and/or complacent but did not express a strong need for a new teacher evaluation model in the Community School District. This finding represents a significant challenge for district and building-level administrators, as there is a positive relationship between perceived need for change and change readiness.

Elias (2009) indicates that a positive or negative evaluative judgment of a change initiative will be a determining factor as to whether the change will be a success. This study found that teachers and administrators alike perceived the change initiative to have several advantages, including increased accountability and improved instruction for all teachers, regardless of tenure.

Administrators and teachers felt that the new model would be more objective and force data-driven decision-making to improve teaching practices and student achievement. The new model would better identify strengths and weaknesses in order to address professional development in a more meaningful way. It is clear that the teachers and administrators believe that the new model will require more reliable evidence of teacher performance. The message from teachers and administrators in this study is that all teachers, including complacent, sub-standard teachers, should be held accountable in the summative evaluation.

Another finding in this study was that both teachers and administrators identified potential barriers to a successful change process with the new model of teacher evaluation. Kezar (2011) emphasizes that obstacles may slow the change process, and they must be analyzed so

that leaders can move the process along and overcome the resistance to change. Mistrust, union involvement, lack of teacher training, apprehension regarding the student growth indicators, and time were all noted as potential barriers to change readiness and acceptance. With so much at stake, potential barriers need to be aggressively and proactively addressed in order to make an effective transition to the new model.

Prochaska, DiClemente, and Norcross (1992) discuss the importance of helping relationships in the process of change. In order to build trust, the District must cultivate buy-in and understanding of the new model. Rafferty et al. (2013) concluded from a review of the empirical literature that “high-quality change communication increases acceptance, openness, and commitment to change” (p. 122). As such, the administration should begin discussions with teachers regarding the new model to communicate the need for change. Administrators as evaluators must build this alliance by conducting more frequent observations and spending a greater amount of time in classrooms. Administrators must also offer productive feedback and professional development that is more closely linked to the evaluation system. While these types of activities will not eliminate all of the mistrust issues, they will assist in building teachers’ confidence and trust in administrators’ abilities to evaluate teachers accurately and effectively.

The district must include union leaders at the ground level to provide support in this process. Union leaders are influential and teachers may respond to other teachers more favorably than to administrators. Union leaders should be included in the training process and the administration should view union leadership as collaborators in identifying employee issues and in helping to devise solutions to rectify those issues. As Rafferty et al. (2013) concluded from the empirical literature, “when employees participate in decisions related to the change, feelings of empowerment are created, providing them with a sense of agency and control” (p. 122).

Training sessions for teachers will be critical at the beginning of the year. In addition, the district needs to provide time for teachers to discuss the new process with administrators and other teachers. Ongoing communication regarding teacher evaluation updates will also be important in this process.

Wallinga (2008) states in the theoretical framework of change readiness that change can cause anxiety and anxiety can be the greatest impediment to performance. Teachers discussed their apprehension over how the district would determine student growth, especially for students with special needs. They were particularly concerned about the “one size fits all” approach Marzano (2007) cautions against in the literature. Munoz and Chang (2007) referred to the unique experiences students bring with them to the classroom as factors that greatly influence the success of strategies used by teachers. Participants in this study also expressed concern with these factors. Additionally, some teachers were concerned with the assurance of fair evaluations for teachers across all subjects. The district must begin to develop the student growth component and include all stakeholders in the decision-making process of establishing criteria for student growth. The district must also include multiple measures to evaluate student growth and help teachers understand how to use multiple data sources to improve instruction and set appropriate goals for student growth.

In addition, the Community School District should research technology and other possible solutions that could ease the burden of the new teacher evaluation requirements on evaluators and help provide immediate feedback to teachers. The amount of time required of evaluators was found to be a concern in this study. The district should research ways to streamline the system by researching online tools and other devices and forms that could possibly ease the burden of collecting data, utilizing data, and scripting observations. In addition,

the potential cost, which could be a limiting factor associated with the purchase of technology and other resources, must be carefully examined.

The findings that surfaced through this study give a qualitatively rich answer to our first research question: *What are the perceptions of the district's building-level administrators and teachers regarding shifting teacher performance evaluation practices?*

We now have a greater understanding regarding teachers' and administrators' perceived need for change, perceived advantages in making the shift to the new evaluation system, and perceived barriers to changing to the new model successfully. In summary, both administrators and teachers report that a new teacher evaluation model will help to improve public perception of public education; however, teachers perceived the new model in the Community School District was needed for underperforming teachers. Participants liked that the new teacher evaluation model has a perceived decreased emphasis on teacher tenure, increased accountability for student growth for all teachers, and a more objective, data-driven process that focuses on professional growth and improved instructional practices. Moreover, they identified five perceived barriers to changing to the new model successfully, including mistrust among administrators and teachers, union resistance to the new model and support of underperforming teachers, teacher training needs, fears about how the student achievement component of the new model will be determined, and the amount of time administrators will spend conducting the various evaluation components (e.g., observations, conferences).

The findings that surfaced through this study also give a qualitatively rich answer to our second research question, which asked *“What do these perceptions tell us about the administrators' and teachers' degree of change readiness related to teacher performance evaluation reform?”*

As indicated in the review of the literature, central to the cognitive components of change readiness are the beliefs, intentions, and attitudes regarding the “extent to which changes are needed and the organization's capacity to successfully make those changes” (Armenakis, Harris, & Mossholder, 1993, p. 681). This study yielded a better understanding of the degree of administrators' and teachers' readiness for change within the Community School District. While participants typically perceived that the new model of teacher evaluation will result in increased accountability and have positive implications for the wider community, the Community School District is only somewhat ready to implement the teacher evaluation reforms. Administrators must promote and communicate the need for the change for all teachers and address the perceived potential barriers in order to successfully make the changes.

Conclusion

While it is certain that teacher evaluation will change in Illinois in the coming year, what is not clear is the extent to which these changes will be meaningful and lead to improved teaching. In part, the quality of the change will depend on the beliefs and actions of district and building level administrators and teachers. This study supports the claim that those most familiar with the traditional system of teacher evaluation see the flaws in that system and the potential benefits of changing it. While this suggests that teacher evaluation reforms will be successful in the district studied, this study also highlights the barriers that might undermine those reforms. District-level leaders should anticipate that, in similar districts, teachers and administrators may not see teacher evaluation reform as an urgent matter. If their concerns bear fruit—if, for example, administrators find the process highly time-consuming—or other problems emerge that make the

changes overly burdensome or ineffective, change readiness theory would suggest that the likelihood of successful change will diminish. This calls for effective district-level leadership focused on promoting the benefits of evaluation reform and working to head off and minimize administrative problems as these reforms roll out. With effective leadership in these areas, district-level leaders may build sufficient momentum to overcome the potential resistance to change that emerges down the road.

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