# ICPEL
# International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation

Spring 2024
Volume 19, Number 1
ISSN 2155-9635

Caryn Wells, Editor
Oakland University
Jill Channing, Assistant Editor
East Tennessee State University




ICPEL Publications Director, Brad Bizzell
*Radford University*

*ICPEL's Education Leadership Review* is an internationally refereed journal published annually in the Fall by the International Council of Professors of Educational Leadership. The manuscripts in Volume 19, Number 1 (Spring 2024) have been peer-reviewed, accepted, and endorsed by the International Council of Professors of Educational Leadership as significant contributions to the scholarship and practice of school administration and PK-12 education.

# Contents

Perceptions of Political Literacy among Aspiring School Leaders in a Rural Mid-West University Preparation Program
*Charles L. Lowery, Chetanath Gautam, Michael E. Hess* 1

Principal Candidates' Leadership Growth During a Summer Residency Program
*Beverly J. Irby, Rafael Lara-Alecio, Fuhui Tong, Elsa Villarreal, Matthew J. Etchells, Zihan Geng, Roya Pashmforoosh, Mikaela Spooner, and Shuo Feng* 22

Governance and School District Leadership: Addressing Race-Based Academic Achievement Disparity and Board Member Perceptions
*Christopher Dignam, James A. Gates, and Matthew A. Cooney* 62

Transforming Sense into Cents: Evaluation of Edgenuity's Impact in a County's Schools
*David R. Maddock and Daniel W. Eadens* 80

A Comparison of Situational Leadership Framing by School Administrators: During and After Principal Preparation
*James Martinez and Cameron Molidor* 97

Professional Development Supporting Principals' Changing Roles as Equity-Oriented Leaders
*Carol A. Mullen and Rebecca B. Hall* 120

Preparing Post-Pandemic, Equity-Focused Educational Leaders: Technology Requires Administrators to Reimagine Schools
*Tracy Reimer and Jennifer Hill* 138

When Complexity and Uncertainty Became Life: Delaware School Principals Roles and Leadership Practices During COVID-19 Crisis - A Mixed Method Case Study
*Shelley Rouser, Chetanath Gautam, and Charles L. Lowery* 157

The Impact of School Leadership on Middle School Teacher's Multicultural Awareness and Inclusivity
*Mary Boudreaux* 183

# Perceptions of Political Literacy among Aspiring School Leaders in a Rural Mid-West University Preparation Program

**Charles L. Lowery**
*Virginia Tech*

**Chetanath Gautam**
*Delaware State University*

**Michael E. Hess**
*Ohio University*

This case study investigates aspiring school leaders' perception of political literacy in educational leadership, offering critical recommendations for principal preparation programs, policymakers, and future research. As a qualitative study, the case addresses integrating political literacy policy, developing relevant professional development opportunities, and initiating future research to gauge the possible impact of political literacy as a practice and subject. Moreover, findings reveal the challenges and strategies for implementing political literacy in school settings through the lens of experienced teachers with aspirations to be school leaders. The research suggests that a comprehensive approach emphasizing political literacy may empower aspiring school leaders, improve school-community relations, and promote an informed citizenry. This study signifies a crucial step towards cultivating politically literate school leaders equipped to foster democratic engagement and critical thinking within school communities.

Keywords: political literacy, educational leadership, principal preparation programs, school-community relations, policy development

Public schools frequently grapple with a political milieu characterized by diverse opinions, which can pose challenges to the overarching goal of fostering an informed citizenry. This predicament is deeply rooted in Dewey's (1927) assertion about the imperative for the public "to find and identify itself" (p. 216). The persistence of this challenge is exacerbated by a discernible deficiency in what can be termed as political literacy. This deficiency is evidenced by polling and media reports indicating that students may graduate without acquiring fundamental civic literacy, lacking proficiency in the essential aspects of citizenship and constitutional knowledge (Fitzgerald et al., 2021; Shapiro & Brown, 2018; Weerts et al., 2022).

Compounding the issue, some argue that teachers often find themselves constrained by mandated curricula that historically prioritize individualistic ideologies at the expense of cultivating a citizenry empowered with democratic literacy (Apple, 1979; Carey, 2019; Dewey, 1916; Gutman, 1995; Levinson, 2018; Onosko, 2011). As a result, many graduates enter the public sphere with a deficit in the fluency necessary to navigate the choppy waters of democracy (Mickey, 2022; Nicoli et al., 2022; Trend, 2013; Warren, 2018). This systemic challenge, underscored by both historical perspectives and contemporary research findings, highlights the ongoing struggle to align educational objectives with the imperative of producing politically literate citizens capable of contributing meaningfully and fully to democratic societies.

The 2021 pandemic-era UK Shout Out report stated that political and media literacy education were "vital for fostering a generation of critically engaged and emotionally resilient citizens who can tackle misinformation narratives and safeguard our democracy" (p. 2). As a concern of citizenship and civic engagement, political literacy, however, is not only viewed as a future concern for students after graduation. It is presented as a critical and current need, one bearing responsibility for instilling and developing democratic attitudes amongst all people, including the key transferable skills. As the Executive Summary of the report asserted, the COVID-19 crisis emphasized an urgency for developing Political Literacy. The initial reaction of global governments, including in the US and in the UK, to the pandemic demonstrated that "politics fundamentally impacts every aspect of our lives" (p. 2). The authors indicate that this impact includes not only our health, but also our jobs and our social lives.

As a concept, political literacy prepares individuals to better comprehend how democratic institutions function. Political literacy equips individuals with the knowledge of diverse avenues through which they can contribute to positive societal change and enhance their personal lives by actively participating in the democratic process. This involvement may take the form of casting votes in elections, establishing connections with both local and national political representatives, or engaging in civic action. Furthermore, political literacy promotes the development of crucial skills such as fostering dialogue and engaging in respectful disagreement, which are essential in navigating a pluralistic society.

Political literacy has been a concern in the United Kingdom since the late 1970s. The Hansard Society report, "Political Education and Political Literacy," speaks to the prioritizing of literacy among future citizens in the UK. The report posited,

> [The] political part of education is primarily, as in any possible moral education, an education in what differing viewpoints are held, who holds them, why, in what contexts and with what restraints. This may seem platitudinous. But how often is political education, if approached at all explicitly, approached primarily through a study of constitutional rules and institutional forms? The cart is put before the horse. (Crick &

Porter, 1978, p. 4)

Today, we are still asking if political literacy is being taught explicitly in school and if so whether the scope and sequence of most curricula still get the cart before the horse. Evidence indicates that political literacy is taught in countries such as Japan and England (Davies et al., 2013). However, the effectiveness (and the motives) of this teaching has remained in question (Breslin, 2023; Brocklehurst, 2015; Ljunggren & Ünemar, 2010). Additionally, although a long-discussed topic, there has been little work in providing a universally accepted definition of political literacy (Alexander, 2009; Dudley & Gitelson, 2002; Lockyear, 2008).

Regardless of the degree to which political literacy is currently embraced internationally, or the particulars of its nuanced meaning, it remains a *glocal* (a local and a global) concern (Fyfe, 2007; Hopkins & Coster, 2019; Milliken & Smith, 2022; Moodley, 2005; Moodley & Adam, 2004). Brooks and Normore (2010) identify political literacy as one of nine requisite critical literacies for being a glocally minded educational leader in the 21st century. Likewise, Eriksen (2020) has called out a need for political literacy among experts and expert agencies.

With this in mind, we questioned both the place of political literacy in K12 curricula and in developing/preparing the school leader for their role as an instructional leader in ensuring the way in which it is taught and in modeling political literacy in decision making. In this study we examine data from a program-based case study at a university in the rural U.S. Midwest. We analyzed the reflections of 30 aspiring school leaders across 3 leadership preparation cohorts concerning how they conceptualize political literacy and what the concept might mean for public school leaders.

## Research Questions

This case study asks: *How do aspiring school leaders conceptualize political literacy in K12 schools?* This primary research question is explored through four secondary questions.

1. How important do aspiring school leaders think political literacy is to their future role as instructional leaders?
2. Do aspiring school leaders feel it is critical to encourage political literacy as part of the culture of the schools that they will lead?
3. Given the political division in the U.S., do aspiring leaders believe it possible to integrate political literacy into curriculum and pedagogy?
4. What are the obstacles that aspiring school leaders perceive in attempting to integrate and implement political literacy?

## Importance of the Study as a Public Concern

According to Cassel and Lo (1997), "because democratic governments attempt to teach political literacy in schools, our understanding of how it develops has practical implications for public education" (p. 317). More recently, Brooks and Normore (2010) asserted, "a politically literate educational leader is familiar both with various formal and informal processes by which people engage local and national issues and the outcomes and consequences of said processes" (pp. 55-56). They argued that "political literacy means developing an understanding of how to act as empowered participants in these processes that influence local, national, and international

decisions and policies" (p. 56).

As far back as the early years of the 20th century, Dewey (1909) reflected that education was a public business. As he articulated,

> It is one of the complaints of the schoolmaster that the public does not defer to his professional opinion as completely as it does to that of practitioners in other professions. [. . .] Education is a public business with us, in a sense that the protection and restoration of personal health or legal rights are not. To an extent characteristic of no other institution, save that of the state itself, the school has power to modify the social order. And under our political system, it is the right of each individual to have a voice in the making of social policies as, indeed, he has a vote in the determination of political affairs. If this be true, education is primarily a public business, and only secondarily a specialized vocation. (p. vi).

Political literacy, then, is arguably integral to effective school policymaking, as it helps educational leaders understand how to engage with and respond to the needs of various stakeholders. As well, political literacy provides school leaders with a framework to analyze and shape policy decisions that benefit schools in the long-term, providing access to resources and support for their stakeholders.

## What is Political Literacy?

Political literacy is defined as skills and understanding regarding a given socio-political text (both content and context), including political messages and artifacts. Denver and Hands (1990) viewed political literacy as "the knowledge and understanding of the political process and political issues which enables people to perform their roles as citizens effectively" (p. 263). Cassel and Lo (1997) conceptualized political literacy as "the potential for informed political participation" (p. 317). They viewed political literacy as "virtually the same concept" as political expertise. Parallels of political literacy were also drawn among the concepts of *ideological awareness*, *political efficacy*, *informed citizenry*, and *civic competence*.

Perhaps the most extensive work on political literacy is Fredic Gale's (1994) *Political Literacy*. Gale defined political *illiteracy* as "the failure of citizens to obtain justice because of their inability to understand what their rights are and, more importantly, how to express their demand for a transformative justice" (p. 2). Although Gale's work focuses on legal theory and rhetorical philosophy, he presented political literacy as "a critical consciousness that will radically interrogate political and cultural institutions and relationships as a matter of course" (p. 156).

Kahne and Westheimer (2014) stressed that political literacy was "a commitment to equity and justice, engagement in local and global issues, and a belief in the capacity of individuals and groups to create change" (p. 34). They reasoned that political literacy should not be limited to mere understanding of an existing political system but should also foster a sense of personal agency, a connection to community, and one's desire to advocate for and address societal challenges. Similarly, Hess and McAvoy (2015) viewed political literacy as "the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to participate effectively in political life, including an understanding of political institutions, processes, and issues" (p. 2). Political literacy, then, is more than mere knowledge of political facts. Like basic literacy, it relies on reinforcing critical habits of mind for decoding, comprehending, and interpreting meaningful political content. It

requires the ability to critically evaluate information and media, engage habits of civil discourse, participate in political processes, and make informed decisions.

Perveen and Awan (2017) extended the notion of political literacy "as an international dimension of citizenship education in the schools' curriculum" (p. 188). They identify ten key elements of political literacy: (1) knowledge of human rights, (2) knowledge of national constitution, (3) knowledge of cultural and linguistic diversity of the society, (4) participation in the public debate, (5) participation in the forum of peaceful protest, (6) participation in interest groups, (7) participation in election/voting, (8) participation in services for community, (9) political efficacy, and (10) any experience of democracy at school level (Perveen & Awan, 2017).

Relatedly, Brooks and Normore (2010) listed political literacy among nine *glocal* literacies necessary in rethinking educational leadership for 21st-century schools. They argued, "Educational leaders must develop a working understanding of politics, a base of knowledge that can also be called political literacy" (p. 55). However, political literacy, as with one's ability to read, may be more than only basic knowledge of governmental processes. Political literacy may be better described as a habit of mind (Costa & Kallick, 2000) or habit of thinking (Dewey, 1910, 1916). Political literacy enables citizens to overcome political limitations by reading situations and scenarios and making informed decisions relating to civic and political activities that relate to those circumstances. This includes but is not limited to decisions related to voting, ways of participating in campaigns and protests, advocating for candidates or stakeholders, and engagement in activism. It may involve the same habits of fluency as those implicated in reading automaticity. This may refer to an individual's proficiency to reflect and act politically.

From a Deweyan perspective, political literacy may be more about developing habits for interpreting textual structures of policies and making important political inferences, drawing relevant and rational conclusions (Author 1, forthcoming). Although it entails the functioning of governments and other political entities and understanding issues facing a political organization or governing body, it also encompasses the ability to critically analyze political information. Therefore, the capacity to distinguish between factual and opinion-based assertions, to analyze the effects of policies on different stakeholders, and to recognize dominant and subtle power dynamics are implicit in political literacy.

## Political Literacy and K12 Schools

The Shout Out report (2021) indicated that political literacy in particular is critical to ensuring that students graduate "with a clear understanding of what politics is and how our society works" (p. 2). As a concern of citizenship and civic engagement, political literacy, however, is not only viewed as a future concern for students after graduation. It is presented as a critical and current need, one bearing responsibility for instilling and developing democratic attitudes amongst all people, including the key transferable skills.

The UK-based report operationalized political literacy as a means to equip "young people with the necessary knowledge of how our democratic institutions operate" (p. 6). The report framed political literacy as a set of diverse methods through which individuals can contribute to positive societal change and improve their lives by actively participating in the democratic process. This involvement may include voting during elections, establishing connections with local and national political representatives, or participating in civic action. Additionally, political

literacy encourages the development of essential skills such as fostering dialogue and engaging in respectful disagreement, crucial abilities in navigating a democratic society. However, political literacy, as a type of literacy, may importantly indicate a set of habits that allow the individual to read and comprehend political discourse, partisan messaging, propaganda, and perhaps even disinformation.

Political education and political literacy have been a concern in the United Kingdom since the late 1970s. According to the Hansard Report (Crick & Porter, 1978), political literacy was considered to be the knowledge, skills, and understanding necessary for individuals to effectively participate in and navigate the political landscape. It encompasses the ability to critically analyze political information, understand political processes and institutions, and engage in informed democratic participation.

Political literacy can be applied to K12 school settings by encouraging educational leaders to utilize their knowledge of the various stakeholders' needs to create effective policies. This includes policies that promote equitable access to educational resources, support for teachers and faculty, and engagement with the surrounding community. Educators can use political literacy to evaluate existing policies and explore new solutions that address the challenges faced by students, families, and those living in the community. By creating an environment where these voices are heard and supported, educators can foster meaningful and respectful dialogue between all members of the school community.

## Educational Leadership and Political Literacy

Political literacy is important for educational leaders because it helps them to be better informed, evaluate policies objectively and make decisions that are beneficial for their stakeholders. In particular, it enables them to understand the various power dynamics and how they affect their stakeholders, allowing them to develop more equitable policies and practices. Furthermore, having a better understanding of the political environment allows educational leaders to anticipate potential changes in the political landscape and plan for them, ensuring that their decisions are made with a long-term perspective (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). This improved level of knowledge and political acumen ensures that educational institutions are well equipped to respond to the needs of their students, faculty, and communities in an increasingly complex and interconnected world (Kahne & Westheimer, 2016).

The relationship between decision making and political literacy is critical for the development of effective strategies for educational leadership. By understanding and considering the changing political environment, decision makers can make informed decisions that will benefit the institution in the long-term, providing students, faculty, and communities with access to educational resources. Political literacy helps ensure that educational leaders are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to navigate the ever-evolving political landscape, giving them an opportunity to address the needs of their constituencies effectively and efficiently (Brooks & Normore, 2010).

With political shifts at the local level, such as seen in decisioning at the local education level regarding pandemic policies and book banning (Dunn, 2022; Oberman, 2022; Pomerance, 2020; Rehn, 2022), the connection between political literacy and how a school's stakeholders impact policy has grown more obvious. With this knowledge, educational leaders can develop

effective policies that address the needs of their students, faculty, and other stakeholders in the community (Westheimer & Kahn, 2004; Kahn & Westheimer, 2016). Political literacy provides educational leaders with the framework and necessary skills to inform and shape policy decisions that benefit the institution in the long-term, providing access to educational resources and support for their constituents.

## Methods

### Research Design

This study employed a case study approach (Stake, 1995) to examine the reflections of aspiring school leaders enrolled in a graduate-level politics of educational leadership course. A single case study is a research design that uses a single case to study a phenomenon. Yin (2017) argued that single cases are relevant under certain circumstances, such as when studying a critical case. According to Yin, the purpose of case studies is to expand theory through analytical generalization, not statistical generalization. He also argued that case studies are only generalizable to theoretical propositions–such as political literacy–and not to populations. In this study, the case being studied is delineated by a principal preparation program in the College of Education of a research university located in the rural Midwest of the United States.

The case proposition rests on the idea that school leaders must have a deeper understanding of the implications and possibilities of political literacy if they are going to lead staff in implementing instructional initiatives (e.g., curriculum development, pedagogical strategies, etc.) that ensure students learn to be politically literate. The logic for linking data to propositions and criteria for interpreting the findings are aspects of the analysis.

By utilizing case study design, the inquiry aimed to gain insights into the perceptions and understandings of aspiring school leaders in a leadership preparation course regarding political literacy and its relevance for their work as instructional leaders. The analysis of the qualitative data sought to uncover obstacles that school leaders may face in integrating political literacy and explore potential strategies to address these challenges.

### Participants

The participants consisted of graduate students from three separate sections (i.e., three program cohorts) enrolled in a politics and policy of education course over a period of three years. The course in which the participants were enrolled was offered respectively during the spring semesters of 2020, 2021, and a summer session of 2022. These individuals were 30 aspiring school leaders who were K-12 practitioners with diverse backgrounds and experiences. Cohort members represented a range of professional educational backgrounds, gender diversity, and international perspectives. Their experiences as K-12 practitioners and their aspirations to become school leaders provided valuable insights for the research on political literacy in educational leadership.

### Data Collection

A researcher-developed qualitative online questionnaire was utilized as the data collection instrument. This questionnaire was administered to volunteering students in a Midwest university who were taking a graduate-level politics in education course for educational administrators. The study focused on collecting and analyzing written responses from 30 aspiring school leaders who provided reflections on the concept of political literacy. Data were collected over three years primarily during the COVID-19 pandemic when students were taking the course asynchronously.

Participants were asked to select and review three of six publications on the topic of political literacy (Figure 1). Hyperlinks were embedded in the options to access the articles. After reading their three self-selected articles, they were prompted by the online questionnaire to reflect on the concept of political literacy then to respond to the questions to openly discuss their reflections. The written responses provided by the participants served as the primary data for this qualitative study.

**Figure 1**

*Political Literacy Readings*

1. Denver, D., & Hands, G. (1990). Does studying politics make a difference? The political knowledge, attitudes and perceptions of school students. *British Journal of Political Science*, *20*(2), 263-279.
2. Cassel, C. A., & Lo, C. C. (1997). Theories of political literacy. *Political Behavior*, *19*, 317-335.
3. O'Toole, T., Marsh, D., & Jones, S. (2003). Political literacy cuts both ways: The politics of non-participation among young people. *The political quarterly*, *74*(3), 349-360.
4. Alexander, R. C. (2009). Political literacy as information literacy. *Communications in Information Literacy*, *3*(1), 3.
5. Perveen, M., & Awan, A. S. (2017). Analysis of Curriculum about Political Literacy as a Dimension of Citizenship Education. *Bulletin of Education and Research*, *39*(1), 187-202.
6. Tam, H. (2016). *Political literacy and civic thoughtfulness*. The Centre for Welfare Reform. [Read/review only a section of your choice from this document]

**Data Analysis**

The data were analyzed using an inductive coding approach (Saldaña, 2021; Stake, 1995). Initially, open coding, using primarily in vivo codes, was employed to initially identify the data. Subsequently, axial coding was used to establish connections between these initial codes. Finally, selective coding was applied to identify code patterns and develop the final emergent themes.

During the process of coding, we followed Yin's (2018) five phases of qualitative data analysis: compiling data, disassembling data, reassembling data, interpreting the meaning. Written responses were coded using inductive procedures, beginning with in vivo and open coding for the first cycle, followed by axial coding to make connections between initial codes. Finally, we used selective coding to identify code patterns (Saldaña, 2021). In this final phase of coding, integral to the identification of meaningful patterns which guided our logic for interpretation, categories were woven together into groups of codes and used to develop the final emergent themes (Patton, 2015; Saldaña & Omasta, 2018).

**Table 1**

*Axial Coding to Selective Codes/Themes*

| Axial Coding | Selective Themes |
|---|---|
| Importance of political literacy as a concept<br>Must be the part of entire schools' knowledge development/sharing process<br>Supports good teaching and instructional leadership<br>Hard to deliver in a time of highly mediated political divide | ***Political Literacy as Essential*** |
| Content/curriculum<br>Pedagogical practices<br>School policies & procedures<br>Professional development | ***Integration In Educational Processes*** |
| Possible but must be thoughtful<br>Social studies and related subjects<br>Direct and indirect approaches<br>Teachers' neutrality and bias<br>Collaboration with stakeholders<br>Dialogues inside and outside the schools | ***Political Literacy as Critical Thinking*** |
| Highly Divided External Political Environment (Impeded democratic dialogue)<br>Parental resistance | ***Challenges and Obstacles to Teaching/Modeling Political Literacy*** |

| | |
|---|---|
| Teacher competence and biases | |
| Respect of differences<br>Open communication<br>Critical dialogues<br>Problem/Case analysis<br>Involve multiple viewpoints (stakeholders)<br>Conflict resolution | ***Creating a Supportive Environment for Teaching Political Literacy*** |

## Findings

Findings speak to a common definition among aspiring leaders that can be stated as: Political literacy does not mean requiring students to take a stance on political issues or to force them to make a distinction between a conservative or liberal viewpoint but, instead, it requires educators to provide students with "the basic skills, understandings, and attitudes required to take an active and well-educated role in a democratic society" (New School Civics, 2013, para. 1).

The themes that emerged from the analysis were then aligned to the research questions to ensure that we could best address the questions driving the study. These thematic units were: 1) Political Literacy is Essential, 2) Integration of Political Literacy into the Educational Processes, 3) Political Literacy as Critical Thinking, 4) Challenges and Obstacles to Teaching/Modeling Political Literacy, and 5) Need to Create Supportive Environments for Teaching Political Literacy.

### Political Literacy is Essential

Participants consistently viewed political literacy as a concept that was essential for all stakeholders, particularly themselves as future leaders. As one participant shared, "I would venture to say that political literacy is more than important but rather vital." Another participant stated, "Political literacy is crucial for having an impact on society in any form." Yet another participant asserted, "I believe that teaching political literacy to students is a responsibility to ourselves."

Teaching and modeling political literacy as a critical element of education is essential for several reasons. It equips students with the necessary knowledge and skills to understand and engage in the political processes that shape their lives. By fostering political literacy, educators empower others to make informed decisions and engage actively as citizens in their school districts and democratic societies. An exemplary quote from one educator was, "The society in the United States is very passionate about politics, but as a whole, the society is lacking a passion for political literacy."

Based on their selected readings, participants viewed political literacy as a phenomenon closely linked to civic competence, and they understood it as a concept that involves understanding political institutions, processes, and values. For them, being politically literate meant individuals were able to engage in informed decision-making, contribute to public

discussions, and actively participate in democratic practices. But they also connected political literacy to critical thinking, media literacy, and information literacy. Participants felt that political literacy encourages critical literacies, enabling individuals to analyze political information, media sources, and political messages. It equips students with the ability to discern bias, evaluate evidence, and form well-informed opinions.

Fostering democratic participation was seen as a major goal of developing political literacy in themselves and their students. Political literacy empowers individuals to participate in democratic processes effectively. It enables them to understand the importance of voting, engage in public discussions, and advocate for their rights and interests. Additionally, as indicated by participant responses, there is a consistent perspective that political literacy is instrumental in countering misinformation and diminishing polarization. Political literacy can perhaps help individuals navigate the complex information landscape, including developing habits needed for identifying disinformation. In turn, this holds potential, at least in the minds of the participants, to curtail some degree of polarization. In an era of heighted and overly mediated polarization coupled with the spread of fake news, political literacy provides a critical lens for assessing information sources, recognizing biased and sensational reporting, and differentiating between basic fact and opinion.

Political literacy is essential for enhancing social cohesion and cultural acceptance. Political literacy contributes to social cohesion by fostering understanding, empathy, and tolerance among individuals with diverse perspectives. It promotes respectful dialogue, the ability to engage in civil discourse, and an appreciation for diverse viewpoints. Modeling and teaching political literacy as a critical element of leading in the educational setting is essential for working with others to become informed, active, and engaged citizens. However, it is also necessary in both the preparation and practice of educators and school leaders. Political literacy fosters democratic participation, counters misinformation, and promotes social cohesion. This is as critical for school-community spaces as it is in the classroom domain. According to one study participant, “It is our duty as teachers to be politically literate and to prepare students to be active in the democratic process.” By equipping students and their teachers with political literacy a commitment can be made to the development and maintenance of democratic societies that thrive on informed and morally responsible citizenry.

**Integration into the Educational Processes**

The integration of political literacy into educational processes of a school, such as curriculum development and pedagogical strategies, involves incorporating political literacy education vertically and horizontally—across various subjects and grade levels. Participants recommended this approach to ensure that students receive comprehensive instruction and exposure to political concepts, democratic values, and civic engagement. But they also hinted at the need for politically literate school leaders and educators as the means of making this possible. As one participant asserted, “I think as instructional leaders, it is very important that we not only encourage political literacy in our teachers and staff, but in the curriculum of the schools we lead.”

Political literacy can be integrated into multiple subject areas, such as social studies, history, government, civics, and language arts only when leadership and teachers are informed

in not only governmental processes but also in the way in which subjects have political significance. By taking an interdisciplinary approach, educators can reinforce political literacy skills and concepts through various contexts and perspectives. One participant shared, “I think given the division in the political landscape of the nation, it is imperative we integrate political literacy into various subjects.” However, another participant indicated that some schools may already be implementing strategies to integrate some aspects of political literacy into class discussion: “Teaching students how to disagree respectfully is a topic my school has been working on.” This integration allows students to see the connections between political issues and other disciplines, such as math and science, fostering a deeper understanding of the subject matter.

It was also important to participants that school leaders stay abreast of current events and “read” those events for context clues. Integrating political literacy involves making connections between political concepts and current events. Teachers and leaders can employ complex case studies and real-life scenarios to increase understanding of the ways in which political decisions impact society. In turn this can influence how school principals make educational leadership decisions in their practice. By analyzing current events and engaging in discussions and debates, stakeholders develop a nuanced comprehension and make inferences of political issues.

Also acknowledged was the role political literacy has in principals’ external leadership. Their ability to engage their community was to a great extent viewed as something dependent on leaders’ ability to decode, comprehend, and infer political situations. Integrating political literacy into the educational processes of a school should involve fostering community partnerships, dialogues, and collaborations. Inviting local politicians, community leaders, and experts to speak to staff and students, organizing forums to better understand government institutions (locally and beyond), and participating in community service projects with a political focus provide all stakeholders, from principals to students, with firsthand experiences and opportunities to engage with the political sphere. This also included using one’s leadership position to create spaces for students to be involved in school-based decision making. This is supported by a participant’s reflection, “Giving students the opportunity to be involved in decision making in and around the school is preparing them for their lives in a democratic society.”

Incorporating democratic governance principles into decision-making processes at the school level also models democratic practices and reinforces the importance of political literacy. Creating a school culture that values political literacy and democratic principles is vital. This can involve establishing democratic practices within the school, such as student councils, mock elections, and opportunities for student voice and participation. For example, “Developing teachers and teaching students how to disagree respectfully is a topic my school has been working on,” and recognizing that leaders can “encourage stakeholders to be involved in a democratic organization and process in a school setting.” By integrating political literacy into the educational processes of a school, educational leaders can cultivate an informed and engaged citizenry. This approach prepares all citizens at all stages of life to actively participate in democratic processes, critically analyze political information and messages, and contribute to the betterment of their communities.

**Political Literacy as Critical Thinking**

This theme developed from the idea that political literacy is closely related to critical thinking as it empowers individuals to engage in thoughtful analysis, evaluate multiple perspectives, and make informed judgments about political issues. Critical thinking is the ability to analyze information, question assumptions, and consider evidence to form well-reasoned conclusions objectively and systematically.

To be politically literate, school leaders need to develop the capacity to recognize bias and to evaluate pluralistic perspectives. A participant averred, "Leaders need to consider concepts globally and locally and how these are connected." They went on to add: "One form of critical literacy that derives from this is political literacy." Politically literate leaders encourage individuals to recognize and question biases in political discourse. By developing critical thinking skills, individuals can examine sources of information, identify potential biases, and evaluate the credibility and reliability of the information presented. This helps them navigate through conflicting viewpoints and make informed decisions. Also, politically literate leaders promote the exploration of diverse viewpoints and encourage individuals to critically examine different arguments and opinions. They create democratic spaces in which individuals assess the validity and reliability of evidence, evaluate logical reasoning, identify fallacies, and determine the soundness of arguments. Through exposure to a variety of perspectives, individuals can develop the ability to critically analyze, compare, and contrast different viewpoints, understand the underlying assumptions, and critically assess the strengths and weaknesses of each perspective. In the view of participants, this would better enable individuals to make informed judgments and form well-supported opinions.

Part of this work requires engaging stakeholders, including students, in purposeful and constructive dialogue. Political literacy encourages individuals to engage in respectful and constructive dialogue about political issues. Critical thinking skills foster the ability to listen actively, ask probing questions, and respond thoughtfully to different perspectives. By critically analyzing and synthesizing information, individuals can contribute to productive discussions and engage in meaningful exchanges of ideas.

Participants shared their understanding that political literacy was about applying analytical habits and skills to real-world contexts. Political literacy, as a critical thinking skill, enables individuals to apply their knowledge and analytical skills to current events and the social, cultural, organizational, and temporal aspects of those real-world events. Participants suggested a need for leaders to examine the implications of political decisions, to evaluate the impact of policies on different communities, and to assess the consequences of different political choices and policies.

Overall, political literacy and critical thinking are intertwined as they both emphasize the ability to deliberate, assess, and critically adjudicate political issues and dilemmas. Political literacy provides individuals with the knowledge and understanding of political systems, while critical thinking equips them with the skills to navigate complex political landscapes and make informed judgments. Together, they empower individuals to engage actively in democratic processes, challenge assumptions, and contribute to the shaping of society.

**Challenges to Teaching/Modeling Political Literacy**

Of the challenges mentioned by participants divisiveness and partisanship were preeminent. The divisive nature of politics and the strong bi-partisanship standoffs that exist in many democratic societies today offer an inordinate deal of concern for educators. According to a participant, "The political divide and partisanship today make it everything but easy to teach political literacy." These contentious and politicized issues make it difficult for teachers and school leaders to navigate political discussions relevant to the classroom without facing backlash from parents, families, and the community. As one participant put it this was an "obvious obstacle." Participants noted having witnessed or experienced numerous newly emerging gray areas—particularly in regard to the subjects of social studies and literature. The fear of teaching a biased political agenda or facing opposition from those who hold opposing political views can hinder the integration of political literacy into the curriculum. In the words of one participant, "Differing biases and fear of teaching a political agenda will likely be two big obstacles for a school leader to overcome before the change in curriculum could occur."

Another obstacle mentioned is the presence of pre-existing biases in students, parents, and educators. Participants stated that many students may already have formed political viewpoints influenced by their families or surroundings, which made it challenging to introduce new perspectives or foster open-minded perspectives. Additionally, school boards and some district level leaders may have their own implicit biases that make it "near impossible" to ensure a balanced and unbiased approach to teaching political literacy.

Resistance to political dialogue or the cultural taboo of discussion of politics (and religion) in public settings was noted by at least a few participants. It was stated that some colleagues in their schools held that controversy, confrontation, or politics generally simply should not be part of the classroom environment. But this challenge also was discussed in terms of a reluctance among some educators to engage in political discussions or teach political literacy out of fear that it would cause a confrontation or conflict that they wished to avoid. Overcoming this resistance and promoting the value of political literacy as an essential element of education was therefore viewed as a significant challenge.

Finally, community expectations and values in which their schools operated posed a challenge to the integration of political literacy. Many participants were educators in conservative areas, and it was suspected that their communities had specific beliefs, political affiliations, or preferences that differed from the content being taught. These disconnects between personal values and curriculum for a democratic society might lead to potential pushback or disagreements. Nonetheless, participants still felt it was crucial for educators and school leaders to face these expectations and find ways to involve the community in the process while ensuring a balanced and inclusive approach.

According to participant responses, addressing these challenges and obstacles requires a thoughtful and proactive approach. Providing professional development opportunities for educators to enhance their own political literacy, fostering an inclusive and respectful classroom environment, involving parents and the community in discussions, and promoting open dialogue about political issues can all contribute to overcoming these obstacles and effectively teaching and modeling political literacy.

**Creating Supportive Environments for Teaching Political Literacy**

Participants suggested that school leaders should prioritize professional development opportunities for educators that focus on enhancing their own political literacy and understanding of effective strategies for teaching and modeling political literacy in the classroom. An example quote asserted, “School leaders need to provide teachers with appropriate training on how to notice their own biases.” Providing resources, workshops, and training sessions can empower educators to navigate political discussions confidently. Participants saw a need for school leaders, like superintendents, to seek out professional development that would improve their ability to guide “the school board in constructing a policy that provides students freedom to express ideas and questions respectfully without fear of discrimination based upon their ideas and concerns.” Without supportive school boards, changes at the building-leader level could be hindered.

Creating safe and orderly schools has long been an aim of educational leadership. Participants in this study saw it a responsibility of a politically literate leader to create safe and inclusive spaces. Principals can foster safe and inclusive environments within the school, places for open dialogue, policy debate, and respectful disagreement about politicized topics. This includes promoting a culture of tolerance, understanding, and respect for diverse perspectives. Creating guidelines or protocols that establish norms for constructive political discourse would be a prerequisite work for school leaders.

School leaders can work with the school board and relevant stakeholders to develop policies that promote political literacy and create guidelines for inclusive political discussions within the school community. These policies can provide clarity on expectations, freedom of expression, and ways to address potential conflicts or concerns. By offering support in these areas, school leaders can create a supportive and empowering environment for educators to teach and model political literacy effectively.

## Limitations and Delimitations

This study sought to understand only the qualitative perspectives of aspiring school leaders (i.e., principal candidates in a leadership preparation program). Investigating perspectives on topics like political literacy can be challenging given numerous factors. The broad scope of political literacy and the complexity of the habits involved make it challenging to evaluate or even fully grasp at the individual level. In fact, it may be impossible to measure the level of political literacy as a subjective concept among school leaders due to its highly subjective nature. As Cassel and Lo (1997) acknowledged early on, “Like all abstract concepts, political literacy cannot be measured directly, but we presume that if people are politically literate, they understand party differences and know basic political concepts and facts” (p. 317). Furthermore, the ever-changing political landscape makes it difficult to assess the habits and knowledge bases necessary for shaping an informed opinion accurately and adequately. Additionally, there is lack of evidence or literature to indicate that preparation programs are working to provide aspiring leaders with the resources or access to political texts relating to decisioning, schooling, and education. This may impact one’s skill in properly decoding, comprehending, and synthesizing politics and policies. Therefore, there are currently insufficient means or metrics for determining a practicing or aspiring school leader’s political literacy or their ability to make in-depth political analyses. Finally, as political literacy includes attitude, assumptions, values, and opinions, it is difficult to

disentangle facts as truth and value-laden assumptions as an individual's reality.

## Discussion

In the globalized contemporary world, political literacy is becoming an increasingly essential habit of mind. Citizens of democracies are confronted with an array of media outlets and mediated messaging that are often misleading and frequently biased. Political literacy provides an individual with the capacity to evaluate information and make educated decisions about the political world around them. As a result, political literacy is often discussed in conjunction with information literacy.

In the context of school leadership, based on insights from aspiring administrators, a potential factor hindering the recognition of the importance of political literacy could be the limited ability of leaders to engage in moral discussions that extend beyond personal sentiments. The prevailing tendency is often to frame certain opinions as either right or wrong, with the perception that holding a *wrong* worldview, or an adversarial opinion, can be perceived by some as dangerous or immoral. Consequently, this inclination makes it difficult to embrace conversations involving divergent viewpoints. From the standpoint of aspiring school leaders, who were experienced teachers, they were able to draw from previously encountered situations where their own values posed challenges in approaching discussions with an open mindset.

For instance, one participant shared an instance when a father made a school-related request for his daughter that the teacher found morally and legally unacceptable to accommodate. Her refusal, based on her personal moral stance, clashed with the cultural expectations and gender roles of the father's family. It was challenging to balance her strong moral convictions with the father's academic request for his daughter. This particular situation speaks to the need for leaders to empathize with and comprehend the difficulties inherent in these types of circumstances. Aspiring school leaders must foster open dialogues that can lead to gaining deeper understandings of other's perspectives, even when they fundamentally challenge their own core beliefs. With this in mind, several recommendations and implications are considered. These recommendations focus on leadership preparation programs, policy making, and future research.

### Implications for Preparation Programs

Principal preparation programs should prioritize the development of political literacy skills and knowledge among aspiring school leaders. This can be achieved through dedicated coursework or internships that explore the role of political literacy in education and provide practical strategies for integrating it into leadership practices. Furthermore, preparation programs should encourage future school leaders to reflect on their own political beliefs and biases. This self-reflection can help principals become aware of their own perspectives and potential impact on creating an inclusive and politically literate environment within their schools.

Also, preparation programs can promote the importance of building collaborative partnerships and coalitions with teachers, parents, and community members to support the integration of political literacy into the school environment. Equipping aspiring principals to engage stakeholders in conversations about political literacy and involve them in decision-making

processes can strengthen community buy-in and support.

Finally, such collaborative efforts put emphasis on the obstacles and challenges acknowledged by participants. Principal preparation programs should address the challenges and obstacles that educators may face when teaching and modeling political literacy. This can include training on managing potential conflicts, addressing resistance, and navigating sensitive or controversial topics. Equipping future school leaders with strategies to overcome these challenges will better prepare them for effectively implementing political literacy initiatives. Regarding these challenges, principal preparation programs should provide opportunities for aspiring principals to apply their learning on political literacy in real-world settings. This can be accomplished through internships, practicum experiences, or case studies that allow future school leaders to observe and participate in political literacy initiatives within diverse school contexts.

**Implications for policy makers**

This study on the perceptions of aspiring school leaders presented several implications for educational policy makers. Foremost would be to prioritize and support the integration of political literacy into educational policies, both in K12 school settings and in principal and school leader standards, like the NELP and PSEL standards in the U.S. or the General Teaching Council for Scotland's Standards for Leadership and Management.

There is a need, particularly given the divisive nature of today's political landscape, for education policymakers to promote the integration of political literacy across curricula and across all educational levels, including graduate level learning. This can be achieved by creating guidelines that explicitly include political literacy as a learning outcome and as a part of the ethics of the profession for educational practitioners.

The development of professional growth opportunities for political literacy is also needed. The allocation of resources for comprehensive and ongoing professional development opportunities for educators and educational leaders can help shift a focus on political literacy. This can include workshops, training sessions, or mentorship programs that equip educators with the necessary literacies, habits, and instructional strategies to effectively teach political literacy in the domains of advocacy, activism, and association. Likewise, policy makers should allocate funding and support the development of appropriate instructional materials, resources, and diverse perspectives for teaching political literacy at all levels. This includes providing access to current and unbiased resources, guest speakers, and community partnerships that enhance the understanding of political systems and issues for all stakeholders.

Finally, policy makers must support collaboration and partnerships to support school leaders in ways of navigating politicized conflicts, controversies, and crises. School leaders must be better equipped to address the discord and disruptions presented by crises (such as COVID-19 and the opioid epidemic), debates on curriculum conflicts (such as the place of creationism versus evolution or sex education), and school-based controversies (like those surrounding the transgender identity of students or the anti-CRT and Don't Say Gay movements). These issues exemplify ethical concerns and dilemmas that school leaders must activate literacy skills to navigate and negotiate in cultivating community relationships.

Ultimately, policy makers must encourage collaboration between schools, community

organizations, and government entities to foster political literacy. This should be done in the spirit of unbiased but accurate information. This could result in the creation of bipartisan and/or unbiased efforts and platforms for dialogue and engagement, facilitating conflict management and resolution, and promoting initiatives that encourage active participation in democratic processes focused on the needs of the local school-community region.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Research can potentially further our understanding of the impact and best practices in teaching political literacy, providing insights to inform educational policies, curriculum development, and instructional strategies that promote informed and engaged citizens in democratic societies. Therefore, we make a number of recommendations where future research is concerned. Though not exhaustive, we feel these recommendations represent a needed body of literature.

First, no longitudinal studies have considered the long-term impact of teaching political literacy or the impact of politically literate leadership approaches on school-community relations. We recommend conducting studies to explore the sustained influence of teaching political literacy on student civic engagement, political habits, and capacity for critical thinking. These studies could help us better understand the influence on students' political attitudes and behaviors as they become active members of society.

Additionally, research could explore innovative pedagogical strategies and instructional approaches that promote political literacy in diverse educational contexts. Studies are needed to examine the effectiveness of project-based learning, case scenarios and simulations, debates and dialogues, and other active learning methods in fostering critical thinking, empathy, community awareness, and individuals' understanding of complex political issues. These studies could focus on leadership and educator candidates in preparation programs.

School culture and climate are important considerations for educational leadership. Therefore, research is needed to investigate the relationship between promoting political leadership and school climate and to understand the relationship between politically literate leaders and leadership style. Research could explore the impact of supportive and inclusive school environments, leadership practices, and policies on teachers' willingness and professional ability to engage in both modeling and teaching political literacy. Such studies could consider the impact of the local, state, and national political landscapes on leaders', teachers', and students' engagement and attitudes towards political topics.

**References**


Apple, M. (1979). *Ideology and curriculum*. Routledge.

Alexander, R. C. (2009). Political literacy as information literacy. *Communications in Information Literacy*, *3*(1), 3.

Author 1. (forthcoming)

Breslin, T. (2023). Rethinking citizenship education for political literacy. In H. Tam (Ed.), *Who's Afraid of Political Education?: The Challenge to Teach Civic Competence and Democratic Participation* (pp. 64-78). Policy Press.

Brocklehurst, H. (2015). Educating Britain? Political literacy and the construction of national history. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, *53*(1), 52-70.

Brooks, J. S., & Normore, A. H. (2010). "Educational leadership and globalization: Literacy for a glocal perspective. *Educational Policy, 24*(1), 52–82. doi: 10.1177/0895904809354070

Carey, J. (2019). Conflict, teachers, and high stakes testing in civic education. In G. L. Samuels & A. Samuels (Eds.), *Democracy at a Crossroads: Reconceptualizing Socio-Political Issues in Schools and Society* (pp. 19-38). Information Age Publishing.

Cassel, C. A., & Lo, C. C. (1997). Theories of political literacy. *Political Behavior, 19*(4), 317-335.

Crick, B., & Porter, A. (Eds.). (1978). *Political education and political literacy*. Longman.

Davies, I., Mizuyama, M., Ikeno, N., Parmenter, L., & Mori, C. (2013). Political literacy in Japan and England. *Citizenship, Social and Economics Education*, *12*(3), 163-173.

Denver, D., & Hands, G. (1990). Does studying politics make a difference? The political knowledge, attitudes and perceptions of school students. *British Journal of Political Science, 20*(2), 263-279.

Dewey, J. (1909). *Moral principles in education*. Houghton Mifflin Co.

Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and education*. Free Press.

Dewey, J. (1927). *The public and its problems.* Swallow.

Dudley, R. L., & Gitelson, A. R. (2002). Political literacy, civic education, and civic engagement: A return to political socialization?. *Applied Developmental Science*, *6*(4), 175-182.

Dunn, J. (2022). Suits challenging book "banning" may be better politics than law. *Education Next*, *22*(3).

Eriksen, A. (2020). The political literacy of experts. *Ratio Juris*, *33*(1), 82-97.

Fitzgerald, J. C., Cohen, A. K., Maker Castro, E., & Pope, A. (2021). A systematic review of the last decade of civic education research in the United States. *Peabody Journal of Education, 96*(3), 235-246. doi: 10.1080/0161956X.2021.1942703

Fyfe, I. (2007). Hidden in the curriculum: Political literacy and education for citizenship in Australia. *Melbourne Journal of Politics*, *32*, 110-135.

Gale, F. G. (1994). *Political literacy: Rhetoric, ideology, and the possibility of justice*. SUNY.

Hess, D. E., & McAvoy, P. (2015). *The political classroom: Evidence and ethics in democratic education*. Routledge.

Hopkins, N., & Coster, W. (2019). The Levellers, political literacy and contemporary citizenship education in England. *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice*, *14*(1), 68-81.

Kahne, J., & Westheimer, J. (2014). Teaching democracy: What schools need to do. *Phi Delta Kappan, 96*(5), 33-37.

Kahne, J., & Westheimer, J. (2016). *What kind of citizen? The politics of educating for democracy*.

Teachers College Press.
Levinson, M. (Ed.). (2018). *Democratic discord in schools: Cases and commentaries in educational ethics*. Harvard Education Press.
Lockyer, A. (2008). Education for citizenship: Children as citizens and political literacy. *Children and Citizenship*, 20-31.
Ljunggren, C., & Unemar Öst, I. (2010, September). Controversial Issue Education and Political Literacy–the Case of Sweden. Conference paper presented at *The IPSA RC 21/29 Conference Citizenship education: Democracy, Culture, Socialization, Media, Aaalborg*.
Mickey, R. (2022). Challenges to subnational democracy in the United States, past and present. *ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 699*(1), 118-129.
Milliken, M., & Smith, A. (2022). The post conflict generation in Northern Ireland: Citizenship education, political literacy and the question of sovereignty. *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice*, *17*(3), 235-254.
Moodley, K. (2005). Antiracist education through political literacy: The case of Canada. In *Critical multiculturalism* (pp. 159-175). Routledge.
Moodley, K. A., & Adam, H. (2004). Citizenship education and political literacy in South Africa. In J. A. Banks (Ed.), *Diversity and Citizenship Education: Global Perspectives* (pp. 159-183). Jossey-Bass.
New School Civics. (2023). *Political literacy - What it is and why we should teach it* [Webpage]. https://www.newschoolcivics.com/political-literacy-what-it-is-and-why-we-should-teach-it/
Nicoli, N., Louca, S., & Iosifidis, P. (2022). Social media, news media, and the democratic deficit. Can the blockchain make a difference? *Triple C: Communication, Capitalism and Critique*, *20*(2).
Oberman, A. (2022). *Superintendents' Perspectives on the School District Budgeting Process at the Onset of the COVID-19 Pandemic and the Potential Effects on Future School District Budgets* (Doctoral dissertation, Delaware Valley University).
Onosko, J. (2011). Race to the Top leaves children and future citizens behind: The devastating effects of centralization, standardization, and high stakes accountability. *Democracy and Education*, *19*(2), 1.
Perveen, M., & Awan, A. S. (2017). Analysis of curriculum about political literacy as a dimension of citizenship education. *Bulletin of Education and Research, 39*(1), 187-202.
Pomerance, B. (2020). Behind the Mask: Analyzing Legal Powers to Mandate Face Coverings in Public Places amid a Global Pandemic. *Albany Law Review*, *84*, 73.
Rehn, J. (2022). Battlegrounds for banned books: The First Amendment and public school libraries. *Notre Dame Law Review*, *98*, 1405.
Saldaña, J. (2021). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (4th ed.). Sage.
Saldaña, J., & Omasta, M. (2018). *Qualitative research: Analyzing life*. Sage.
Schroeder, R. L. (2021). How to ban a book and get away with it: Educational suitability and school board motivations in public school library book removals. *Iowa Law Review*, *107*, 363.
Shapiro, S., & Brown, C. (2018). A look at civics education in the United States. *American Educator, 42*(2), 10.
Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Sage.
Trend, D. (2013). *Radical democracy: Identity, citizenship and the state*. Routledge.

Westheimer, J., & Kahne, J. (2004). What kind of citizen? The politics of educating for democracy. *American Educational Research Journal, 41*(2), 237-269.

Warren, M. E. (2018). Trust and democracy. In E. M. Uslaner (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Social and Political Trust* (pp. 75-94). Oxford University.

Weerts, D. J., Cabrera, A. F., & Van Dorn, K. (2022). *Antecedents of individual civic health*. American Center for Political Leadership, Southeastern University.

Yin, R. K. (2017). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (6th ed.). Sage.

# Principal Candidates' Leadership Growth During A Summer Residency Program

**Beverly J. Irby, Rafael Lara-Alecio, Fuhui Tong, Elsa Villarreal, Matthew J. Etchells, Zihan Geng, Roya Pashmforoosh, Mikaela Spooner, and Shuo Feng**
T*exas A&M University*

Field-based practicum experiences are essential in connecting classroom theory to the real world. In this mixed methods study, we analyzed principal candidates' perceptions of their summer residency practicum experiences via a self-assessment principal leadership competency instrument and virtual semi-structured interviews. We found that principal candidates expressed leadership growth in the following Texas principal leadership competency areas: Strategic Operations, Human Capital, and Executive Leadership. These findings were consistent in our quantitative and qualitative data analysis. Conversely, the principal candidates stated that their greatest leadership challenges during the summer residency practicum involved providing instructional feedback and engaging in difficult conversations. The results of this study may assist principal preparation programs in revamping their curriculum to include a more meaningful residency-practicum experience.

*Keywords:* Principal preparation programs, principal practicum, summer practicum, principal internship, instructional leadership, educational administration

The research described in this article is supported by the U.S. Department of Education Supporting Effective Educator Development Grant Program, Project Accelerated Preparation of Leaders for Underserved Schools (A-PLUS, Grant Award No. U423A17005

School principals manage several roles in their day-to-day jobs, requiring varied leadership skills and behaviors to successfully lead their schools. Of the myriad roles principals take on, instructional leadership has emerged as a leading indicator of school success and positive student outcomes (Leithwood et al., 2004; Munna, 2023). Miller (2011) contextualized instructional leadership as the principal shaping a vision for the campus and fostering an environment centered around learning as opposed to focusing on managerial aspects of the principalship (buses, discipline, and textbooks). As principal preparation programs have streamlined their curriculum design to shift from the principal as manager to the principal as an instructional leader, they have provided high-quality field-based experiences in which principal candidates can lead instructional improvement (Dickens et al., 2021, Pounder & Crow, 2005; Gordon et al., 2016; Pannell et al., 2015). These high-quality field-based experiences allow principal candidates to apply academic theory to practice in real-world contexts.

One particularly important component of a principal preparation program is the internship or practicum experience (Drake, 2022; Goldsmith & Martin, 2009; Darling-Hammond et al. 2010; Orr, 2011). Traditionally, the practicum has been implemented in a face-to-face (f2f) format among a university professor and field supervisor (university mentor), a principal candidate, and a site supervisor (school district administrator mentor). The principal practicum is a principal preparation program course sequence capstone in which the site supervisor, university professor, and field supervisor collaborate to create a customized practicum experience for the principal candidate to apply theory in practice (Faulk et al., 2021; Hitt et al., 2012). Although the structure and delivery of principal practicums can be either f2f or online, both delivery modes require key elements to achieve success (Mullen, 2022; Nicks et al., 2018). Goldsmith and the Texas Council Professors of Educational Administration (2012) stated that the site supervisor, principal candidate, university professor, and university field supervisor can now mentor beyond f2f settings, enriching course theory integration and practicum experience through tools such as Google+, video chat, or other audio/visual conferencing software.

## Literature Review

The traditional literature review includes the following related principal residency topics: (a) principal practicum candidates' perceptions of their practicum experiences, (b) principal candidates' perceptions and leadership growth, and (c) principal residency models. We used an electronic database search across ERIC, Education Full Text, Education Source, and EBSCO, incorporating the following keywords: principal preparation programs, principal practicum, summer practicum, principal internship, instructional leadership, and educational administration. The inclusion criteria consisted of both quantitative and qualitative studies from peer-reviewed journal articles in the United States. Peer-reviewed journal articles published prior to 2005 were excluded due to the lack of literature on principal residencies; it appears that the first published report of principal residencies was by Anderson and Louh (2005) of the New Leaders for New Schools (NLNS).

### Principal Candidates' Perceptions of their Practicum Experiences

Tubbs and Holiday (2009) analyzed perceptions of the principal practicum experience through the perspectives of university field supervisors, site supervisors, and principal candidates. All three groups considered hands-on experiences a major strength of the practicum. Examples of these activities included leadership opportunities in their school workplace, collaboration with the community, budget, and coordination of standardized testing experiences. They confirmed that practicum experiences should consist of real-world school leadership experiences. However, they also acknowledged logistical challenges such as practicum experiences offered synchronically with the principal candidates' regular work duties in school. Thus, they suggested consideration of practicum options beyond traditional principal practicum parameters.

Orr (2011) noted that the practicum remains the most challenging feature to implement in a principal preparation program, as principal candidates' perceptions varied the most across 17 geographically dispersed university-based principal preparation programs from 2004-2007. Orr pointed out the variation in principal candidates' practicum perceptions resulted from their ability to conduct practicums on a full- or part-time basis apart from their teaching duties. For example, one of 17 principal preparation programs did not have a practicum. Five of the 17 programs did offer a practicum in which 75% - 100% of the principal candidates reported they had been given partial release time from their teaching duties to conduct them. Seven of the 17 programs implemented a practicum in which 16% - 33% of the principal candidates were relieved of their teaching duties part-time to complete them. In other words, practicum activities most likely took place during free time on school days/evenings, on weekends, and during summers. Therefore, Orr concluded that a district partnership seemed to have a positive relationship with program quality.

Anast-May et al. (2011) also demonstrated variations in principal practicum design when they interviewed 47 PK-12 principal candidates during the 2010-2011 academic year. Of the 47 interviewed, 40 were required to complete a principal practicum for principal certification while seven were not. With respect to practicum duration, one principal candidate indicated that the practicum was more than one semester; the remainder stated their practicum requirements consisted of up to two semesters. They concluded that principal candidates need opportunities to facilitate change efforts, build relationships with staff, and apply data to implement change for school improvement. The findings emphasized the significance of principals leading instruction for positive student outcomes.

Ruiz (2013) examined the level of principal preparedness in Florida's Preparing New Principal Program to demonstrate Florida Principal Leadership Standards. Senior-level school administrators were surveyed and interviewed; several senior-level administrators commented that principal candidates would have been prepared if they had diverse experiences, strong mentoring/coaching experience, and a differently structured internship. Participants in this study indicated that principal candidates lacked real-world experiences where they could engage in problem-solving and decision-making. Notably, Ruiz (2013) indicated, "principal candidates who were placed in diverse schools with wide gaps in student subgroups struggled immensely if they had not had any experience in this type of school" (pp. 119-120). A hands-on practicum based on a solid foundation of mentoring and coaching is critical to support principal candidates for the real world.

Thessin and Clayton (2013) studied K-12 district and school leaders' perspectives on the experiences and training they received in their principal practicum. Graduates of this program

pinpointed the following three factors that contributed to or would have improved their leadership practicum experiences: (a) the extent to which principal candidates were provided opportunities to lead, (b) assignment to work responsibilities, and (c) mentor support from the site supervisor. In addition, they emphasized the impact of practice-based practicum experiences and the need for full-time administrative practicum experiences. They referred to collaborations between university and school districts to support these full-time principal practicums. Examples of these collaborations included the Wallace Foundation and the Federal School Leadership Program grants.

Salazar et al. (2013) researched the most beneficial components of a principal preparation program according to participant cohort perceptions after completing one year of study. The principal candidates ranked seven components of a high-quality principalship program in order from most beneficial to their learning experiences to least beneficial. The respondents indicated that they prioritized a commitment to instructional leadership and that school improvement was the most essential component to their success as school leaders. The second most beneficial component of a principal preparation program that was crucial to their professional growth was the application of professional standards to professional practice and experiences. Salazar et al. (2013) probed further for examples of specific learning experiences applicable to professional practice: (a) dealing with legal issues regarding teacher contracts and student discipline, (b) completing equity audits, (c) leading team meetings, (d) sharing and applying research-based practices from coursework with teachers, (e) building relationships, (f) conducting critical conversations, (g) acquiring conflict resolution skills, and (h) providing effective feedback to teachers.

Chandler et al. (2013) examined principal candidates' perceptions of an embedded practicum approach in which field experiences were embedded or part of multiple courses rather than a standalone traditional practicum at the end of the program sequence. The candidates indicated an appreciation for the embedded practicum approach and described the efficiency in connecting theory/classwork and practice. Conversely, they cited weaknesses such as a lack of communication between stakeholders, a lack of hands-on experiences compared to observation, and too much repetition. The candidates also emphasized mentors' competency in providing the most current information from the field. The researchers noted that full-time practicum residencies were not an option in state studies, and principal candidates continued to struggle to earn practicum hours outside of their regular school responsibilities.

Zavala (2014) studied 16 South Texas principals' perceptions of the most important components of an effective principal preparation program. Principals were critical of their respective principal preparation programs, commenting that they lacked a broader scope of topics or situations such as practicum experiences, budgetary courses, and curriculum and instructional models for instructional leadership. These principals stated that they would have been more prepared for their first year of the principalship if they had a higher-quality practicum experience. Zavala (2014) concluded that if future principals are to be successful with student learning outcomes, they should experience effective mentoring and perform tasks related to real work conditions during training. Examples of these real work conditions include disaggregating data, evaluating curriculum, and working with teachers to lead instruction.

In 2024, Stosich et al. examined the University School System Program (USSP) which focuses on building district and school leadership capacity, implementing high-impact practices,

and fostering collaborative learning to drive improvements in student outcomes in underperforming schools. By providing targeted support and promoting effective leadership practices, USSP contributes to positive changes in student performance and school success. Furthermore, Irby et al. (2020) examined a collaborative principal preparation program that is socially responsible. They tested a year-long residency with an intensive summer. In a randomized control trial study, they randomly assigned participants to the treatment group of mentoring/coaching and summer instructional improvement leadership residency program and strategic planning and implementation of family/community engagement.

In another qualitative case study, Irby et al. (2023) investigated how pre-service principals enrolled in a university principal preparation program assessed the impact of leadership behaviors and responses to the COVID-19. Pre-service principals shared stories from their leadership practices related to assisting their leadership teams. In addition to the main theme, Assist Leadership Teams, six sub-themes were explored. These include (a) establishing leadership committees; (b) administering virtual leadership processes; (c) improving student performance in the virtual setting; (d) taking over leadership responsibilities; (e) supporting students and their families; and (f) contributing to decision-making processes.

Studying the impact of principal preparation programs is important to streamline program design, inform policy, and provide information to stakeholders (George W. Bush Institute, 2016). For instance, the George W. Bush Institute, in partnership with the American Institutes for Research (AIR, 2016), evaluated the impact of five principal preparation programs on student outcomes and improved the effectiveness of school principals. Findings included: (a) small evidence that student achievement differed in schools led by graduates of the principal programs being analyzed, (b) high-quality, reliable data on principal candidate assignments and experiences were scarce, (c) graduates positively perceived coursework and practicum experiences but had mixed perceptions regarding school district support, and (d) each principal preparation program had both high-performing and low-performing graduates. The George W. Bush Institute (2016) research team suggested a full evaluation of principal preparation programs including multiple criteria that would encompass comprehensive data collection systems (e.g., school climate, teacher workforce data, and principal workforce data), student outcomes, individual principal effectiveness, and principals' career pathways. Indeed, additional research on the evaluation of principal preparation programs is crucial to improve program design and support the continuous PD of principals.

**Principal Candidates' Perceptions and Leadership Growth**

Currently, principals are expected to assume a host of leadership roles ranging from traditional building manager to instructional leader (Lynch, 2012), with research pointing to principal leadership as an integral component of student outcomes (Davis et al., 2005; Stosich et al., 2024). Nevertheless, principals may be underprepared for their roles once they take leadership positions (Petzko, 2008). As such, leadership development and growth are of utmost importance for aspiring principals (Huber, 2004), and practicum and other field-based experiences can provide one method to better prepare aspiring school leaders (Anast-May et al., 2011; Geer et al., 2014).

Professional-related experience is valuable for affecting the growth of aspiring leaders (Cunningham et al., 2018; McCall, 2004). Leskiw and Singh (2007) reviewed best practices in leadership development, finding that action-oriented opportunities are vital for leadership growth. This allows learners to make connections between theory and practice (Leskiw & Singh, 2007). In this vein, aspiring principals report leadership growth following practicum experiences. In addition, Thessin and Clayton (2013) interviewed graduates of a school leadership program who indicated that experiences in leading certain school functions during their practicum were particularly important in preparing them for subsequent administrative posts. For example, this principal certificate program required two practicum experiences: (a) an 80-hour practicum in leading an administrative project under the direction of the site supervisor and university field supervisor and (b) a 150-hour summer practicum in which the principal candidate takes on the role of a full-time summer school administrator. They noted that school district budget cuts in the past few years have not permitted principal candidates to participate in the 150-hour summer practicum experience. Overall, participants reported that the practicum aided their growth in the skills necessary to properly lead a school.

Indeed, several researchers have indicated that aspiring principals have gained leadership skills through the practicum. For instance, Stevenson et al. (2008) tracked aspiring principals' understanding of Colorado state principal standards across their practicum year. Participants self-rated their knowledge pre-, during, and post-training year, showing an upward trend across the time and significantly greater scores post-training compared to pre-training (Stevenson et al., 2008). Similar self-reported growth in standards-based leadership capacity was found for administrative candidates after their field experience in California (Barton & Cox, 2012), Tennessee, Virginia, and North Carolina (Christian, 2011). More recently, principal interns shared that their internship helped develop a bigger picture understanding of school functioning rather than a zoomed-in, classroom-level perception (Jamison & Clayton, 2016), an important quality for an administrator who must balance the interests of multiple parties along with available resources. In all, aspiring and current principals perceive the experience and professional leadership growth from practicum experiences positively.

**Principal Residency Models**

A principal residency is an immersed experience in which a principal candidate is engaged in ongoing school activities and applies aspects of school leadership such as action, reflection, research, and accountability (American Institutes for Research, 2016; North Carolina State University, 2019; Wallace, 2012). A principal residency should also offer a supervisory experience or an explicit leadership role over adults, such as group projects (Pierson, 2014). Residency programs are an investment in leadership capacity, developing a pipeline of principals prepared to lead schools and enhancing student outcomes (Mullenholz, 2015; Palmer et al., 2019). The lack of residency experiences in principal preparation programs can act as a barrier in this pipeline, denying principal candidates the opportunity to apply leadership skills in a practice setting before assuming a principal role (New Leaders, 2014). Researchers have agreed that traditional approaches to principal preparation programs do not effectively prepare principals for today's work environment (Bacon, 2016; Casavant & Cherkowski, 2001; Perilla, 2014). High quality principal preparation and development programs should focus on instruction,

organizations, and using data for change while investing in applied learning, cohorts and networks for collegial learning, and partnerships between districts and programs (Sutcher et al., 2017; William et al., 2022).

Moreover, Parylo (2013) questioned if principal candidates would be well prepared to lead economically challenged school districts if both mentoring and residency costs were cut from collaborative principal preparation programs. For instance, Parylo (2013) conducted a systematic literature search for studies on partnerships in principal preparation programs. The inclusion criteria consisted of: (a) studies predominantly qualitative in research design, (b) manuscripts in the English language, (c) studies situated in the U.S. context, and (d) studies published between 2007-2013. Parylo found a sustainability concern across all studies: the lack of funding to sustain paid full-time practicum residencies after the state, the U.S. Department of Education, or professional organization grants expire.

Further, Braun et al. (2013) indicated that the cornerstone of their principal preparation program was an intensive residency experience with a mentor. Principal candidates stated they were able to see the relationship between knowledge from the university classroom and application in their residency placement. At the same time, they described their relationships with mentors as complicated but vital to their professional development. Notably, the principal candidates rated their mentoring and coaching experience highly across their principal preparation program. They strongly suggested the need for additional research on using multiple mentors and placing principal residency graduates as mentors to add new perspectives to the principal preparation program.

Additionally, Cosner et al. (2015) implemented a three-phased principal certification and degree program. The first phase consisted of a full year paid principal residency program partnered with Chicago public schools, supporting an onsite principal mentor and a university leadership coach. Principal candidates would earn a PK-12 principal certificate after 18 months. The second phase entailed 20 additional hours of coursework and performance assessments. The third phase is an Ed.D., which requires 16 hours of field-based research, coursework, leadership coaching, and completion of a capstone thesis detailing their research in a school improvement intervention.

Furthermore, Kelemen et al. (2016) reported how the University of Missouri St. Louis (UMSL) implemented a paid, full-time residency in the second year of their principal preparation program. Aiming beyond the state-required 300 clock hours of practicum, UMSL partnered with local school districts to provide principal candidates the opportunity to leave their teaching positions and work as administrative interns for one year. Some of these administrative responsibilities include (a) implementing and monitoring both an academic and a school culture program, (b) leading grade level or department professional learning communities, (c) coaching at least two teachers through observation and feedback, and (d) serving in the principal role for one week with support. This paid, full-time residency is dependent upon school district and university partnerships.

Other principal preparation programs, such as Washington State University, NYC Leadership Academy, the Ritchie Program for School Leaders in Denver, the University of Illinois at Chicago, and the University of San Diego's Educational Leadership Development Academy partner with the state and/or school districts to support principal candidates with paid residency experiences (The Wallace Foundation, 2012; Washington State University, 2015). Roberts (2019)

stated the need for researchers to explore a two-year field practicum infused with mentoring to ensure maximum immersion in the principal world. Other examples of residency practicum models include principal candidates enrolled in graduate coursework while simultaneously completing a full-time administrator practicum (Pannell et al., 2015). Hence, residency experiences in a cohort model are a crucial link between theory and practice (NYC Leadership Academy, 2013). Overall, residencies and expert mentoring are investments crucial to the development of future principals.

## Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to analyze the perceptions of principal candidates' residency experiences concerning their perceived leadership growth. The evaluation of principal preparation programs is critical to the development of a strong pipeline of future leaders into the workforce. The results of this study may serve to inform university and school district stakeholders in improving the quality of principal preparation programs. To guide this research, we addressed the following research questions:

1. What leadership skills did the principal candidates report that they gained from the summer intensive residency program?
2. What did the principal candidates perceive as their greatest leadership challenge during the summer intensive residency program?

## Method

### Research Design

The research design for our study was mixed methods concurrent triangulation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017), in which we concurrently implemented quantitative and qualitative data collection, conducting separate quantitative and qualitative analyses. The findings from these analyses were combined to interpret a complete understanding of principal candidates' perceptions of their summer residency practicum experience. We included "procedures for collecting both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study" (Creswell, 2008, p. 642). The quantitative data included the participants' ratings of their leadership competencies. The qualitative data provided in-depth explanatory information regarding the participants' leadership skills and knowledge. A combination of quantitative and qualitative research allowed for a rich understanding of participants' experiences in the summer practicum residency.

### Research Context

The study is part of a federal Project of the Department of Education Supporting Effective Educator Development Grant Program, Project Preparation of Leaders for Underserved Schools (A-PLUS, Grant Award No. U423A170053), the goal of which is to develop successful principals and school leaders. The project involves five different components, and the present study was conducted within Component 1. The aim of Component 1 is to prepare in-service school leader candidates for leading campuses and influencing policy in districts that serve diverse learners,

particularly emergent bilingual (EB) and economically challenged students. This program is formatted as an online cohort model with an accelerated pace of four semesters (including summer) during which participants may remain in full-time teaching roles. Part of the principal preparation program includes a summer residency for principal candidates to practice their leadership skills in a school setting. During the residency, participants facilitated the management, set-up, leadership, and administration of a research-based, literacy-infused STEM summer residency curriculum as well as community engagement.

**Participants**

As part of a component of Project A-PLUS, the 16 principal candidates in the study were enrolled in the four-semester master's degree in educational administration program, receiving virtual mentoring throughout. All participants were women ranging from 26 to 63 years of age. Half of the participants (n=8) identified their ethnicity as European American, and the other half (n=8) identified as Hispanic or Latina. About 69% (n=11) of the participants held elementary-level positions, about 25% (n=4) middle school level, and about 6% (n=1) high school-level positions. The average teaching experience was 7.2 years.

These 16 principal candidates also represented a vast range of school district types as classified by the Texas Education Agency (TEA, 2020). Out of the 16 summer residency placements, five school districts were classified as Other Central City, six were Non-Metropolitan Stable, four were Independent Town, and one was Rural. Per the TEA 2018-2019 District Type Glossary of Terms (TEA, 2020), a school district is classified as Other Central City if it is in a county with a population between 100,000 and 1,019,999 and its enrollment is at least 75% of the largest district enrollment in the county. An Independent Town district is in a county with a population of 25,000 to 99,999 and its enrollment is at least 75% of the largest enrollment in the county. A district is considered Non-Metropolitan Stable if its enrollment is equal to or greater than the state median district enrollment of 897 students. Finally, Rural school districts consist of enrollment of fewer than 300 students or enrollment between 300 students and the state median district enrollment of 897 students, with an enrollment growth rate of less than 20% over the past five years. Below is a demographics chart of the principal candidates who participated in the summer residency program.

**Table 1**

*Principal Candidate Demographics*

| Principal Candidate Pseudonym | Gender | Ethnicity | School District Type | Years of Teaching Experience |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Amy | Female | White | Other Central City | 10 |
| Melissa | Female | Hispanic | Other Central City | 6 |
| Andrea | Female | White | Non-metropolitan Stable | 14 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Teresa | Female | Hispanic | Non-metropolitan Stable | 5 |
| Linda | Female | White | Other Central City | 4 |
| Jaime | Female | White | Other Central City | 6 |
| Carmen | Female | Hispanic | Independent Town | 5 |
| Julia | Female | Hispanic | Independent Town | 5 |
| Kaitlyn | Female | White | Non-metropolitan Stable | 11 |
| Serena | Female | Hispanic | Independent Town | 11 |
| Eliza | Female | Hispanic | Other Central City | 8 |
| Farrah | Female | White | Rural | 7 |
| Jane | Female | White | Non-metropolitan Stable | 6 |
| Danielle | Female | Hispanic | Non-metropolitan Stable | 4 |
| Karina | Female | Hispanic | Non-metropolitan Stable | 7 |
| Maribel | Female | Hispanic | Independent Town | 7 |

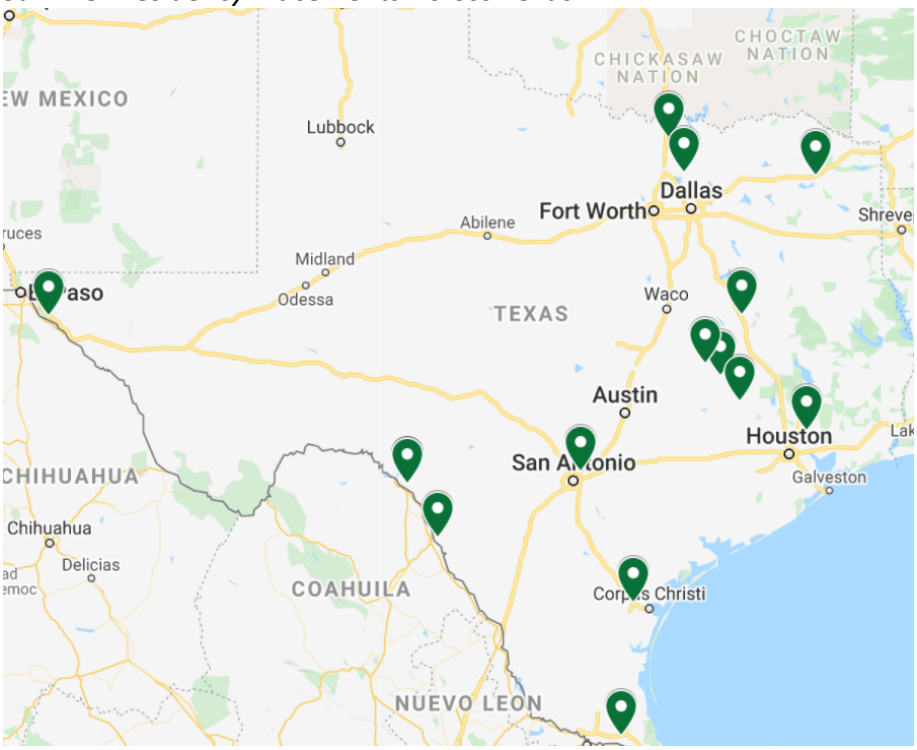
*Note*. Principal candidate names are pseudonyms for research purposes.

**Intervention: Summer Residency Model**

The participants in this study completed their master's degree with specific virtual mentoring and coaching, including the intensive summer residency in which candidates facilitated the management, set-up, leadership, and administration of a research-based, literacy-infused STEM curriculum as well as community engagement. In Summer 2019, we implemented 16 summer residency placements in school districts across Texas. Below is a geographical map representing the locations of the summer residency across Texas.

**Figure 1**

*Summer Residency Placements Across Texas*




*Note*. Geographical locations are represented by markers in green.

Most of the summer residencies were four weeks of instruction, and their duration adhered to each school district's summer program schedule. Project A-PLUS also partnered with the Houston-based non-profit organization iEducate (2024), which identifies and brings together motivated college undergraduates and high school students to help elementary school students in underserved and underperforming schools strengthen their math and science concepts and to nurture, educate and inspire future generations of doctors, engineers, scientists, and artists. College and high school students engaged in a 3-1 ratio with a total of 48 K-2 elementary students in a summer bridge/enrichment school. The iEducate organizational model was altered to be included as the A-PLUS Summer Residency Program as follows:

1. The principal candidate served in a simulated principalship/leadership capacity, organizing all the teachers, the curriculum, training and observing the teachers on the implementation of the curriculum, organizing the program on the campus, initiating and culminating the program
2. 4 college students as lead teachers per classroom
3. 4 high school students (juniors and seniors) as co-teachers per classroom
4. 12 elementary students per classroom for a total of 48 elementary student participants per summer residency campus site

In conjunction with the summer residency practicum program design, the principal candidates participated in the virtual mentoring and coaching (VMC) component of the summer residency. By consulting with an experienced mentor/coach who were former principals from the field, principal candidates were able to reflect on their interactions with teaching staff as they implemented their iEducate A-PLUS Summer Residency. These mentoring and coaching sessions

also provided emotional support; principal candidates could express their feelings of vulnerability in a safe environment. The VMC experience supported principal candidates in their transition from classroom teachers to instructional leaders by providing coaching/mentoring as they mentored and coached their staff while reflecting on their own practice. In turn, the principal candidates were able to apply classroom knowledge to real-world practice, with the VMC to guide their program coordination in a supervised, supportive environment.

**Instruments**

We included a leadership competencies assessment and an interview protocol for data collection. Those instruments are discussed below.

***Leadership Competencies: Knowledge, Skills, and Mindsets (KSM) Assessment***

The leadership competencies instrument was originally developed by researchers of the principal preparation program. The six domains of the State Standards for Principal instrument are: (a) School and Community Leadership, (b) Instructional Leadership, (c) Human Resource Management, (d) Executive Leadership, (e) Strategic Operations, and (f) Ethical Leadership (Texas Principal Certificate Standards found in the Texas Administrative Code §241.15, 2018). The content assessed by the TExES Principal as Instructional Leader examination (268), an exam which is required to be passed by Texas principal candidates, includes 11 principal competencies and 63 sub-descriptors. The residents' assessment was created by the TAMU Educational Leadership Faculty based on the Texas Principal Certificate Standards found in the Texas Administrative Code §241.15 (See Appendix B). Principal candidates ranked their self-perceived competencies on the KSM in a scale of 0 to 5 (with 0 = the lowest level and 5 = the highest level) among the principal competencies and 63 sub-descriptors. The internal consistency of the KSM assessment was calculated based on Cronbach's alpha for our participants. The results showed that Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for each leadership competency scale was between 0.83 and 0.97. According to Pallant (2010), reliability coefficients above 0.70 are acceptable. The table below depicts Cronbach's alpha indices for all eleven competencies.

**Table 2**
*Cronbach's Reliability Indices of 11 Leadership Competencies*

| Principal Competency | Cronbach's Alpha |
|---|---|
| Competency 1. The beginning principal knows how to establish and implement a shared vision and culture of high expectations for all stakeholders (students, staff, parents, and community). | 0.97 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Competency 2. The beginning principal knows how to work with stakeholders as key partners to support student learning. | 0.84 |
| Competency 3. The beginning principal knows how to collaboratively develop and implement high-quality instruction. | 0.89 |
| Competency 4. The beginning principal knows how to monitor and assess classroom instruction to promote teacher effectiveness and student achievement. | 0.89 |
| Competency 5. The beginning principal knows how to provide feedback, coaching, and professional development to staff through evaluation and supervision and knows how to reflect on his/her own practice and strives to grow professionally. | 0.83 |
| Competency 6. The beginning principal knows how to promote high-quality teaching by using selection, placement, and retention practices to promote teacher excellence and growth. | 0.85 |
| Competency 7. The beginning principal knows how to develop relationships with internal and external stakeholders, including selecting appropriate communication strategies for audiences. | 0.96 |
| Competency 8. The beginning principal knows how to focus on improving student outcomes through organizational collaboration, resiliency, and change management. | 0.89 |
| Competency 9. The beginning principal knows how to collaboratively determine goals and implement strategies aligned with the school vision that support teacher effectiveness and positive student outcomes. | 0.90 |
| Competency 10. The beginning principal knows how to provide administrative leadership through resource management, policy implementation, and coordination of school operations and programs to ensure a safe learning environment. | 0.93 |
| Competency 11. The beginning principal knows how to provide ethical leadership by advocating for children and ensuring student access to effective educators, programs, and services. | 0.94 |

*Note.* Range of 11 Leadership Competencies showing Cronbach's Reliability Indices.

### *The Interview Protocol*

We interviewed each participant individually via GoToMeeting, and all participants took part in the interview phase. The interview protocol had 13 questions focused on leadership knowledge and skills gained in the practicum experience, instructional leadership practices, and the greatest strengths and challenges of being a summer program principal. Interview questions were reviewed and adjusted by educational administration experts, and each participant interview lasted 30-45 minutes.

The interview questions included: (a) the experience the participants learned from implementing the summer school program, (b) the leadership skills they gained from the summer school program, (c) the ways they supported their teachers during the summer program, (d) their reflection on the outcome of a lesson during the summer program, (e) the ways they assisted their teachers in establishing classroom management, (f) the most successful aspects of the curriculum, (g) the greatest leadership strength during the summer practicum, (h) the greatest leadership challenge during the summer practicum, (i) the most valuable topics in VMC sessions during the summer practicum, (j) the ways they addressed urgent topics in the VMC, (k) the overall summer residency experience with iEducate, and (l) their suggestions and recommendations to improve the future summer residency program. These questions were considered as a starting point; the principal candidates were encouraged to share and discuss their personal perspectives and real concerns about the summer residency program.

## Data Collection Procedures and Analysis

### *Quantitative Phase*

Principal candidates submitted KSM assessments before and after the summer residency program to determine their developmental progress. An effective set of instructions was provided to all participants prior to completing the pre- and post-assessment. Participants' ratings from the pre- and post-assessment were recorded and organized based on different leadership competencies. Their perceived developmental progress was determined by the differences in their ratings before and after the residency program. Descriptive statistics including measures of central tendency, variability, and frequency counts were conducted using SPSS version 25. Mean scores were calculated based on the main subscale indicators.

### *Qualitative Phase*

The qualitative component of the study included semi-structured interviews of all participants immediately following the summer principal residency. The semi-structured interview data collection method maintains a focused structure for the discussion and allows for follow-up exploration based on interviewers' responses (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Interviews were conducted remotely and were recorded using the online conferencing software GoToMeeting. All participants were asked their permission to record their interviews.

The qualitative data were guided by Marshall and Rossman's (2011) seven phases of analytical procedures: organizing the data, immersion in the data, generating categories and

themes, coding the data, offering interpretations, searching for alternative understanding, and writing the report. First, the interviews were transcribed and checked for accuracy. Three researchers then read the transcripts multiple times to ensure a full understanding of the information. After that, each interview was coded for dominant themes. According to Creswell (2008), "the identification of themes provides the complexity of a story and adds depth to the insight about understanding individual experiences" (p. 521). To obtain a thorough interpretation, a matrix was developed to help categorize and identify the relationships among various themes. The three researchers also recorded reflective memos during the coding process, which were subsequently compared and discussed for any alternative interpretations of participants' narratives. Finally, the analytical report was written by integrating interconnected narratives from different participants.

### Credibility and Trustworthiness

To ensure credibility, which concerns the trustworthiness of the interpretation of participant views (Polit & Beck, 2012), an audit trail was used in the study. Practicum activities, time logs, reflective reports, and interview notes were recorded. Member checking was also conducted to enhance credibility. In addition, data triangulation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017) was used to address validity, which is defined as "a judgment of the appropriateness of a measure for specific inferences, decisions, consequences, and use of the result from the scores that are generated" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p. 130). We collected and evaluated both quantitative and qualitative data from the same group of participants. This substantially enhanced the validity of the study (Lodico et al., 2006).

## Results and Discussion

In this mixed-methods concurrent triangulation study, we analyzed principal candidates' perceptions of their summer residency practicum experience. We concurrently collected quantitative and qualitative data collection, conducting separate quantitative and qualitative analyses. To address the first research question, the quantitative findings were evaluated through the principal candidates' self-assessment of their proficiency in principal leadership competencies, and the qualitative findings were examined from the principal candidates' virtual semi-structured interviews. Next, the findings from these analyses were combined to interpret a complete understanding of principal candidates' perceptions of their summer residency practicum experience. To address the results of the second research question, we provided qualitative findings from the principal candidates' semi-structured interviews.

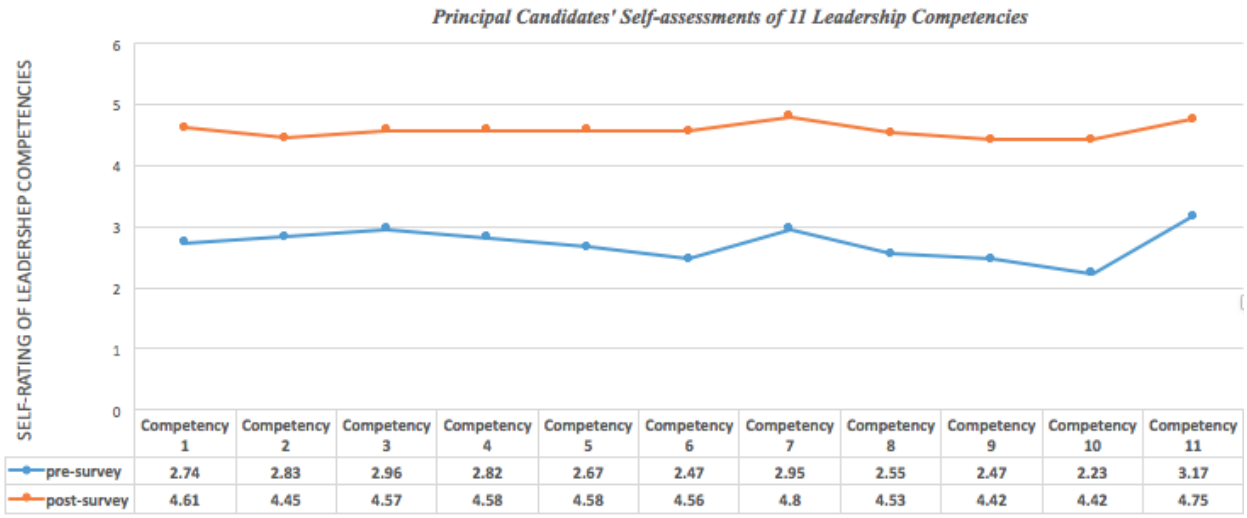
### RQ1. What leadership skills did the principal candidates report that they gained from the summer residency practicum program?

The principal candidates reported leadership development across all 11 different principal competencies over time. The average score of various leadership skills increased from 2.71 on the pre-assessment to 4.57 on the post-assessment. The greatest leadership development was found in Strategic Operations (Competency 10): The beginning principal knows how to provide

administrative leadership through resource management, policy implementation, and coordination of school operations and programs to ensure a safe learning environment, ($M_{difference}$ = 2.19), followed by Human Capital (Competency 6): The beginning principal knows how to promote high-quality teaching by using selection, placement, and retention practices to promote teacher excellence and growth ($M_{difference}$ = 2.09), and followed third by Executive Leadership (Competency 008): The entry-level principal knows how to focus on improving student outcomes through organizational collaboration, resiliency, and change management ($M_{difference}$ = 1.98). Figure 2 depicts the perceived self-evaluation of summer residency leadership competencies from 0 to 5 on a pre- and post-self-report assessment.

**Figure 2**

*Principal Candidates' Self-assessments of 11 Leadership Competencies*




| | Competency 1 | Competency 2 | Competency 3 | Competency 4 | Competency 5 | Competency 6 | Competency 7 | Competency 8 | Competency 9 | Competency 10 | Competency 11 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| pre-survey | 2.74 | 2.83 | 2.96 | 2.82 | 2.67 | 2.47 | 2.95 | 2.55 | 2.47 | 2.23 | 3.17 |
| post-survey | 4.61 | 4.45 | 4.57 | 4.58 | 4.58 | 4.56 | 4.8 | 4.53 | 4.42 | 4.42 | 4.75 |

*Note*: Leadership competencies as stated in Texas Administrative Code §241.15.

Thus, the summer residency program experience facilitated the principal candidates' leadership development across all 11 Texas principal competencies; in fact, the scores for the post-survey across the competencies were more stable as opposed to the pre-survey scores. The greatest principal leadership development was observed in Strategic Operations (Competency 10), Human Capital (Competency 6), and Executive Leadership (Competency 8), respectively.

The principal candidate interview responses were analyzed with respect to the summer residency program's impact on participants' knowledge and leadership skills. In agreement with the quantitative findings, the following leadership themes emerged: (a) Strategic Operations (Competency 10), (b) Human Capacity (Competency 6), and (c) Executive Leadership (Competency 8), as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3**

*Qualitative Findings: Texas Principal Certificate Standards and Competency Examples*

| Texas Principal Certificate Standards | Competency Examples as Outlined in Texas Administrative Code §241.15. |
|---|---|
| Strategic Operations (Competency 10) | Coordination of School Operations<br>Resource Allocation |
| Human Capital (Competency 6) | Coaching and Feedback<br>Professional Development of Campus Staff |
| Executive Leadership (Competency 8) | School and Community Collaboration<br>Organizational Effectiveness |

*Note*. Texas Principal Certificate Standards as found in Texas Administrative Code §241.15.

***Strategic Operations*** **(Competency 10)**

Strategic Operations (Competency 10) refers to the allocation of resources and coordination of school operations to support teacher effectiveness and student learning. The summer residency practicum provided an opportunity for principal candidates to assume the role of a school administrator. As such, they were required to plan instructional resource appropriation, carry out school district policies, and oversee daily school operations to ensure a safe and conducive learning environment. For example, Serena commented that the ability to manage and allocate resources is a leadership skill she acquired in the summer residency:

> *Managing resources and allocating them to the classrooms was one [of the leadership skills] because you know, we had the curriculum …iEducate provided [the curriculum], but then it was just getting those materials that the teachers needed and making sure they had them by when they had to use them and having enough and you know, just managing that and then managing duty schedules.*

Carmen elaborated and added how she had coordinated her summer residency program in synchronous collaboration with other summer programs on her campus.

> *I was the one who would have to go and manage the timing and the schedules and the logistics of duty and logistics of parent pick-up and school bus drop-offs. And so, I worked with the migrant program at our school. We had the bilingual program at our school and then ours. We had the special ed program going on. So, four programs all going at one campus and so managing between the four facilitators, five, because there was another [principal candidate] who was with me.*

Andrea shared that her summer residency program exposed her to the coordination of multiple school programs, something she would have never witnessed as a teacher.

> *The summer school program was probably the best experience I've had out of all my*

*educational years. I knew a lot goes into the summer program, but like...being on the flip side, as a principal, you know, I not only had to train the staff, I had to make sure the busses were coordinated, and the cafeteria was coordinated, and parents were informed, and the kids were happy, and they're in attendance every day, and setting up for the having the end in mind with an awards ceremony and having all that coordinated. So I learned to be a teacher, and turn my roles, reversed, or on the flip side.*

Thus, principal candidates developed leadership competency in Strategic Operations (Competency 10) through the summer residency practicum. In the principal role, they planned instructional resource allocation, carried out school district policies, and monitored daily school operations in a real-world school environment.

***Human Capital (Competency 6)***

The principal candidates were trained in human resource capacity skills during the summer residency practicum. In the role of a principal, the principal candidates were responsible for hiring, training, and scheduling teachers for the summer residency program. The principal candidates had the unique opportunity to step outside of their teacher role and oversee personnel from the principal's perspective. Linda commented:

*The hiring [process] was probably the biggest eye-opener and I've done that before I was a children's minister for 12 years … but on this level it was different. You see what principals do while you're in the classroom, so it was interesting to be on the other side of it.*

Jamie reported experiences with hiring teachers, observing instruction, and building teacher capacity, a role beyond their realm of the teaching classroom:

*It puts you in a different leadership role, having to recruit the teachers, interview the teachers, hire the teachers, work with their payroll, and reach out to parents but not as the classroom teacher … being the observer of the teachers, and leading and guiding them through their curriculum. All those things put me in a different role.*

In addition, the principal candidates examined the execution of lesson plans, conducted debriefing and reflective meetings with teachers, supervised teachers with classroom management, and guided teachers in meeting the specific needs of English learners (ELs) and children with learning challenges. For example, Farrah expressed that her greatest takeaways from the summer residency program were the classroom observations and instructional coaching experiences:

*So, I did walk in a lot, and they were very receptive to your advice and to your coaching pieces. I did walk in often and talk to them about how things were being implemented in the classroom, what would work better, and what I have seen that works. So that's got to be the biggest piece that I gained from the summer school.*

Many participants noted that the summer residency program fostered the development of their communication and collaboration skills by allowing them to take ownership in the success of the summer school program. For example, Maribel commented:

*I can collaborate with the teachers. I always told them, you know, whenever I would go into classrooms, I always told them that don't act like I'm here to try to see what you're*

*doing wrong. I'm here to help you and for me to grow as well. . . I perceived [that] as my greatest strength.*

Hence, the principal candidates developed human resource capacity leadership skills in their coordination of hiring, training, and scheduling teachers for the summer residency program. The principal candidates had a unique opportunity to observe instruction and provide instructional coaching to enhance teacher professional development.

***Executive Leadership (Competency 8)***

In the simulated role of a principal, the principal candidates focused on effective communication and collaboration with internal and external stakeholders. Jamie stated that she learned how to collaborate with different colleagues on campus as well as district-wide stakeholders to organize the entire summer program:

*It [the residency program] threw you into a leadership role … It forced me to contact people who are high up in our district. It forced me to contact and work with our bus barn and work with our summer school assistant … It made me reach out to other people in the district that I wouldn't normally have reached out to and worked with*.

Moreover, the summer residency practicum program trained principal candidates in establishing partnerships with the community. For example, Farrah commented on learning the importance of community engagement in her summer residency experience.

*It's just a great opportunity to learn about community involvement [and] how important that is in forming a good school because, without good community involvement, it's difficult to have a successful school. And getting just completely different than the open house is getting my teachers to collaborate and it's easy for them to kind of go, 'I know what I'm going to do, you know in my room,' but getting them to collaborate. And so, towards the end I wanted them to all pick a science unit and then a unit to showcase at the open house and just watch and kind of learn to work together and learn to communicate and talk to one another and say no this is what I'm going to do, or I'd rather do it this way. And those were good experiences to watch and kind of guide instead of being in the mix, just kind of making myself step back and let the process take place naturally and then guided as it needed.*

Overall, the principal candidates stated that the summer residency practicum program experience helped them develop a real-world understanding of the relationship between school and community to support student learning. By the end of the program, the principal candidates felt much more confident in their ability to engage with the community and felt prepared for their future roles as school principals.

In our quantitative findings, we interpreted how the principal candidates perceived their leadership growth across all 11 Texas principal competencies. In agreement with previous studies (Barton & Cox, 2012; Christian, 2011; Stevenson et. al., 2008), the summer residency principal candidates self-reported leadership growth before and after the practicum residency experience. Specifically, the principal candidates in this summer residency experienced the greatest principal leadership development over three Texas principal competencies: Strategic Operations (Competency 10), Human Capital (Competency 6), and Executive Leadership (Competency 8), respectively. These three Texas principal competencies also emerged from the qualitative data,

thus encompassing leadership skills gained by Anas-May et al. (2011) and confirming that principal practicums should provide opportunities to build relationships with staff and lead instruction for positive student outcomes. With an extended practicum and opportunity for immersive, field-based experiences, practicum candidates will be better equipped as they transition into first-year principal roles.

**RQ2. What did the principal candidates perceive as their greatest leadership challenge during the summer intensive residency practicum program?**

For the second research question, we present two qualitative findings from the principal candidates' interview responses: providing instructional feedback and engaging in critical conversations.

***Providing Instructional Feedback***

Providing instructional feedback was perceived as the greatest leadership challenge in coordinating the summer residency program. For instance, one principal candidate expressed difficulty with delivering constructive feedback out of concern that it could be interpreted as too harsh. Jane elaborated on her experience of providing feedback to teachers, reflecting on her choice of words and her lack of experience providing instructional feedback:

> *It is hard to come to those teachers and give them constructive feedback because, for me, sometimes it can be taken harshly, and you just have to be careful about how you word it. And I haven't had to experience that yet.*

Teresa revealed similar struggles addressing instructional issues with teachers after conducting formal classroom observations. She further described giving constructive feedback as the most challenging leadership skill area:

> *So, when I did their observations, I had to do a formal observation. I don't like to have to tell you about an area of challenge growth for you, would be trying to say it in a way that doesn't sound like I am looking or picking on you or looking for something, but I needed to address a couple of things that I saw that would be worked on and that's probably the hardest area for me. Like I don't want to come across as I'm telling you something negative about you, but this is an area of growth and it's something that you could do to make yourself even better. So, I guess I like to tell you the good things. So, it's hard to tell you the things that you need to work on in a way. You know what I mean? I mean, I just don't want to come across as a negative, very challenging area.*

This principal candidate voiced an intention to offer suggestions for the teacher's professional development without coming across negatively. Hence, providing instructional feedback to teachers was perceived as the greatest leadership challenge in implementing the summer residency program.

***Engaging in Critical Conversations***

Another emergent theme across the principal candidate interviews was having critical conversations with staff members. For example, one of the principal candidates recounted approaching a staff member about expectations for dressing professionally. She also had to address attendance and punctuality with another staff member. Carmen expanded on her experiences:

> *It's the human element part. It's the kids [teacher leaders/college tutors] that showed up with the ripped jeans, even though I told them not to. You know, and then must have those conversations where they have to go home and change. Or being late to duty and you must have those difficult conversations about you know, 'I was at your duty station you weren't there. You need to be there; [that is] how important it is. I think that was the most challenging part.*

Thus, this principal candidate considered these critical conversations to be difficult.

Eliza outlined challenges with engaging in difficult conversations in her administrator role and balancing her ability to navigate relationships with her staff. She questioned where to draw the line between being an administrator and a co-worker:

> *My biggest challenge was to keep myself at a distance to find the balance between where I wanted to be as a leader and as part of the group to find my place. Since I've never been in that position, it's very easy to want to be friends. That's not the relationship that I wanted as the authority figure that I wanted to create for myself and in my future situations. So, trying to figure out the balance of how deep to develop relationships and where to draw the line between administrator, friend, and co-worker. . . How do I balance this?*

This principal candidate's struggles with navigating her new leadership role and relationships with coworkers reflect other principal candidates' challenges implementing the summer residency in the areas of: (a) providing instructional feedback and (b) engaging in difficult conversations.

**Discussion of Research Question Two**

The principal candidates' stated challenges of providing instructional feedback to teachers and engaging in difficult conversations to support research conducted by Salazar et al. (2013) regarding the significance of principal residencies providing applicable learning experiences such as building relationships, conducting critical conversations, acquiring conflict resolution skills, and providing effective feedback to teachers. Leskiw and Singh (2007) concluded that action-oriented opportunities are crucial for leadership development and further bridge connections between theory and practice. In addition, Thessin and Clayton (2013) stressed the need for full-time administrative practicum experiences and the importance of establishing partnerships between university and school districts to support full-time principal practicums. Chandler et al. (2013) cited embedded field experiences as maximizing efficiency in connecting theory and practice. As Tubbs and Holiday (2009) addressed logistical challenges to implementing a principal residency in the workplace, our intensive summer residency practicum model provided students an opportunity to apply theory to practice in a real-world environment without the logistical constraints of principal candidates' regular work duties. Similarly, Orr (2011) noted challenges in implementing a principal residency on a full or part-time basis apart from the candidate's regular

duties. We addressed these challenges by partnering with school districts and a non-profit agency to provide a full-time residency experience across four weeks.

## Implications for Principal Summer Residency

The principal summer residency provided a real-world leadership experience beyond the stand-alone principal practicum offered in traditional principal preparation programs. To replicate our online principal residency model, we recommend the following:

1. Establish a school district partnership to collaborate on implementing an online summer residency. We concluded that coordinating a successful online summer residency across the state of Texas, with small schools to large schools, required a school district partnership to ensure the principal candidate would experience the simulation of a full-time, job-embedded principal residency.
2. Employ an iEducate program or a similar one in which high school and college students are in the summer residency program. Through a non-profit agency, our principal candidates recruited, interviewed, ran criminal background checks on, and employed college and high school students to mentor the elementary students under the leadership and coordination of our principal candidates.
3. Include a VMC component to guide principal candidates in their summer program implementation. In our VMC model, we require that the virtual mentor/coach has the extensive principal experience and the ability to help the principal candidate navigate the leadership expectations of leading a summer school program.
4. Engage parents and the community in summer residency programs. After the summer residency program, the principal candidates should invite parents and other community members to a student showcase. The principal candidates should partner with the local community to donate goods and services to the student showcase event.

The results can inform education policymakers and leading principal preparation faculty about a principal residency practicum model that can be successfully run during the summer months. The results of this study may inform principal preparation programs as they review their respective residency practicum program designs. As school districts recruit principal candidates for their campuses, they may be able to compare the residency program experiences across different university principal preparation programs to recruit the most highly qualified principal candidates who are equipped with rich, in-depth, field-based leadership experiences.

We have provided data on the perceptions of principal candidates regarding their summer residency practicum experiences. These principal candidates were engaged in elementary school placements serving emergent bilingual and/or economically challenged students. The summer residency practicum consisted of six weeks. This principal residency model serves to provide a real-world environment where the principal candidate can apply multiple leadership skills in a real-life context.

## Considerations for Future Study

Based on the results of this study, we considered the outcomes of a six-week summer principal residency experience. Since the summer school setting operates at a reduced staff and student building capacity, a calendar year residency would simulate a more real-world experience; however, if there can be no year-long residency, a simulated principalship residency in the summer appears to be able to provide support for building leadership capacity. However, studying the differences between the summer residency experience described in this paper and a year-round residency experience would add to the body of knowledge about training principal candidates to be successful in the field.

We would also recommend extending the scope of the residency from strictly elementary school placement to placements in middle schools, high schools, and alternative schools such as disciplinary alternative education placements (DAEP), optional flexible school day programs, and early college campuses. Principal candidates' simulated experiences at these alternative school campuses may further enhance their leadership development.

## Funding

The research described in this article was supported by the U.S. Department of Education Supporting Effective Educator Development Grant Program, Project Accelerated Preparation of Leaders for Underserved Schools (A-PLUS, Grant Award No. U423A170053).

## References


American Institutes for Research. (26 May, 2016). *Ready to lead: Designing residencies for better principal preparation*. American Institutes for Research. https://www.air.org/resource/ready-lead-designing-residencies-better-principal-preparation

Anast-May, L., Buckner, B., & Geer, G. (2011). Redesigning principal internships: Practicing principals' perspectives. *The International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation, 6*(1), 1-7. https://cnx.org/contents/ojWlrjGZ@3/Redesigning-Principal-Internships-Practicing-Principals-Perspectives

Anderson, C., & Louh, R. (2005). A new look at leadership development for urban schools: A rigorous three-year program gives aspiring urban principals the leadership tools they need to succeed. *Principal*, *84*(5), 26-29.

Bacon, J. C. (2016). Readiness to lead: Novice school principals' perceptions of the internship experience on their preparedness to assume school leadership roles (Publication No. 10162138)[Doctoral Dissertation, University of Arkansas at Little Rock]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

Braun, D., Billups, F. D., Gable, R. K. (2013). Transforming equity-oriented leaders: Principal Residency Network Program evaluation. *NCPEA Education Leadership Review, 14*(1), 161-181.

Casavant, M. D. & Cherkowski, S. (2001). Effective leadership: Bringing mentoring and creativity to the principalship. *NAASP Bulletin, 85*(624), 71-81.

Chander, M., Chan, T. C., & Jiang, B. (2013). The effectiveness of an embedded approach to practicum experiences in educational leadership: Program candidates' perspectives. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, 2*5(1), 79-91.

Cosner, S., Tozer, S., Zavitkovsky, P., & Whalen, S. P. (2015). Cultivating exemplary school leadership preparation at a research-intensive university. *Journal of Research on Leadership Education, 10*(1), 11-38. https://doi.org/10.1177/1942775115569575

Creswell, J. (2008). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*. Pearson Education, Inc.

Creswell, J. W., & Clark, V. L. P. (2017). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. Sage publications.

Cunningham, K. M. W., VanGronigen, B. A., Tucker, P. D., & Young, M. D. (2019). Using powerful learning experiences to prepare school leaders. *Journal of Research on Leadership Education*, *14*(1), 74-97. https://doi.org/10.1177/1942775118819672

Darling-Hammond, L., Meyerson, D., LaPointe, M., & Orr, M. T. (2010). *Preparing principals for a changing world*. Jossey-Bass.

Davis, S., Darling-Hammond, L., LaPointe, M., & Meyerson, D. (2005). Developing successful principals. *Stanford Educational Leadership Institute, (Ed.). Retrieved February 20*, 2019.

Dickens, K. N., McBrayer, J. S., Pannell, S., & Fallon, K. (2021). Evidence-based leadership preparation program practices: From the perceptions of Georgia rural school leaders. *Georgia Educational Researcher*, *18*(2), 52-71. DOI: 10.20429/ger.2021.180203

Drake, T. A. (2022). Learning by doing: A daily life study of principal interns' leadership activities during the school year. *Journal of Research on Leadership Education*, *17*(1), 24-54. https://doi.org/10.1177/1942775120941549.

Faulk, N., Harvey, T., Welch, B., & Martin, G. E. (2021). A Comparative analysis of the impact of university field supervision on administrative mindsets: Considerations for redesign. *School Leadership Review*, *16*(1), 5.

George W. Bush Presidential Center, G. W. B. I. (2016). *Following the leaders: An analysis of graduate effectiveness from five principal preparation programs* (ED 570673). ERIC In George W. Bush Institute, Education Reform Initiative. George W. Bush Institute, Education Reform Initiative. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED570673

Goldsmith, L. & Martin, G. E. (2009). Developing and implementing an effective online educational leadership internship. *International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation, 4*(1), 1-12. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1068484.pdf

Goldsmith, L. & Texas Council of Professors of Educational Administration. (2012). A case for an online educational administrator practicum experience. *School Leadership Review*, *7*(2), 2-10. https://scholarworks.sfasu.edu/slr/vol7/iss2/3

Gordon, S. P., Oliver, J., & Solis, R. (2016). Successful innovations in educational leadership preparation. *International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation, 11*(2), 51-70. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1123995.pdf

Hitt, D. H., Tucker, P. D., & Young, M. D. (2012). *The professional pipeline for educational leadership. A white paper developed to inform the work of the National Policy Board for Educational Administration*. University Council for Educational Administration. http://www.ucea.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/PipelineWhitePaper_web.pdf

Huber, S. G. (2004). School leadership and leadership development: Adjusting leadership theories and development programs to values and the core purpose of school. *Journal of Educational Administration, (42)*6, 669-684.

iEducate. (2024). *About iEducate*. LinkedIn. https://www.linkedin.com/company/ieducateusa/

Irby, B. J., Lara-Alacio, R., & Tong, F. (2017). Accelerated preparation of leaders for underserved schools: Building instructional capacity to impact diverse learners (U423A170053). Funded Grant, U.S. Department of Education SEED Program.

Irby, B. J., Lara-Alecio, R., Tong, F., Abdelrahman, N., & Torres, M. (2020). A model for preparing academic leaders (Project PAL) for teachers of English learners building instructional capacity within a socially responsible principal preparation program. *International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation*, *15*(1), 29-47.

Irby, B. J., Abdelrahman, N., Lara-Alecio, R., Tong, F., & Elfaragy, H. (2023). Pre-service principals in a principal preparation program: Leadership practices as a response to COVID-19. *Journal of School Leadership, 33*(6), 557-578. doi:10.1177/10526846231174148

Kelemen, M., Fenton, B., & New Leaders. (2016). Redesigning principal preparation: A work in progress at the University of Missouri St. Louis (UMSL). New Leaders. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED585201.pdf

Lashway, L. (2003). Transforming principal preparation. ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management. No.165. http://purl.access.gpo.gov/GPO/LPS45040

Leithwood, K., Louis, K. S., Anderson, S., Wahlstrom, K., Minnesota Univ., M. C. for A. R. and E. I., & Ontario Inst. for Studies in Education, T. (2004). How leadership influences student learning. Review of research. In *The Wallace Foundation*. The Wallace Foundation.

Leskiw, S.-L., & Singh, P. (2007). Leadership development: Learning from best practices. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal, 28*(5), 444–464. https://doi.org/10.1108/01437730710761742

Lodico, M.G., Spaulding, D.T, & Voegtle, K.H. (2006). *Methods in educational research: From theory to practice*. Jossey-Bass.

Lynch, M. (2012). *A guide to effective school leadership theories*. Routledge.

Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. (2011). *Designing qualitative research*. Sage Publications, Inc.

McCall Jr, M. W. (2004). Leadership development through experience. *Academy of Management Perspectives, 18*(3), 127-130.

McMillan, J. H., & Schumacher, S. (2006). *Research in education: Evidence-based inquiry*. Pearson Education, Inc.

Miller, W. (2011). Your district's pipeline for principals. *School Administrator*, 68(11), 40-41.

Mullen, C. A. (2020). Does modality matter? A comparison of aspiring leaders' learning online and face-to-face. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, *44*(5), 670-688. https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2019.1576859

Munna, A. S. (2023). Instructional leadership and role of module leaders. *International Journal of Educational Reform*, *32*(1), 38-54. https://doi.org/10.1177/10567879211042321

Mullenholz, G. (2015). Policy and Practice: Reflections on the principalship. *National Association of Elementary School Principals, 39*(3), https://www.naesp.org/communicator-november-2015/policy-and-practice-reflections-principalship

New Leaders. (2014). *Prioritizing leadership: New leaders' federal policy platform* (ED559351). ERIC https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED559351

Nicks, B., Thibodeaux, T., & Martin, G. (2018). Student perceptions of enhancing the internship experience for online principal preparation programs. *School Leadership Review, 13*(1), 22-31.

North Carolina State University. (2019). *NELA principal residency handbook*. North Carolina State University. https://nela.ced.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/NELA-PRINCIPAL-RESIDENCY-HANDBOOK-2019-2020-NCSU-Updated-08-7-19.pdf

NYC Leadership Academy. (2013). *Literature review of principal preparation programs*. NYC Leadership Academy, Inc. https://www.nycleadershipacademy.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/residency-design-literature-review.pdf

Orr, M. T. (2011). Pipeline to preparation to advancement: Graduates' experiences in, through, and beyond leadership preparation. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 47*(1), 114-172. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000010378612

Palmer, D. L., Almager, I. L., & Valle, F. (2019). Designing our principal pipeline from a job-embedded residency. *School Leadership Review, 14*(2), 1-18. https://scholarworks.sfasu.edu/slr/vol14/iss2/8

Pannell, S., Peltier-Glaze, B. M., Hayes, I., Davis, D., & Skelton, D. (2015). Evaluating the effectiveness of traditional and alternative principal preparation programs. *Journal of Organizational & Educational Leadership, 1*(2), 1-30. https://digitalcommons.gardner-

webb.edu/joel/vol1/iss2/3/?utm_source=digitalcommons.gardner-webb.edu%2Fjoel%2Fvol1%2Fiss2%2F3&utm_medium=PDF&utm_campaign=PDFCoverPages

Parylo, O. (2013). Collaborative principal preparation programs: A systematic review and synthesis of qualitative research. *International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation, 8(*2), 177-191.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Sage.

Perilla, N. (2013). Leading the future: Rethinking principal preparation and accountability frameworks. *Harvard Journal of Hispanic Policy, 26,* 59-69.

Petzko, V. (2008). The perceptions of new principals regarding the knowledge and skills important to their initial success. *NASSP Bulletin*, *92*(3), 224-250.

Pierson, A. (2014). *What makes a successful principal? Incorporating school principal background in state and district policy* [Doctoral dissertation, Pardee RAND Graduate School]. The RAND Corporation. https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/rgs_dissertations/RGSD300/RGSD336/RAND_RGSD336.pdf

Polit, D.F., & Beck, C.T. (2012). *Nursing research: Generating and assessing evidence for nursing practice*. Lippincott Williams and Wilkins.

Pounder, D., & Crow, G. (2005). Sustaining the pipeline of school administrators. *Educational Leadership, 62*(8), 56-60.

Roberts, G. (2019) Usefulness of field experience component of a principal preparation program [Doctoral dissertation, Walden University], *Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies*. https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations/7503/

Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (2005). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data* (2nd ed.). Sage.

Ruiz, E. (2013). Senior-level school district administrators' perceptions of the effectiveness of a Florida Preparing New Principals Program [Doctoral dissertation, University of Central Florida], *Electronic Theses and Dissertations* https://stars.library.ucf.edu/etd/2983/?utm_source=stars.library.ucf.edu%2Fetd%2F2983&utm_medium=PDF&utm_campaign=PDFCoverPages

Salazar, M. J., Pazey, B. L., & Zembik, M. K. (2013). What we've learned and how we've used it: Learning experiences from the cohort of a high-quality principalship program. *Journal of Research on Leadership Education, 8*(3), 304-329.

Sutcher, L., Podolsky, A., & Espinoza, D. (2017). *Supporting principals' learning: Key features of effective programs*. Learning Policy Institute. https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Supporting_Principals_Learning_REPORT.pdf

Texas Education Agency. (2019). *Texas Examination of Educator Standards (TExES) program preparation manual: Principal as an instructional leader* (268). yhttps://www.tx.nesinc.com/content/docs/268PrepManual.pdf

Texas Education Agency (2020). *District type glossary of terms, 2018-2019*. Texas Education Agency. https://tea.texas.gov/reports-and-data/school-data/district-type-data-search/district-type-glossary-of-terms-2018-19#teadist

Thessin, R. A., & Clayton, J. (2013). Perspectives of school leaders on the administrative internship. *Journal of Educational Administration*, *51*(6), 790-811. https://doi.org/10.1108/JEA-12-2011-0113

Tubbs, J. E., & Holiday, H. E. (2009). Educational leadership preparation: What supervisors, candidates, and mentors said. *Journal of College Teaching & Learning*, *6*(5), 17-30.

The Wallace Foundation (2012). *The making of the principal: Five lessons in leadership training*. The Wallace Foundation. https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/The-Making-of-the-Principal-Five-Lessons-in-Leadership-Training.pdf

Washington State University. (2015). *Residency principal and program administrator internship and certification handbook*. Washington State University. https://education.wsu.edu/documents/2015/08/principal-certification-2014-2015.pdf/

Williams, S. S., Romans, R., Perrone, F., Borden, A. M., & Woodrum, A. (2022). A case study of lessons learned from a decade of success in preparing and supporting quality school leadership through district–university partnerships. *Journal of School Leadership*, *32*(1), 51-76. DOI:10.1177/1052684620980362.

Zavala, F. A. (2014) *Principals' perceptions of the most important components in an effective principal preparation program* [Doctoral dissertation, Walden University], Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies. https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations/26/

## Appendix A

### Summer Residency Program Background

Part of the principal preparation program includes a summer residency for principal candidates to practice their leadership skills in a school setting. Most of the summer residencies were four weeks of instruction adhering to each school district's summer program schedule. Project A-PLUS also partnered with iEducate, a non-profit organization that identifies and brings together motivated undergraduate college students and high school students to help elementary school students in underserved and underperforming schools strengthen their math and science concepts and to nurture, educate and inspire future generations of doctors, engineers, scientists, and artists. College and high school students engaged in a 3-1 ratio with a total of 48 K-2 elementary students in a summer bridge/enrichment school. The organizational model is as follows:

- 4 college students as lead teachers per classroom
- 4 high school students (juniors and seniors) as co-teachers per classroom
- 12 elementary students per classroom for a total of 48 elementary student participants per summer residency campus site

This past summer, 16 summer practicum residencies were implemented in the following school districts:

1. Bryan ISD (two residency placements)
2. Buffalo ISD
3. Calallen ISD
4. Eagle Pass ISD
5. Gainesville ISD
6. Hearne ISD
7. Heritage Academy Charter Schools
8. Huffman ISD
9. La Feria ISD
10. Little Elm ISD
11. Mount Pleasant ISD
12. Navasota ISD
13. San Felipe Del Rio Consolidated ISD (two residency placements)
14. Tornillo ISD

## Appendix B

### Principal Candidate Assessment of Texas Principal Competencies and Skills

| **Intern Name/Date:** | Rating 0 to 5 |
|---|---|
| **DOMAIN I —SCHOOL CULTURE (School and Community Leadership)** | |
| **Competency 001**<br>The beginning principal knows how to establish and implement a shared vision and culture of high expectations for all stakeholders (students, staff, parents, and community). | |
| **Knowledge and Skills** | |
| A. *Creates a positive, collaborative, and collegial campus culture that sets high expectations and facilitates the implementation and achievement of campus initiatives and goals | |
| B. Uses emerging issues, recent research, knowledge of systems (e.g., school improvement process, strategic planning, etc.), and various types of data (e.g., demographic, perceptive, student learning, and processes) to collaboratively develop a shared campus vision and a plan for implementing the vision | |
| C. Facilitates the collaborative development of a plan that clearly articulates objectives and strategies for implementing a campus vision | |
| D. Aligns financial, human, and material resources to support the implementation of a campus vision and mission | |
| E. Establishes procedures to assess and modify implementation plans to promote achievement of the campus vision | |
| F. Models and promotes the continuous and appropriate development of all stakeholders in the school community, to shape the campus culture | |
| G. *Establishes and communicates consistent expectations for all stakeholders, providing supportive feedback to promote a positive campus environment | |
| H. *Implements effective strategies to systematically gather input from all campus stakeholders, supporting innovative thinking and an inclusive culture | |
| I. *Creates an atmosphere of safety that encourages the social, emotional, and physical well-being of staff and students | |
| J. Facilitates the implementation of research-based theories and techniques to promote a campus environment and culture that is conducive to effective teaching and learning and supports organizational health and morale | |
| **Competency 002**<br>The beginning principal knows how to work with stakeholders as key partners to support student learning. | |
| **Knowledge and Skills** | |
| A. Acknowledges, recognizes, and celebrates the contributions of all stakeholders toward the realization of the campus vision | |

| | |
|---|---|
| B. Implements strategies to ensure the development of collegial relationships and effective collaboration | |
| C. *Uses consensus-building, conflict-management, communication, and information gathering strategies to involve various stakeholders in planning processes that enable the collaborative development of a shared campus vision and mission focused on teaching and learning | |
| D. *Ensures that parents and other members of the community are an integral part of the campus culture | |
| **DOMAIN II — LEADING LEARNING (Instructional Leadership/Teaching and Learning)** | |
| **Competency 003**<br>The beginning principal knows how to collaboratively develop and implement high-quality instruction. | |
| **Knowledge and Skills** | |
| A. *Prioritizes instruction and student achievement by understanding, sharing, and promoting a clear definition of high-quality instruction based on best practices from recent research | |
| B. *Facilitates the use of sound, research-based practice in the development, implementation, coordination, and evaluation of campus curricular, curricular, and extracurricular programs to fulfill academic, development, social, and cultural needs | |
| C. *Facilitates campus participation in collaborative district planning, implementation, monitoring, and revision of the curriculum to ensure appropriate scope, sequence, content, and alignment | |
| D. *Implements a rigorous curriculum that is aligned with state standards, including college and career-readiness standards | |
| E. *Facilitates the use and integration of technology, telecommunications, and information systems to enhance learning | |
| **Competency 004**<br>The beginning principal knows how to monitor and assess classroom instruction to promote teacher effectiveness and student achievement. | |
| A. *Monitors instruction routinely by visiting classrooms, observing instruction, and attending grade-level, department, or team meetings to provide evidence-based feedback to improve instruction | |
| B. *Analyzes the curriculum collaboratively to guide teachers in aligning content across grades and ensures that curricular scopes and sequences meet the particular needs of their diverse student populations (considering sociological, linguistic, cultural, and other factors)<br>C. *Monitors and ensures staff use of multiple forms of student data to inform instruction and intervention decisions that maximizes instructional effectiveness and student achievement | |
| D. *Promotes instruction that supports the growth of individual students and student groups, supports equity, and works to reduce the achievement gap | |

| | |
|---|---|
| E. *Supports staff in developing the capacity and time to collaboratively and individually use classroom formative and summative assessment data to inform effective instructional practices and interventions | |
| **DOMAIN III — HUMAN CAPITAL (Human Resource Management)** | |
| **Competency 005**<br>The beginning principal knows how to provide feedback, coaching, and professional development to staff through evaluation and supervision, knows how to reflect on his/her practice, and strives to grow professionally | |
| **Knowledge and Skills** | |
| A. *Communicates expectations to staff and uses multiple data points (e.g., regular observations, walk-throughs, teacher and student data, and other sources) to complete evidence-based evaluations of all staff<br>B. *Coaches and develops teachers by facilitating teacher self-assessment and goal setting, conducting conferences, giving individualized feedback, and supporting individualized professional growth opportunities | |
| C. *Collaborates to develop, implement, and revise a comprehensive and ongoing plan for the professional development of campus staff that addresses staff needs based on staff appraisal trends, goals, and student information/data | |
| D. *Facilitates a continuum of effective professional development activities that includes appropriate content, process, context, allocation of time, funding, and other needed resources | |
| E. Engages in ongoing and meaningful professional growth activities, reflects on his or her practice, seeks and acts on feedback, and strives to continually improve, learn, and grow | |
| F. Seeks assistance (e.g., mentor, central office) to ensure effective and reflective decision-making and works collaboratively with campus and district leadership | |
| **Competency 006**<br>The beginning principal knows how to promote high-quality teaching by using selection, placement, and retention practices to promote teacher excellence and growth. | |
| **Knowledge and Skills** | |
| A. *Invests and manages time to prioritize the development, support, and supervision of the staff to maximize student outcomes | |
| B. *Facilitates collaborative structures that support professional learning communities in reviewing data, processes, and policies to improve teaching and learning in the school | |
| C. *Creates leadership opportunities, defines roles, and delegates responsibilities to effective staff and administrators to support campus goal attainment | |
| D. *Implements effective, appropriate, and legal strategies for the recruitment, screening, hiring, assignment, induction, development, evaluation, promotion, retention, discipline, and dismissal of campus staff | |
| **DOMAIN IV — EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP (Communication and Organizational Management)** | |
| **Competency 007** | |

| | |
|---|---|
| The beginning principal knows how to develop relationships with internal and external stakeholders, including selecting appropriate communication strategies for particular audiences. | |
| **Knowledge and Skills** | |
| A. *Understands how to effectively communicate a message in different ways to meet the needs of various audiences | |
| B. *Develops and implements strategies for systematically communicating internally and externally | |
| C. Develops and implements a comprehensive program of community relations that uses strategies that effectively involve and inform multiple constituencies | |
| D. Establishes partnerships with parents, businesses, and other groups in the community to strengthen programs and support campus goals | |
| **Competency 008**<br>The beginning principal knows how to focus on improving student outcomes through organizational collaboration, resiliency, and change management. | |
| **Knowledge and Skills** | |
| A. Demonstrates awareness of social and economic issues that exist within the school and community that affect campus operations and student learning | |
| B. Gathers and organizes information from a variety of sources to facilitate creative thinking, critical thinking, and problem-solving to guide effective campus decision-making | |
| C. *Frames, analyzes, and creatively resolves campus problems using effective problem-solving techniques to make timely, high-quality decisions | |
| D. Develops, implements, and evaluates systems and processes for organizational effectiveness to keep staff inspired and focused on the campus vision | |
| E. *Uses effective planning, time management, and organization of work to support the attainment of school district and campus goals | |
| **DOMAIN V — STRATEGIC OPERATIONS (Alignment and Resource Allocation)** | |
| **Competency 009**<br>The beginning principal knows how to collaboratively determine goals and implement strategies aligned with the school vision that support teacher effectiveness and positive student outcomes. | |
| **Knowledge and Skills** | |
| A. *Assesses the current needs of the campus, analyzing a wide set of evidence to determine campus objectives, and sets measurable school goals, targets, and strategies that form the school's strategic plans | |
| B. *Establishes structures that outline and track the progress using multiple data points and make adjustments as needed to improve teacher effectiveness and student outcomes | |
| C. *Allocates resources effectively (e.g., staff time, master schedule, dollars, and tools), aligning them with school objectives and goals, and works to access additional resources as needed to support learning | |

| | |
|---|---|
| D. Implements appropriate management techniques and group processes to define roles, assign functions, delegate authority, and determine accountability for campus goal attainment | |
| **Competency 010**<br>The beginning principal knows how to provide administrative leadership through resource management, policy implementation, and coordination of school operations and programs to ensure a safe learning environment. | |
| **Knowledge and Skills** | |
| A. Implements strategies that enable the physical plant, equipment, and support systems to operate safely, efficiently, and effectively to maintain a conducive learning environment | |
| B. *Applies strategies for ensuring the safety of students and personnel and for addressing emergencies and security concerns, including developing and implementing a crisis plan | |
| C. *Applies local, state, and federal laws and policies to support sound decisions while considering implications related to all school operations and programs (e.g., student services, food services, health services, and transportation) | |
| D. *Collaboratively plans and effectively manages the campus budget within state law and district policies to promote sound financial management about accounts, bidding, purchasing, and grants | |
| E. Uses technology to enhance school management (e.g., attendance systems, teacher grade books, shared drives, and messaging systems) | |
| F. Facilitates the effective coordination of campus curricular, curricular, and extracurricular programs in relation to other school district programs to fulfill the academic, developmental, social, and cultural needs of students | |
| G. Collaborates with district staff to ensure the understanding and implementation of district policies and advocates for the needs of students and staff<br>H. *Implements strategies for student discipline and attendance in a manner that ensures student safety, consistency, and equity and that legal requirements are met (e.g., due process, SPED requirements) | |
| **DOMAIN VI — ETHICS, EQUITY, AND DIVERSITY** | |
| **Competency 011**<br>The beginning principal knows how to provide ethical leadership by advocating for children and ensuring student access to effective educators, programs, and services. | |
| **Knowledge and Skills** | |
| A. Implements policies and procedures that require all campus personnel to comply with the Educators' Code of Ethics (TAC Chapter 247) | |
| B. Models and promotes the highest standard of conduct, ethical principles, and integrity in decision-making, actions, and behaviors | |
| C. Advocates for all children by promoting the continuous and appropriate development of all learners in the campus community | |
| D. *Implements strategies to ensure that all students have access to effective educators and continuous opportunities to learn | |

| | |
|---|---|
| E. *Promotes awareness and appreciation of diversity throughout the campus community (e.g., learning differences, multicultural awareness, gender sensitivity, and ethnic appreciation) | |
| F. *Facilitates and supports special campus programs that provide all students with quality, flexible instructional programs, and services (e.g., health, guidance, and counseling programs) to meet individual student needs | |
| G. *Applies legal guidelines (e.g., about students with disabilities, bilingual education, confidentiality, and discrimination) to protect the rights of students and staff and to improve learning opportunities H. Articulates the importance of education in a free, democratic society | |
| H. Articulates the importance of education in a free, democratic society | |

**DOMAIN I — SCHOOL CULTURE (School and Community Leadership)**

Competency 001: The entry-level principal knows how to establish and implement a shared vision and culture of high expectations for all stakeholders (students, staff, parents, and community).

1. ***Creates a positive, collaborative, and collegial campus culture that sets high expectations and facilitates the implementation and achievement of campus initiatives and goals**
2. Uses emerging issues, recent research, knowledge of systems (e.g., school improvement process, strategic planning, etc.), and various types of data (e.g., demographic, perceptive, student learning, and processes) to collaboratively develop a shared campus vision and a plan for implementing the vision
3. Facilitates the collaborative development of a plan that clearly articulates objectives and strategies for implementing a campus vision
4. Aligns financial, human, and material resources to support implementation of a campus vision and mission
5. Establishes procedures to assess and modify implementation plans to promote achievement of the campus vision
6. Models and promotes the continuous and appropriate development of all stakeholders in the school community, to shape the campus culture
7. ***Establishes and communicates consistent expectations for all stakeholders, providing supportive feedback to promote a positive campus environment**
8. ***Implements effective strategies to systematically gather input from all campus stakeholders, supporting innovative thinking and an inclusive culture**
9. ***Creates an atmosphere of safety that encourages the social, emotional, and physical well-being of staff and students**
10. Facilitates the implementation of research-based theories and techniques to promote a campus environment and culture that is conducive to effective teaching and learning and supports organizational health and morale

Competency 002: The entry-level principal knows how to work with stakeholders as key partners to support student learning.

1. Acknowledges, recognizes, and celebrates the contributions of all stakeholders toward the realization of the campus vision
2. Implements strategies to ensure the development of collegial relationships and effective collaboration
3. ***Uses consensus-building, conflict-management, communication, and information-gathering strategies to involve various stakeholders in planning processes that enable the collaborative development of a shared campus vision and mission focused on teaching and learning**
4. ***Ensures that parents and other members of the community are an integral part of the campus culture**

**DOMAIN II — LEADING LEARNING (Instructional Leadership/Teaching and Learning)**

Competency 003: The entry-level principal knows how to collaboratively develop and implement high-quality instruction.

1. ***Prioritizes instruction and student achievement by understanding, sharing, and promoting a clear definition of high-quality instruction based on best practices from recent research**
2. ***Facilitates the use of sound, research-based practice in the development, implementation, coordination, and evaluation of campus curricular, co-curricular, and extracurricular programs to fulfill academic, development, social, and cultural needs**
3. ***Facilitates campus participation in collaborative district planning, implementation, monitoring, and revision of the curriculum to ensure appropriate scope, sequence, content, and alignment**
4. ***Implements a rigorous curriculum that is aligned with state standards, including college and career-readiness standards**
5. Facilitates the use and integration of technology, telecommunications, and information systems to enhance learning

Competency 004: The entry-level principal knows how to monitor and assess classroom instruction to promote teacher effectiveness and student achievement.

1. ***Monitors instruction routinely by visiting classrooms, observing instruction, and attending grade-level, department, or team meetings to provide evidence-based feedback to improve instruction**
2. ***Analyzes the curriculum collaboratively to guide teachers in aligning content across grades and ensures that curricular scopes and sequences meet the particular needs of their diverse student populations (considering sociological, linguistic, cultural, and other factors)**

3. ***Monitors and ensures staff use of multiple forms of student data to inform instruction and intervention decisions that maximizes instructional effectiveness and student achievement**
4. ***Promotes instruction that supports the growth of individual students and student groups, supports equity, and works to reduce the achievement gap**
5. ***Supports staff in developing the capacity and time to collaboratively and individually use classroom formative and summative assessment data to inform effective instructional practices and interventions**

**DOMAIN III — HUMAN CAPITAL (Human Resource Management)**

Competency 005: The entry-level principal knows how to provide feedback, coaching, and professional development to staff through evaluation and supervision, knows how to reflect on his/her own practice, and strives to grow professionally.

1. ***Communicates expectations to staff and uses multiple data points (e.g., regular observations, walk-throughs, teacher and student data, and other sources) to complete evidence-based evaluations of all staff**
2. ***Coaches and develops teachers by facilitating teacher self-assessment and goal setting, conducting conferences, giving individualized feedback, and supporting individualized professional growth opportunities**
3. ***Collaborates to develop, implement, and revise a comprehensive and ongoing plan for the professional development of campus staff that addresses staff needs based on staff appraisal trends, goals, and student information/data**
4. ***Facilitates a continuum of effective professional development activities that includes appropriate content, process, context, allocation of time, funding, and other needed resources**
5. Engages in ongoing and meaningful professional growth activities, reflects on his or her practice, seeks and acts on feedback, and strives to continually improve, learn, and grow
6. Seeks assistance (e.g., mentor, central office) to ensure effective and reflective decision making and works collaboratively with campus and district leadership

Competency 006: The entry-level principal knows how to promote high-quality teaching by using selection, placement, and retention practices to promote teacher excellence and growth.

1. ***Invests and manages time to prioritize the development, support, and supervision of the staff to maximize student outcomes**
2. ***Facilitates collaborative structures that support professional learning communities in reviewing data, processes, and policies to improve teaching and learning in the school**
3. ***Creates leadership opportunities, defines roles, and delegates responsibilities to effective staff and administrators to support campus goal attainment**
4. ***Implements effective, appropriate, and legal strategies for the recruitment, screening, hiring, assignment, induction, development, evaluation, promotion, retention, discipline, and dismissal of campus staff**

**DOMAIN IV — EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP (Communication and Organizational Management)**

Competency 007: The entry-level principal knows how to develop relationships with candida teal and external stakeholders, including selecting appropriate communication strategies for audiences.

1. ***Understands how to effectively communicate a message in different ways to meet the needs of various audiences**
2. ***Develops and implements strategies for systematically communicating internally and externally**
3. Develops and implements a comprehensive program of community relations that uses strategies that effectively involve and inform multiple constituencies
4. Establishes partnerships with parents, businesses, and other groups in the community to strengthen programs and support campus goals

Competency 008: The entry-level principal knows how to focus on improving student outcomes through organizational collaboration, resiliency, and change management.

1. Demonstrates awareness of social and economic issues that exist within the school and community that affect campus operations and student learning
2. Gathers and organizes information from a variety of sources to facilitate creative thinking, critical thinking, and problem solving to guide effective campus decision making
3. ***Frames, analyzes, and creatively resolves campus problems using effective problem-solving techniques to make timely, high-quality decisions**
4. Develops, implements, and evaluates systems and processes for organizational effectiveness to keep staff inspired and focused on the campus vision
5. ***Uses effective planning, time management, and organization of work to support attainment of school district and campus goals**

**DOMAIN V — STRATEGIC OPERATIONS (Alignment and Resource Allocation)**

Competency 009: The entry-level principal knows how to collaboratively determine goals and implement strategies aligned with the school vision that support teacher effectiveness and positive student outcomes.

1. ***Assesses the current needs of the campus, analyzing a wide set of evidence to determine campus objectives, and sets measurable school goals, targets, and strategies that form the school's strategic plans**
2. ***Establishes structures that outline and track the progress using multiple data points and makes adjustments as needed to improve teacher effectiveness and student outcomes**
3. ***Allocates resources effectively (e.g., staff time, master schedule, dollars, and tools), aligning them with school objectives and goals, and works to access additional resources as needed to support learning**

4. Implements appropriate management techniques and group processes to define roles, assign functions, delegate authority, and determine accountability for campus goal attainment

Competency 010: The entry-level principal knows how to provide administrative leadership through resource management, policy implementation, and coordination of school operations and programs to ensure a safe learning environment.

1. Implements strategies that enable the physical plant, equipment, and support systems to operate safely, efficiently, and effectively to maintain a conducive learning environment
2. ***Applies strategies for ensuring the safety of students and personnel and for addressing emergencies and security concerns, including developing and implementing a crisis plan**
3. ***Applies local, state, and federal laws and policies to support sound decisions while considering implications related to all school operations and programs (e.g., student services, food services, health services, and transportation)**
4. ***Collaboratively plans and effectively manages the campus budget within state law and district policies to promote sound financial management about accounts, bidding, purchasing, and grants**
5. Uses technology to enhance school management (e.g., attendance systems, teacher grade books, shared drives, and messaging systems)
6. Facilitates the effective coordination of campus curricular, co-curricular, and extracurricular programs about other school district programs to fulfill the academic, developmental, social, and cultural needs of students
7. Collaborates with district staff to ensure the understanding and implementation of district policies and advocates for the needs of students and staff
8. ***Implements strategies for student discipline and attendance in a manner that ensures student safety, consistency, and equity and that legal requirements are met (e.g., due process, SPED requirements)**

**DOMAIN VI — ETHICS, EQUITY, AND DIVERSITY**

Competency 011: The entry-level principal knows how to provide ethical leadership by advocating for children and ensuring student access to effective educators, programs, and services.

1. Implements policies and procedures that require all campus personnel to comply with the Educators' Code of Ethics (TAC Chapter 247)
2. Models and promotes the highest standard of conduct, ethical principles, and integrity in decision-making, actions, and behaviors
3. ***Advocates for all children by promoting the continuous and appropriate development of all learners in the campus community**
4. ***Implements strategies to ensure that all students have access to effective educators and continuous opportunities to learn**

5. ***Promotes awareness and appreciation of diversity throughout the campus community (e.g., learning differences, multicultural awareness, gender sensitivity, and ethnic appreciation)**
6. ***Facilitates and supports special campus**
7. **programs that provide all students with quality, flexible instructional programs, and services (e.g., health, guidance, and counseling programs) to meet individual student needs**
8. ***Applies legal guidelines (e.g., about students with disabilities, bilingual education, confidentiality, and discrimination) to protect the rights of students and staff and to improve learning opportunities**
9. Articulates the importance of education in a free, democratic society

# Governance and School District Leadership: Addressing Race-Based Academic Achievement Disparity and Board Member Perceptions

**Christopher Dignam**
*Governors State University*

**James A. Gates**
*Concordia University Chicago*

**Matthew A. Cooney**
*Governors State University*

*Public school board members are charged with the responsibility and accountability to provide governance-level advocacy for equity and excellence in public education. This qualitative study examined the perceptions of school board members in three K–8 school districts in the midwestern part of the United States regarding the 50+ year Race-Based Academic Achievement Disparity (RBAAD) in public education. Virtual one-on-one interviews, a virtual focus group, and member checks were used to gather data. Utilizing servant and moral leadership as the theoretical frameworks, the findings revealed that school board members are empowered with governance-level authority and the responsibility to address the RBAAD phenomenon, school board members encounter obstacles that challenge their ability to mitigate the RBAAD phenomenon, and school board members contend that opportunities exist to promote mitigation of the RBAAD. Implications for future research and practice are addressed.*

*Keywords:* Achievement disparity, Board member perspectives, School board governance, Servant leadership theory, Moral leadership theory, Equal access

## Background and Context

The United States' tradition of investing authority in local school boards to promote quality public education has a long history dating back to at least 1837, when Massachusetts became the first state to create a state board of education (George Washington University, C. on E.P. (CEP), Kober & Renter (2020). Horace Mann served as secretary of the Massachusetts State Board of Education and became an advocate for the creation of public schools available to all children at no cost and funded by state government (George Washington University, C. on E.P. (CEP), Kober & Renter (2020). Mann argued that a universal, non-sectarian, and common public institution was the most efficacious way to achieve moral and socioeconomic growth of all Americans, mitigate social class conflict, and promote citizen engagement (George Washington University, C. on E.P. (CEP), Kober & Renter (2020); Warder (2015). Over time, every state has invested authority over public education to local school boards. Across the United States, local school boards are composed of community members who take an oath to discharge their statutory educational duties and responsibilities faithfully to the benefit of all students and the entire community. Over time, every state has invested authority over public education to local school boards. Across the United States, local school boards are composed of community members who take an oath to discharge their statutory educational duties and responsibilities faithfully to the benefit of all students and the entire community.

In the 21st century, public school board members serve over 51 million public-school students across 13,000 American public-school districts. These volunteer advocates for public education are charged with providing leadership and governance that ensures that all students have access to an excellent public education where they live (National School Boards Association, 2019).

The complex and rapidly changing nature of public education in the United States requires community school board members to respond to an array of challenges to honor its academic, societal, and moral commitment to provide a quality and just public education to every student in every public school. Those challenges include, but are not limited to, ensuring safe and supportive learning environments (National School Boards Association, 2021); providing adequate and equitable school funding (Epstein, 2011); genuinely engaging students, families, and the greater school community (Lamb, 2014); maximizing the benefits of technology (Tawfik et al., 2016); creating curricula and assessments that are responsive to the attitudes and needs of contemporary students (Education Commission of the States, 2020; Graesser et al., 2018); and preparing students to compete and succeed in a fast-paced, global, technological world (Silliman & Schleifer, 2018).

While all these educational challenges are of critical importance, possibly the greatest challenge lies in addressing a problem with which U.S. public education has struggled for over 75 years: the Race-Based Academic Achievement Disparity (RBAAD). The existence of a significant and persistent disparity between the academic achievement of K–12 students of color and their White peers is not only a problem for public education, but also a problem that impacts individuals and U.S. society (Bowman et al., 2018; Ratcliff et al., 2016).

The threat that RBAAD poses to equity and excellence in American public education has been characterized as the greatest civil rights issue of our time (Paige & Witty, 2010), and a perpetual national recession on the economy of the United States (McKinsey & Company, 2009).

Hanson et al. (2011) asserted that the disparity produces harmful effects on the academic, social, emotional, and health outcomes of students of color (as cited in Voight, 2013).

## *Review of the Literature*

In U.S. public education, a persistent phenomenon has resulted in short- and long-term negative effects on children, families, and society: RBAAD. Throughout U.S. history, quality public equitable education has been viewed as essential for promoting the social and economic well-being of individuals and the nation because quality and equitable public education ensures that each generation can call on qualified women and men to serve others and their country with honor and guarantee equality of opportunities for all children (Baker & Cummings, 2015; Center on Education Policy, 2007).

In the 21st century, public education is expected to provide learning environments in which all students develop their core curricular, interpersonal, and technological skills while laying a foundation that will prepare them to compete in a global workplace (American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education & the Partnership for 21st Century, 2010; Silliman & Schleifer, 2018). Despite the evolution of U.S. public education and the avowed commitment to high ideals that speak to advancing the individual and common good, the realities of public schools have sometimes failed to live up to those espoused ideals (Center on Education Policy, 2007).

Perhaps the most troubling dissonance between ideal and reality has been what appears to be public education's inability to deliver equitable achievement and success for every student, in every school in the United States (Coleman et al., 1966; Commission on No Child Left Behind, 2007; Hursh, 2007; Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). Over time, academic progress has been made based on National Assessment of Educational Progress data that indicates the 2023 average reading scores for both Black and White 13-year-old students were higher than their 1971 peers, the year of the first reading assessment year (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2022a). However, longitudinal achievement data from 1990-2022 confirms significantly lower scale scores of Black students when compared with scale scores of white students in both math and reading in Grades 4, 8, and 12 (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2022b). Long-run trends indicate that race-based performance disparities within the United States remain significant and highly persistent (Hanushek et al., 2020; National School Boards Association, 2020).

Public education's inability to deliver on its goal of success for every student in every U.S. school is exhibited in a variety of forms. The inability to reach that goal may be most recognizable and best exemplified by the decades long RBAAD. The persistent RBAAD and its deleterious impacts on children and society has been characterized as unequal opportunity due to race and education (Darling-Hammond, 1998), the greatest civil rights issue of our time (Paige & Witty, 2010), the race-based income inequality gap (Voight, 2013), and one of the most concerning problems in American public education (Wixom & Education Commission of the States, 2015). The RBAAD has been identified as a contributing factor in the school-to-prison pipeline (McKinsey & Company, 2009), which produces disproportionate minority incarceration rates and lifetimes in poverty (Sens & van Rompu, 2017).

## Race Based Academic Achievement Disparity

Due to the complexity of the RBAAD, no single definition can fully capture its depth and multifarious nature. America's largest, continual, and nationally representative assessment of the student performance, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (2015), defined the RBAAD as a phenomenon in which one racial group of students outperforms another group with a difference larger than the margin of error. Researcher definitions of the RBAAD include below-par achievement of minority students, race-based achievement differences both within and between groups, historically patterned differences in learning and attainment outcomes between groups of students, and statistically significant differences between race-based student groups regarding academic standards of excellence set by educational institutions and society (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008; Carpenter & Ramirez, 2012; Carpenter et al., 2006; Wixom & Education Commission of the States, 2015). The varied definitions and consequences of the RBAAD require its examination and understanding in the context of its historical roots and impact on society, especially on children.

## School Factors

There are three themes detailing school factors contribution towards the RBAAD: teacher quality, school composition, and school finance (Darling-Hammond, 2014; Desimone & Long, 2010; Enamorado, 2019; Epstein, 2011; Goldhaber et al., 2018; Learning Policy Institute et al. (2020). First, the relationship between teacher quality and the RBAAD is strongly suggested in the literature. Significant teacher quality gaps were identified as a widespread and persistent feature of public education in America that exacerbated the well-documented RBAAD (Enamorado, 2019; Goldhaber et al., 2018). Often the teachers assigned to support students experiencing learning disparities compared to peers are the same teachers who lack a proven record of classroom success (Goldhaber et al., 2018; Hanselman, 2018). The Learning Policy Institute et al. (2020) asserted that to make schooling accountable for all students, especially the historically underserved, it is necessary that certified and experienced teachers present meaningful and relevant curricula in safe and inclusive learning environments. Finally, a study by Benson and Gezer (2020) found statistically significant trends and evidence that student race in correlated to access to more experienced teachers over time and that white students are more likely to be assigned to teachers with experience than Black students.

In addition to disparities in teacher quality in and across school systems, another school-based factor impacting the RBAAD is school composition. School compositions that reflect a disproportionate number of students of color from low-income backgrounds perform much worse than schools with more diverse student populations, and that underperformance remains significant even in otherwise high-performing states (McKinsey & Company, 2009). Black student achievement is lower in schools with the highest density of students of color, as opposed to student performance in schools with a lower density of students of color (Bohrnstedt et al., 2015; National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2015). Research also suggests that not only do school and classroom composition matter, but the size of the racial groups matter because they can promote racial and socioeconomic diversity that fosters a beneficial sense of student belonging, particularly for low-income students and students of color, and classroom diversity

that ensures equal access to opportunities that have long-term impacts on life outcomes (Seider et al., 2023; Graham et al., 2022).

The final school-based factor contributing to the RBAAD is inequalities in school financing. Darling-Hammond (2014) asserted that the United States allocates significantly less funding and resources for the neediest students than other developed nations. Baker (2017) claimed that significant evidence in academic literature indicates that resources matter. Baker maintained that state school finance reforms that create more adequate and equitable school finances improve student outcomes.

Two positive outcomes of equitable school funding were higher graduation rates and higher levels of educational attainment, especially for students from minority and low-income families. Governmental commitment to sustainable state finance systems ensuring equitable funding and improved access to resources is a key strategy to improve student outcomes and to close the RBAAD (Baker & Cummings, 2015; Darling-Hammond, 2014). Additionally, there is evidence that appropriate school funding also promotes equitable student and district access to high-quality teachers and the increased per-pupil funding levels that exist in wealthier school districts (Baker, 2017; Cardichon et al., 2020; McKinsey & Company, 2009).

**Socioeconomic Factors**

McKinsey and Company (2009) contended that the achievement gap among students from low-income situations is severe and appears early in children's lives. Low-income situations typically place students at least 2 years behind more financially secure same-age peers and persist over students' lifetimes. Family finances appear to explain the persistent nature of the RBAAD by limiting parental ability to provide children access to quality health care and rich social, emotional, and academic preschool experiences (Barton et al., 2010; Burchinal et al., 2011; McKinsey & Company, 2009; Porfeli et al., 2009; Reardon, 2013; Robinson & Harris, 2013).

Porfeli et al. (2009) offered that neighborhood social capital can positively or negatively impact the RBAAD. They found that community capital is a powerful predictor of academic outcomes. Neighborhood social capital also determines the quality of local schools, libraries, and enrichment activities (Barton et al., 2010). Porfeli et al. (2009) found that even after factoring in parent education and income, children and adolescents who experienced positive family or community social capital had higher high-school graduations, college enrollments, and economic stability, lower rates of teenage pregnancy, fewer mental health issues, and lower incarceration rates than peers from neighborhoods with less social capital. Dufur et al. (2013) differed from researchers who applied a single social capital lens as the key factor in the persistence of the RBAAD. Those researchers concluded that future studies should consider examining the implications, benefits, and outcomes of the interplay between family and community social capital, not limiting the impact to family or social capital alone.

**RBAAD: Incomplete Knowledge in the Literature**

While school-related and socioeconomic factors are dominant themes regarding the persistence of the RBAAD, there are additional factors as well. Though not at the broad thematic, patterned level of school based and socioeconomic RBAAD factors, there appears to be an incomplete

understanding of factors that include inequities regarding access to technology (Tawfik et al., 2016), school discipline (Gopalan, 2019; Gregory et al., 2010; Pearman et al. 2019), tracking and the overrepresentation and underrepresentation of students in special education, remedial, or advanced classes (Ahram et al., 2011), and RBAAD-related pedagogical intervention strategies (Fergus, 2016).

**RBAAD: Apparent Gaps in the Literature**

There are multiple studies addressing the RBAAD from the perspectives of teachers and administrators and the attitudinal and behavioral commitment and leadership that will be required of teachers and administrators to combat it (Annamma et al., 2014; Colgren & Sappington, 2015; Petrilli, 2019; Ratcliff et al., 2016; Ruff, 2019; Webb & Thomas, 2015). Nonetheless, there are few studies regarding school board members and the RBAAD.

Shober and Hartney (2014) asked whether, and to what extent, school board leadership matters anymore in the 21st century era of accountability. Plough (2014) did not share the view that some researchers now consider school boards archaic educational institutions in the modern educational world.

Hess and Meeks (2010) noted that school boards matter when it comes to the RBAAD. They offered that although the RBAAD has been identified as negatively impacting American students of color for over 50 years, only in the years immediately following the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001) has the link between school board member governance and student achievement been considered. Hess and Meeks (2010) valued the body of research focused on students and the adults who instruct them, but they contended that since the passage of NCLB (2001), school boards' accountability may be even more critical to addressing the RBAAD.

In terms of accountability for equitable student outcomes, Plough (2014) posited that all who seek to play a role in education reform movements that produce systemic high-level student performance need to focus more attention on public school boards. Plough emphasized that since school board members hold positions of significant influence and responsibility within their communities, their understanding of policies that address and potentially mitigate achievement disparities among students is critical. Consequently, it is imperative to scrutinize and research how these officials govern with a focus on fostering equitable educational outcomes.

In the post-2001 NCLB era of accountability, how school board members understand, make meaning of, and govern in response to the RBAAD has taken on increased importance. Community school boards exercise extensive statutory and mandatory authority as servant leaders and representatives of the community and advocates for students and the school district. School boards govern by policy to develop administrative structures, approve, and maintain an annual budget that is aligned with the vision of the local school district, and make curricular and staff hiring decisions (Mountford, 2008). The National School Boards Association (2021) asserted that community school board members are expected to ensure the right of every student across the United States to access an excellent and equitable public education and that school boards achieve this goal by taking direct responsibility for effective leadership and governance.

### *Summary and Integration*

The purpose of this study's literature review was to examine the perspectives and understandings of educational researchers, practitioners, and other key stakeholders regarding the RBAAD phenomenon. The literature review revealed that the RBAAD phenomenon has led academic and social researchers to conduct studies using qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods study approaches framed in various theoretical frameworks including behavioral, change, and servant leadership frames (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). The study participant groups in those studies included researchers, teachers, administrators, parents, and politicians. However, the literature review also revealed a gap in or at least an incomplete understanding of how locally elected public school board members describe, interpret, and make meaning of the RBAAD. This is problematic because an analysis and synthesis of the literature yielded two interconnected themes that underpin the persistence of the RBAAD: school-based and socioeconomic factors. These factors directly intersect with statutory school board governance responsibility to determine how local revenues and resources are allocated, communicate how allocation equitably benefits all students, and monitor district performance to assess the state of the district's attainment of equitable student outcomes. Plough (2014) contended that in light of school board member statutory obligations, how they understand the complexities of the RBAAD and their governance practices to mitigate the disparity warrants further research and examination.

## *Conceptual Framework*

The conceptual frameworks of servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977) and moral leadership (Sergiovanni, 1990, 2005) guided this qualitative case study on the RBAAD phenomenon in public education. The Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership (2021) viewed servant leadership theory as a philosophy and set of practices that enriches the lives of individuals and builds better organizations. The leader who chooses to serve first as opposed to leading first and focuses on the growth and well-being of people and community is a servant leader. Greenleaf (2012) concluded that the greatest opportunity to build a more equal and more just society lies in the opportunity to function as servant leaders within existing institutions and to harness the regenerative forces operating within them.

The second theoretical framework, Sergiovanni's (1992) moral leadership theory, posited that effective leaders are change agents who help individuals learn to process change, and to consider how change impacts them, the organization, and those they serve. Sergiovanni asserted that moral leadership practice begins within the individual and is driven by melding one's heart, head, and hands. Sergiovanni upheld that when leaders model purposes, values, norms, and responsibilities in a school's everyday activities, words and deeds are one and goals are attainable. Finally, Sergiovanni argued that when moral leadership becomes part of a school culture, leaders know and focus on what is important, care deeply about their work, learn from success and failure, and take calculated risks.

Servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977) and moral leadership (Sergiovanni, 1990, 2005) are complementary frameworks (Lemoine et al., 2019; Muhammad & Mohamad, 2016). Servant leadership and moral leadership both provided context for how the voluntary service experiences

of school board members shape and impact their perceptions of and actions in response to the RBAAD phenomenon.

## *Methodology*

To investigate how board members' perceptions and leadership promote mitigation of a district RBAAD, the researchers utilized a qualitative methodology, as this methodology is appropriate when investigating research questions that require in-depth understanding of a particular issue (Johnson & Christensen, 2020). Qualitative methods are used to explore complex problems, gain detailed understandings of phenomena from the perceptions of the study participants, and identify the meanings people construct from those understandings and perceptions (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009).

Within the qualitative research paradigm, the researchers employed a qualitative case study method to examine multiple data points centered around a particular unit to answer the research question (Yin, 2014). Case study research must utilize two or more data sources.

The first data source was collected through semi-structured, one-on-one interviews. Semi-structured interviews foster a social interaction in which the interviewer inquires and the interviewees express what is on their mind, construct knowledge from experiences, pose follow-up, probing questions, and collect in-depth, rich information related to research questions, (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Patton, 2015; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Six 1-hour, one-one-one virtual interviews with six participants were conducted. The virtual interviews allowed board members to share their perceptions on the RBAAD as a national and local district phenomenon in K–8 public education.

The second data point was collected through a focus group with three out of six participants. Focus groups are often used in qualitative research to collect narrative data, provide for participant sharing of perceptions, and frequently follow one-on-one interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). The one-hour focus group discussion included three of the participants from the one-on-one interview sample. The focus group participants responded to five predetermined questions that were developed as concluding questions to the study's five research questions.

### Trustworthiness

The quality of qualitative research is situated in trustworthiness (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Following the one-on-one virtual interviews and participation in the virtual focus group, participants were provided an editable Word transcription of their interview to conduct a member check. The member check provided participants the opportunity to assess the data's accuracy and credibility, and, as needed, to edit their responses to the interview questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). The researchers also employed a critical friend to provide honest and impartial feedback and to help the researchers to clarify the data collected in the focus group. The critical friend concept provides a trusted advocate who takes the time to understand the context of the study and assists the researcher to work toward the successful completion of the research study (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014).

## Participants and Setting

Six participants who served as board members shared their perceptions regarding the RBAAD phenomenon and educational equity. Participants were selected as (a) they served in racially diverse school districts, (b) overall district test scores were at or above standards, and (c) there were below average test scores for students of color. All participants experienced multiple years of board experience (two or more) and multiple years (two or more) of experience with the RBAAD phenomenon and educational equity. Six participants completed virtual one-on-one interviews and four also took part in the focus group. Table 1 presents a visual depiction of the participants' K–8 board member years of service, service experience related to the RBAAD phenomenon and educational equity, participation in the one-on-one virtual interview, and participation in the audio-only focus group.

**Table 1**

*Participant Experience*

| Participant Number | Years' Experience as a K–8 Board Member | Years' Experience with RBAAD and Educational Equity | Virtual One-on-One Interview or Both (Virtual One-on-One Interview/Focus Group) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 4 | 4 | I |
| 2 | 6 | 6 | I |
| 3 | 2 | 2 | B |
| 4 | 4 | 4 | B |
| 5 | 4 | 4 | B |
| 6 | 2 | 2 | B |

## Analysis

The first level of coding reduced the raw language-based data in the transcripts to meaningful chunks of salient words, phrases, and comments (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Watts, 2014). Subsequent transcript readings underpinned the second-level coding process that combined the codes into broader categories or themes that reflected a comparative method of analysis and were responsive to the study questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Emergent themes were utilized to generate findings responsive to the research question (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Findings were placed in literary form, and there were multiple iterations of the outcome of inquiry, which resulted in an understanding with respect to the RBAAD from the narratives and perspectives of school board members (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Keywords and ideas developed from multiple readings of the transcripts led to the identification of 18 codes. Codes are researcher-produced words, phrases, or visualizations that represent significant and recurring themes during qualitative data analysis (Medelyan, 2020; Saldana, 2013). Data analysis of one-to-one interviews and focus group identified three major themes and three related sub-themes that reflected a credible connection between the data collected and analyzed and the research questions. The three data-dependent major themes that emerged from the

data analysis indicated three key findings addressing how board member perceptions and leadership promote mitigation of a district RBAAD

## Findings

Theme 1: The participants' perceptions indicated that public school board members are uniquely empowered and positioned to address the RBAAD phenomenon. All study participants shared that K–8 school board members are empowered with governance-level authority and responsibility to address the RBAAD phenomenon to the benefit of all students. The participants also noted their responsibility in establishing policies to provide equitable support and services to position all students for success is a necessary board responsibility. For example, Participant 5 stated, "I think the board's responsibility is to ensure that every child in that district is getting access to an equitable and high-quality education." Similarly, Participant 2 asserted, "I think very carefully about resources, building accountability structures. It takes a lot of time and funding, and you have to think carefully about what you're investing in and why."

Multiple coding iterations led to three Theme 1 sub-themes: The board has the authority and responsibility to develop and implement policies that provide equitable support and services to position all students for success, the board is duty-bound to approve and ensure justifiable resource allocation, and the board must actively engage the school and broader community in candid conversations focused on mitigating a district RBAAD. These board member perceptions reflected assertions in academic literature that all who seek to play a role in education reform movements that produce systemic high-level student performance, need to focus more attention on school boards' accountability for equitable student outcomes (Plough, 2014; National School Boards Association, 2021).

Theme 2: The participants' perceptions reflected the reality that school board members encounter obstacles, that challenges their ability to mitigate the RBAAD phenomenon. Influencing factors included structural obstacles with respect to mitigation, issues pertaining to accountability, and external factors. For example, Participant 3 declared that:

Our job is to remove obstacles, provide resources, and align all the incentives such that our team knows where they have to go and have the tools to get there. And that anything that gets in their way, we can clear the way.

Similarly, Participant 4 stated, "One of the major obstacles to overcoming this issue (RBAAD) is getting people to admit and believe that this really exists, that it is a long-standing structural, systemic problem, while avoiding saying that anyone did something wrong."

This study's data analysis revealed that all study participants referenced experiences and issues that impact a school board's ability to successfully address and lessen a district RBAAD phenomenon. The participants' perceptions generated three sub-themes of obstacles: structural (long-standing beliefs, practices, and structures), accountability (defining, assigning, and evaluating), and externalities (factors outside the control of the school district that impact mitigation of the RBAAD). While the study participants described several challenges and obstacles school board members face in service of their school district and community, each in their own way expressed a genuine commitment to overcome those obstacles.

Theme 3: The participants' perceptions optimistically expressed that a variety of opportunities exist to promote mitigation of RBAAD. For example, participants emphasized the importance of the board's support for building relationships with staff, students, and the broader school community as an avenue to mitigate the RBAAD. As Participant 5 remarked, "I think we do, at every level, need ongoing training and reflection and space for discussing diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging and social justice issues." Similarly, Participant 2 concurred, stating, "I think resources around relationship building and culture building and continual reflection on our equity work is super important."

The data analysis evidenced that all study participants believed the persistence of the RBAAD phenomenon did not mean it could not be overcome. That mindset underpinned their recommendations for overcoming RBAAD obstacles from which three sub-themes emerged: the need for greater commitment to relationship building across stakeholder groups, the need for RBAAD specific training for both the board and staff to build their RBAAD problem-solving skills and knowledge, and need for information and knowledge sharing across stakeholder groups both locally and beyond to identify what isn't working and what is.

The board member participants in this study without knowing the researcher's theoretical frameworks, reflected the theories advanced by Sergiovanni (1992) and Greenleaf (2012) ~~s~~ that the opportunity to build a better world can be realized when leaders within and across organizations strive to become effective change agents who coalesce and unleash the knowledge and power of all stakeholders to the benefit of all.

## Conclusions

This qualitative case study examined K–8 public school board members' perceptions of the persistent Race Based Academic Achievement Disparity (RBAAD) in American public education. This study had three primary aims: (a) to address what appears to be a gap, or at minimum, an incomplete representation in the literature of the RBAAD from the perspectives of school board members, (b) to give voice to K–8 school board member perceptions and understanding of the RBAAD, and (c) to examine the unique role K–8 school board members' perceptions of the RBAAD may play in offering implications for potential school board governance to mitigate and eventually close the RBAAD.

Analysis of the one-on-one virtual interviews and focus group data revealed three key findings that linked the participants' perceptions of school board member responsibilities with essential school board actions. First, K–8 school boards are empowered with governance-level authority and responsibility to address the RBAAD via policy, procedures, and two-way stakeholder engagement. To address this responsibility effectively, school boards must model compliance with their state school board associations' principles of effective board governance. Second, school boards must address internal structural and organizational obstacles, including curricular, philosophical, and pedagogical concerns that impact equitable student growth and achievement. To address and overcome those obstacles, school boards should balance support with accountability, while holding themselves, the administration, and the staff responsible for student outcomes. Third, despite the challenges posed by the K–8 school board members' perceptions indicated that opportunities exist to promote mitigation of the RBAAD. If school boards seek to convert those opportunities to actions that promote the success of all students,

they will need to focus on building relationships with students, staff, and other stakeholders; actively seek training experiences directly related to building board capacity to mitigate the RBAAD; and actively promote and lobby for information and knowledge sharing across stakeholder groups.

In addition to the study findings, participant perceptions generated recommendations for practice. One recommendation for practice called for an overarching school board mindset and leadership guide that established a high-quality education for all students as the top district priority. Another recommendation for practice called for an ongoing series of public RBAAD-focused forums or panel discussions that bring together school parents, community leaders, social organizations, the school board, superintendent, key cabinet members, and teacher leaders to clarify the scope of their separate roles and responsibilities, and their collaborative efforts to provide an equitable and high-quality education to all students. A final recommendation was that school boards should place a high priority on budgeting the time and resources to support district research efforts focused on identifying the beliefs, policies, institutional knowledge, staffing, and practices in high-achieving school districts that separate them from their counterparts in lower-achieving districts.

Local school board members are charged with critical duties and responsibilities. One overarching duty is to sit in trust for the entire community. To honor that trust, school boards must use their authority and collaborate with staff and community to provide every student an equitable and high-quality public educational experience.

Additional research studies focused on understanding the role school boards play in promoting broad-based accountability and building stakeholder partnerships can help to hasten the end of the RBAAD phenomenon and usher in a new era in public education when all children in every community have the opportunity to reach their fullest potential.

## References


Ahram, R., & Fergus, E., & P. Noguera. (2011). Understanding disproportionality in special education: Case studies in suburban school districts. *Teachers College Record, 13*(10), 2233-22236.

Aikens, N. L., & Barbarin, O. (2008). Socioeconomic differences in reading trajectories: The contribution of family, neighborhood, and school contexts. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 100*(2), 235–251. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.100.2.235

Ansbury, T. L. (2008). (Ed.), *The future of school board governance: Relevancy and revelation* (pp. 81-114). Rowman & Littlefield Education.

American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education & the Partnership for 21st Century. (2010). *The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education and P21 release paper on 21st century knowledge and skills in educator preparation*. https://aacte.org/2010/09/the-american-association-of-colleges-for-teacher-education-and-p21-release-paper-on-21st-century-knowledge-and-skills-in-educator-preparation/

Annamma, S., Morrison, D., & Jackson, D. (2014). Disproportionality fills in the gaps: Connections between achievement, discipline, and special education in the school-to-prison pipeline. *Berkeley Review of Education, 5*(1), 53–87.

Baker, B. D. (2017, December). *How money matters for schools*. Learning Policy Institute. https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/How_Money_Matters_REPORT.pdf

Baker, B. D., & Cummings, E. (2015). *Pennsylvania's best investment: The social and economic benefits of public education*. https://www.elc-pa.org/resource/pennsylvanias-best-investment-the-social-and-economic-benefits-of-public-education/

Barton P. E., Coley, R. J., & Educational Testing Service. (2010*). The Black–White achievement gap: When progress stopped* [Policy Information Report]. The Black-White Achievement Gap: When Progress Stopped

Benson, T., Bryant, A., & Gezer, T. (2020). Segregation within integrated schools. Racially disproportionate student-teacher assignments in middle school. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, *28*(170), 2-3, 15.

Bohrnstedt, G., Kitmitto, S., Ogut, B., Sherman, D., & Chan, D. (2015). *School composition and the Black-White achievement gap: Methodology companion.* National Center for Education Statistics. ERIC - ED560723 - School Composition and the Black-White Achievement Gap. NCES 2015-018, National Center for Education Statistics, 2015-Jun

Bowman, B. T., Comer, J. P., & Johns., D. J. (2018). *Addressing the African American achievement gap: Three leading educators issue a call to action*. https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/yc/may2018/achievement-gap

Brinkmann, S., & Kvale, S. (2015). *Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (3rd ed.). Sage.

Burchinal, M., McCartney, K., Steinberg, L., Crosnoe, R., Friedman, S. L., McLoyd, V., & Pianta, R. (2011). Examining the Black–White achievement gap among low-income children using the NICHD study of early childcare and youth development. *Child Development, 82*(5), 1404–1420. Examining the Black-White achievement gap among low-income children using the NICHD study of early child care and youth development - PubMed (nih.gov)

Cardichon, J., Darling-Hammond, L., Yang, M., Scott, C., Shields, P. M., Burns, D., & Learning Policy Institute. (2020). *Inequitable opportunity to learn: Student access to certified and experienced teachers.* Learning Policy Institute. https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/crdc-teacher-access-report

Carpenter, D. M., II, & Ramirez, A. (2012). Exploring the underachievement gap. *Christian Higher Education, 11*(2), 115–130. https://doi.org/10.1080/15363759.2012.624458

Carpenter, D. M., II, Ramirez, A., & Severn, L. (2006). Gap or gaps: Challenging the singular definition of the achievement gap. *Education & Urban Society, 39*(1), 113–127. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013124506291792

Center on Education Policy. (2007). *Why we still need public schools. Public education for the common good*. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED503799.pdf

Coghlan, D., & Brydon-Miller, M. (2014). Critical friend. In D. Coghlan & M. Brydon-Miller (Eds.), *The Sage encyclopedia* (pp. 190-192).

Coghlan, D., & Brydon-Miller, M. (Eds.) (2014). *The SAGE encyclopedia of action research*. (Vols. 1-2). SAGE Publications Ltd. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446294406

Coleman, J. S., Campbell, E. Q., Hobson, C. J., McPartland, J., Mood, A. M., Weinfeld, F. D., & York, R. L. (1966). *Equality of educational opportunity*. U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Office of Education. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED012275

Colgren, C., & Sappington, N. E. (2015). Closing the achievement gap means transformation. *Education Leadership Review of Doctoral Research, 2*(1), 24–33.

Commission on No Child Left Behind. (2007). *Beyond NCLB: Fulfilling the promise to our nation's children*. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED495292.pdf

Creswell, J. W., & Guetterman, T. C. (2019). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*. Pearson.

Creswell, J. W. & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Sage.

Darling-Hammond, L. (1998, March). *Unequal opportunity: Race and education*. Brookings Institute. https://www.brookings.edu/articles/unequal-opportunity-race-and-education/

Darling-Hammond, F. L. (2014). Want to close the achievement gap? Close the teaching gap. *American Educator, 38*(4), 14–18.

Desimone, L. M., & Long, D. (2010, December). Teacher effects and the achievement gap: Do teacher and teaching quality influence the achievement gap between Black and White and high- and low-SES Students in the early grades*? Teachers College Record, 112*(12), 3024–3073.

Dufur, M. J., Parcel, T. L., & Troutman, K. P. (2013). Does capital at home matter more than capital at school? Social capital's effects on academic achievement. *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility, 31*, 1–21.

Education Commission of the States. (2020). *50-state comparison: K-12 governance.* https://www.ecs.org/50-state-comparison-k-12-governance/

Enamorado, P. (2019). *Closing the teacher quality gap*. https://fordhaminstitute.org/national/commentary/closing-teacher-quality-gap

Epstein, D. (2011, August). *Measuring inequity in school funding*. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED535988.pdf

Every Student Succeeds Act, 20 U.S.C. § 6301 (2015). PUBL095.PS (congress.gov)

Fergus, E. (2016). *Solving disproportionality and achieving equity: A leader's guide to using data to change hearts and minds.* Corwin Press.

George Washington University, Center on Education Policy, Kober, N., & Renter, D.S. (2020). *History and evolution of public education in the US*. ERIC - ED606970 - History and Evolution of Public Education in the US, Center on Education Policy, 2020**.**

Goldhaber, D., Quince, V., & Theobald, R. (2018). Has it always been this way? Tracing the evolution of teacher quality gaps in U.S. public schools. *American Educational Research Journal, 55*(1), 171–201.

Gopalan, M. (2019, December). Understanding the linkages between racial/ethnic discipline gaps and racial/ethnic achievement gaps in the United States. *Education Policy Analysis Archives, 27*(154), 1–34.

Graham, S., Kogachi, K., & Morales-Chicas, J. (2022). Do I fit in: Race/ethnicity and feelings of belonging in school. *Educational Psychology Review*, 34(4), 2015-2042. https://doi-org.cucproxy.cuchicago.edu/10.1007/s10648-022-09709-x

Grant, C., & Osanloo, A. (2014). Understanding, selecting, and integrating a theoretical framework in dissertation research: Creating the blueprint for your house. *Administrative Issues Journal: Connecting Education, Practice, and Research, 4*(2), 12–26.

Graesser, A. C., Fiore, S. M., Greiff, S., Andrews-Todd, J., Foltz, P. W. & Hesse, F. W. (2018). Advancing the science of collaborative problem solving. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest, 19*(2) 59–92. https://doi.org/10.1177/1529100618808244

Greenleaf, R. K. (1977). *Servant leadership: A journey into the nature of legitimate power and greatness*. Paulist Press.

Greenleaf, R. K. (2012). *The institution as servant*. Robert K. Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership.

Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership. (2021). *What is servant leadership*? https://www.greenleaf.org/what-is-servant-leadership/

Gregory, A., Skiba, R. J., & Noguera, P. A. (2010). The achievement gap and the discipline gap. *Educational Researcher, 39*, 59–68. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X09357621

Hanselman, P. (2018). *Do school learning opportunities compound or compensate for background inequalities? Evidence from the case of assignment to effective teachers*. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED585866

Hanson, T., Austin, G., & Zheng, C. (2011). Academic performance and school well-being, and the achievement gap and school well-being. California Healthy Students Research Project, Being Well Learning Well Issue Briefs #1 and #2. San Francisco: WestEd and University of California, San Francisco.

Hanushek, E. A., Peterson, P. E., Talpey, L. M., & Woessman, L. (2020, February). *Long-run trends in the U.S. SES-achievement gap* (Program on Education Policy and Governance Working Papers Series Working Paper No. 26764).

Hess, F. M., & Meeks, O. (2010). *School boards circa 2010: Governance in the accountability era*. National School Boards Association, Thomas B. Fordham Institute, and Iowa School Boards Foundation. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED515849.pdf

Hursh, D. (2007, September). Exacerbating inequality: The failed promise of the No Child Left Behind Act. *Race Ethnicity and Education, 10*(3), 295–308. https://doi.org/10.1080/13613320701503264

Johnson, R. B., & Christensen, L (2020). *Educational research: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed approaches*. Sage.

Lamb, S. (2014). *Community engagement: The job of the school board member*. Community Engagement: THE Job of a School Board Member | ThoughtExchange

Learning Policy Institute, Cardichon, J., Darling-Hammond, L., Yang, M.. Scott, C., Shields, P.M., & Burns, D. (2020). Inequitable opportunity to learn: Student access to certified and experienced teachers. In *Learning Policy Institute.*

Lemoine, J. G., Hartnell, C. A., & Hannes, L. E. (2019). Taking stock of moral approaches to leadership. An integrative review of ethical, authentic, and servant leadership. *Academy of Management Annals, 13*(1), 148–187.

McKinsey & Company, Social Sector Office. (2009). *The economic impact of the achievement gap in America's schools*. ACHIEVEMENT_GAP_REPORT_20090512.pdf (dropoutprevention.org)

Medelyan, A. (2020). *Coding qualitative data: How to code qualitative research*. Medelyan, A. (2020). Coding Qualitative Data How to Code Qualitative Research. Thematic. - References - Scientific Research Publishing (scirp.org)

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). Jossey-Bass.

Mountford, M. (2008). Historical and current tensions among board-superintendent teams: Symptoms or cause? In T. L. Ansbury (Ed.), *In the future of school board governance: Relevancy and revelation* (pp. 81-114). Rowman & Littlefield Education.

Muhammad, Y., & Mohamad, N. A. (2016, June). Ethics and morality: Comparing ethical leadership with servant, authentic and transformational leadership styles. *International Review of Management and Marketing, 6*(4), 310–331.

National Assessment of Educational Progress (2015). *Achievement gaps*. https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/studies/gaps/

National Assessment of Educational Progress. (2020). *NAEP 2019-2020 for teachers*. National Assessment of Educational Progress: 2020 Facts for Teachers

National Assessment of Educational Progress. (2022a).*Achievement gaps dashboard.* NAEP Dashboards - Achievement Gap (nationsreportcard.gov)

National Assessment of Educational Progress. (2022b). *NAEP long-term trend assessments: Reading and mathematics.* NAEP Long-Term Trends: Home (nationsreportcard.gov)

National School Boards Association. (2019). *About us.* About (nsba.org)

National School Boards Association. (2020, June). *Black students in the condition of education 2020*. https://www.nsba.org/Perspectives/2020/black-students-condition-education

National School Boards Association. (2021). *Reimagining school board leadership: Actions for equity*. https://www.nsba.org/-/media/NSBA/File/center-for-safe-schoolsreimagining-school-board-leadership-guide-2021.pdf

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, P.L. 107–110, 20 U.S.C. § 6319 (2002). PLAW-107publ110.pdf (congress.gov)

Paige, R., & Witty, E. (2010). *The Black–White achievement gap: Why closing it is the greatest civil rights issue of our time*. American Management Association.

Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (4th ed.). Sage.

Pearman, F. A., Curran, F. C., Fisher, B., & Gardella, J. (2019). Are achievement gaps related to discipline gaps? Evidence from national data. *AERA Open, 5*(4). Are Achievement Gaps Related to Discipline Gaps? Evidence From National Data - Francis A. Pearman, F. Chris Curran, Benjamin Fisher, Joseph Gardella, 2019 (sagepub.com)

Petrilli, M. (2019). *A new era of accountability in education has barely just begun*. A new era of accountability in education has barely just begun | The Thomas B. Fordham Institute

Plough, B. (2014). *School board governance and student achievement: School board members' perceptions of their behaviors and beliefs*. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1028871.pdf

Porfeli, E., Wang, C., Audette, R., McColl, A., & Algozzine, B. (2009). Influence of social and community capital on student achievement in a large urban school district. *Education and Urban Society*, *42*(72). DOI: 10.1177/0013124509343373

Ratcliff, N. J., Costner, R. H., Carroll, K. L., Jones, C. R., Chase-Sheehan, H., & Hunt, G. H. (2016). *Causes of and solutions to the achievement gap: Teachers' perceptions*. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1095644.pdf

Reardon, S. F. (2013). The widening income achievement gap. *Educational Leadership, 70*(8), 10–16.

Robinson, K., & Harris, A. L. (2013). Racial and social class differences in how parents respond to inadequate achievement: Consequences for children's future achievement. *Social Science Quarterly, 94*, 1346–1371. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3930341/

Ruff, R. R. (2019). State-level autonomy in the era of accountability: A comparative analysis of Virginia and Nebraska education policy through No Child Left Behind. *Education Policy Analysis Archives, 27*(6), 1–31.

Saldana, J. (2013). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (2nd ed.). Sage.

Seider, S., Henry, D. A., Edwards, E.C., Huguley, J. P., Diaz, B., & Daza, K. (2023). Investigating the relation between consciousness and academic achievement for adolescents of color and white adolescents. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, 29(4), 516-529.* https://doi-org.cucproxy.cuchicago.edu/10.1037/cdp0000613

Sens, E., & van Rompu, P. (2017, April). *The school-to-prison pipeline: Early education inequality shapes incarceration in US and Brazil*. https://www.rioonwatch.org/?p=35924

Sergiovanni, T. J. (1990, May). Adding value to leadership gets extraordinary results. *Educational Leadership*. https://files.ascd.org/staticfiles/ascd/pdf/journals/ed_lead/el_199005_sergiovanni.pdf

Sergiovanni, T. J. (1992). *Moral leadership.* Jossey-Bass.

Sergiovanni, T. J. (2005, Winter). The virtues of leadership. *Educational Forum, 69*, 112–123. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ683737.pdf

Shober, A. F., & Hartney, M. T. (2014). *Does school board leadership matter*? Does-School-Board-Leadership-Matter-FINAL.pdf (edex.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com)

Silliman, R., & Schleifer, D. (2018, October). *Our next assignment: Where Americans stand on public K–12 education*. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED594795.pdf

Tawfik, A. A., Reeves, T. D., & Stich, A. (2016). Intended and unintended consequences of technology on social inequality. *TechTrends: Linking Research and Practice to Improve Learning, 60*(6), 598–605.

Teddlie, C., & Tashakkori, A. (2009). *Foundations of mixed-methods research: Integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches in social behavior and sciences*. Sage.

Voight, A. (2013). *The racial school-climate gap.* [Summary report from the Region IX Equity Assistance Center at WestEd]. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED580366.pdf

Warder, G. (2015). *Horace Mann and the creation of the Common School*. http://www.disabilitymuseum.org/dhm/edu/essay.html?id=42.

Watts, S. (2014). User skills for qualitative analysis: Perspective, interpretation, and the delivery of impact. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 11(1), 1–1.

Webb, M., & Thomas, R. (2015). Teachers' perceptions of educators' and students' role in closing the achievement gap. *National Forum of Teacher Education Journal, 25*(3), 1–6.

Wixom, M. A., & Education Commission of the States. (2015, January). *Closing the achievement gap: Four states' efforts*. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED561914.pdf

Yin, R. K. (2014). *Case study research design and methods* (3rd ed.). Sage.

# Transforming Sense into Cents: Evaluation of Edgenuity's Impact in a County's Schools

**David R. Maddock**
*Osceola County Schools*

**Daniel W. Eadens**
*University of Central Florida*

Edgenuity is a one of a multitude of digital support tools for instruction and intervention. In 2019, a School District in the South began using Edgenuity – a digital intervention platform focused on grade and credit recovery. This current study evaluated Edgenuity to determine its effects on students learning and the associated cost. For the 2022-2023 school year, a total of 2371 students entered the platform and participated in approximately 5447 courses, and students spent a total of 177,022 hours on the platform. Quantitative methodologies were utilized to examine the effects of each current program. Data collected included individual student data including grade, school, courses attempted, overall course grade, time spent on platform, length of enrollment as well as assessment data from the Florida Reporting System for SY2023. Additional data were collected on students' graduation measures, including credits earned over time, GPA over time, and graduation requirement status (such as concordant scores) over time. Based on the quantitative results, it appears that the utilization of Edgenuity is associated with student growth higher than standard student growth measures, even when students in the platform are scoring significantly lower than their academic peers. Students completing coursework in Edgenuity had higher growth in both ELA, $d$ = 0.12**, and math, $d$ = 0.12*. When considering just academic outcomes, Edgenuity has an ROI of 12%, however when adding credits earned to the measurement, the ROI is between 22% (current) and 53% (potential) depending on how many students currently in progress on their courses complete the course and pass their exam with the requisite grade. While the *direct cost* of Edgenuity ($49.31 per course) is very high in comparison to other digital interventions Edgenuity still provides a return on the investment made and provides the further benefit of allowing students to earn a credit and correct their path towards graduation when they otherwise would not have had the opportunity. It is recommended that schools continue the use of the Edgenuity platform.

*Keywords:* Edgenuity, educational leadership, program evaluation, digital support, instruction, intervention

A multitude of digital support tools exist for instruction and intervention. As part of the continuous evaluations of the various tools and resources that a School District in the South spends money on, a program called Edgenuity, (n.d.), hereto forward referred to as simply Edgenuity, is a digital intervention platform focused on grade and credit recovery – was evaluated to determine its effects on students learning, and the cost associated with that learning. Edgenuity was introduced to the school district in 2019, when students began using the course for the purposes of credit recovery, grade forgiveness, or in substitution for a teacher when one was unavailable. In addition to being an explicit evaluation of the effects of a program, this article also proposes a framework for applying the Return on Investment framework to education both broadly as a concept and specifically in Florida.

## Purpose

The purpose of this evaluation was to examine the effectiveness of the Edgenuity program regarding student outcomes and cost-effectiveness. This evaluation aimed to provide valuable insights into the program's efficacy in delivering quality education in a cost-efficient manner by investigating the impact of Edgenuity on student learning and academic achievement while considering the associated costs per student. The study outcomes examined success on Edgenuity associated with success on measures of standardized assessments, relationships between the implementation of the program and graduation, and return on investment (ROI). Drawing upon a range of studies (Avellaneda, 2020; Desimone, 2019; Llewellyn, 2018) and employing rigorous analysis, this evaluation sought to shed light on the effectiveness of Edgenuity as a valuable educational intervention within the context of limited resources and budget considerations. Additionally, the evaluation aimed to identify any potential trade-offs between the program's effectiveness and its associated costs, providing a comprehensive understanding of its overall value and impact in educational settings.

## Research Questions

The following evaluation questions were posed for each tool:

1) Is success on Edgenuity associated with success on measures of standardized assessments?
2) What relationship, if any, exists between the implementation of the program and graduation outcomes?
3) What is the cost per student of Edgenuity and is there a return on the investment in the program?

## Literature Review

In K-12 settings, digital intervention platforms have gained considerable popularity in the field of education. They are able to provide targeted support for students in areas such as credit recovery and grade improvement. This summary of the literature reviewed explores existing research on

effectiveness of Edgenuity, its impact on student learning, and the associated costs. Additionally, this review aims to provide valuable insights towards the potential of the Edgenuity program by synthesizing a diverse range of studies.

In analyzing the effectiveness of Edgenuity, we can draw upon a philosophical framework rooted in pragmatism (Dewey, 1910; James, 1907). Pragmatism emphasizes the practical consequences and outcomes of actions and interventions, aligning with the goal of evaluating the use of the tool Edgenuity and its impact on student learning and academic achievement. Additionally, a theoretical lens informed by constructivism (Piaget, 1977; Vygotsky, 1978) can be applied to understand how students engage with Edgenuity and actively construct knowledge through their experiences. Lastly, from a conceptual standpoint, Edgenuity can be viewed within the broader context of digital intervention platforms and educational technology (Selwyn, 2011), considering its role in addressing educational gaps, supporting student needs, and navigating the evolving landscape of modern education. Better understanding the needs of students during rapidly developing times and preparing teachers is crucial (Eadens et al., 2022). This is especially important now that results of learning loss are even more visible, due to "the pandemic and sudden shift online" (Eadens, et al., 2022, p. 148). Integrating these philosophical, theoretical, and conceptual frameworks enables a comprehensive examination of the effectiveness and implications of Edgenuity in educational settings today.

## Effectiveness of Edgenuity

Because the authors are not vendors of Edgenuity and received no compensation or benefits from the program, this examination was unbiased. A fair deal of research has been conducted to investigate the effectiveness of Edgenuity across diverse educational contexts. Notably, studies conducted by Avellaneda (2020), Desimone (2019), and Llewellyn (2018) have consistently shown strong evidence that students who utilized the program Edgenuity experienced significant improvements in credit recovery success and progress towards graduation. These findings underscore the platform's efficacy in helping students regain credits and stay on track for successful graduation.

To further examine these findings the body of literature around the platform, Avellaneda (2020) conducted research on the impact of Edgenuity as a credit recovery tool, revealing positive outcomes in credit recovery success rates. In Avellaneda's dissertation, a mixed method evaluation of the Edgenuity program in a public high school using a CIPP model, findings indicated that the use of Edgenuity program was practical for credit recovery, had significant impacts on aiding students towards remaining on track for graduation, and there was significance in recovery of several core subjects including Algebra, English, and Biology (Avellanada, 2020). Desimone (2019) conducted a comparative analysis of Edgenuity's influence on student achievement across various subject areas, uncovering limited improvements, especially in science. Llewellyn (2018) explored the impact of Edgenuity on graduation rates through a comprehensive statewide analysis, highlighting its positive influence on progress towards graduation. Hypothesi (2015) investigated the effectiveness of Edgenuity in relation to NWEA scores, finding evidence of improved student achievement. In a recent study by Williams et al. (2021), a rigorous randomized controlled trial was conducted, reporting positive outcomes in credit recovery and grade improvement.

When examining the impact of Edgenuity on academic performance rather than just credit recovery, the results have been more mixed. For instance, the study conducted by Hypothesi (2015) indicated positive effects of Edgenuity on students' NWEA scores, suggesting a potential favorable impact on academic achievement. On the contrary, Desimone (2019) observed limited gains in academic performance, particularly in the field of science. Avellaneda (2020) reported minimal changes in assessment scores among students using the platform. These divergent findings highlight the need for further research to comprehensively understand Edgenuity's impact on academic performance across various subject domains. Furthermore, these studies all considered the effect that the use of Edgenuity had on academic achievement despite the fact that usage of the program has additional financial outcomes to considered beyond simply the academic implications of the program.

**Comparative Effect Sizes**

Effect sizes serve as a valuable metric for assessing the impact of interventions. Notably, Hattie (2009) established a baseline effect size for teacher education, which he termed the “hinge-point”, set at an effect of $d = 0.40$. This effect is useful for comparing academic core programs, but it a difficult hurdle to cross for academic interventions, which happen *in addition to* core academics and therefor have isolated outcomes. Kraft (2019) proposed a revised interpretation which is useful for examining the effect sizes of specific expectations, set at $d > 0.05$ for moderate effects, and $d > 0.20$ for large effects. Considering these benchmarks, the expected effect size for the Edgenuity program intervention falls within the range of $0.05 < d > 0.20$, especially when interpreting outcomes from standardized tests which can include zero or negative outcomes into the model. With Edgenuity specifically, the possibility of negative inflation bias exists with students who have very low participation in their coursework.

In summary, the literature indicates that the use of Edgenuity has demonstrated a positive impact on credit recovery success and progress towards graduation. However, the effects on academic performance in other subject areas remain inconclusive. This underscores the need for further reviews and research. Additional studies are required to explore the specific impact of Edgenuity across different subject domains, consider return on investment, and identify optimal implementation practices to maximize its potential as an effective educational intervention.

**Return on Investment in Education (ROI)**

It is essential to consider the cost-effectiveness and practical implementation of Edgenuity as a key piece of evaluating effectiveness. The Return on Investment methodology from the ROI Institute (Phillips, Phillips, Paone, & Gaudet, 2019) provides valuable insights into the financial implications and overall value of utilizing Edgenuity compared to alternative interventions. Furthermore, examination of implementation processes, including teacher training, student engagement strategies, and technical support, can be considered within the context of costs and therefore operationalized as outcomes.

Within the realm of return-on-investment research, cost analysis must be conducted. For the purposes of proposing a framework for conducting academic return-on-investment research, the Institute of Educational Sciences Standards for Excellence in Education Research (IES SEER, 2020)

present an excellent methodology for cost analysis in which the costs of personnel, materials, equipment, facilities, and other inputs are systematically examined from a set perspective. The IES Cost Analysis method is a rigorous method for systematically determining costs in alignment with the ROI Institute methodology and remains applicable in an ROI analysis even though it was developed for use with cost-effectiveness analysis. While cost-effectiveness analysis remains a useful way of measuring the effectiveness of an intervention, ROI analysis can have different utility in two manners. First, the output value of cost-effectiveness analysis is cost-per-unit-increase-in-effect-size. This requires the reader to understand the cost framework, the value of an effect size increase, and what a standard deviation increase means regarding the assessment utilized (Hollands et. al, 2016).

While the ROI analysis allows for a less nuanced analysis of the data, it does output variables that are more generally understandable by public stakeholders: dollars and time. Second, because the ROI framework requires both the costs to be turned in dollars and the benefits to be turned into dollars, the output is standardized. This allows for any ROI analysis completed with this methodology to be immediately comparable to any other ROI analysis completed in the same manner. This analysis is still subject to the same assumptions that cost-effectiveness is subject to, mainly the assumptions that the effects of an intervention can be isolated from the effect of a teacher and that the assessment we utilize accurately measure educational growth, however the output is easier to report and share with stakeholders, thereby allowing them to make better informed decisions not hindered by statistical inability.

Additionally, within the cost-effectiveness framework, any growth that occurs with the teacher is not inherently isolated out from the cost-per-unit-increase metric. In this variable, the cost of the teacher is inherent, resulting in values that *assume* the cost of the teacher as part of their effect. For this reason, the SEER standards (2020) recommend that researchers utilize reference case analysis and control or comparison conditions to help disambiguate the comparative cost of the intervention. That is to say, studies should use national average teacher salary, or suffer an exposure to bias from teacher making above-average salaries in states such as Massachusetts, or from studies wherein teachers earn below-average salaries in states such as Mississippi. A feature of the return-on-investment framework is that, when teacher costs are included, it utilizes the *true* teacher cost in both the numerator and the denominator, thereby isolating out the cost of the teacher within the context they are employed from, and in turn reducing the bias of either the true teacher cost, or the assumed average teacher cost. This means that an ROI analysis should, theoretically, yield a similar ROI regardless of the state or country examined and the variance in cost of the teachers (although it would be subject to validity issues if teacher methods varied in such a manner that costs were otherwise incomparable).

A framework for applying the return-on-investment method to the context of non-for-profit education environments in conjunction with the SEER cost-analysis method will be examined in detail in the methodology. The return-on-investment method will also be explained in explicit detail during the analysis in the hopes that the methodology is easily replicable for future academic ROI research.

## Methodology

Multiple quantitative methodologies via statistical analyses were utilized to examine the effects of the examined intervention. For the evaluation of Edgenuity, data were collected sent directly from Edgenuity with each student's individual data, including grade, school, courses attempted, overall course grade, time spent on platform, and length of enrollment. Assessment data for the Florida Assessment of Student Thinking were collected from the Cambium Florida Reporting System for SY2023, and internal data sources were paired with each student in a row context, harvested from the Student Information System.

Additional data were collected on students' graduation measures, including credits earned over time, Grade Point Average (GPA) over time, and graduation requirement status (such as concordant scores) over time. Data for the NWEA assessment were collected directly from the NWEA platform and match to the student records. The data related to platform costs were collected via quote. Statistical tests were performed to compare differences among students. All statistical analyses were performed using SPSS 27.0.

### Methods for Using Return on Investment in an Educational Context

The Return-on-Investment model (Phillips et al., 2019) does not seem inherently applicable to educational contexts. Indeed, it is a measure of the return, in dollars, for the cost, in dollars, of a program, and it is widely accepted that student learning does not equate to dollars earned. If it did, it's likely that educators would be exceptionally wealthy. For this reason, a method is needed for collecting both the costs and benefits of the intervention program.

In order to determine the cost of the intervention program, the methodology provided by the ROI Institute (Phillips, Phillips, Paone, & Gaudet, 2019) was combined with the IES SEER Standards for analyzing intervention's costs (IES SEER, 2020). Within this method, data were collected for the cost of Edgenuity and associated teacher training, the use of computers and internet, the cost of personnel to implement the program. While the cost of facilities utilized are also considered in SEER Standards, they were not included in the ROI analysis. The reasoning behind this decision is that the benefit rate for ROI analysis comes from the Florida Education Finance Program, FEFP (FLDOE, 2023), which provides a per-pupil allocation of funding per student based on the number of hours they attend school in Florida, while the funding for the facilities comes from a local sales tax. Given that the facility cost is not valued in the benefit rate, it has been excluded from the cost rate. This will be further examined in the analysis.

Under the SEER Standards, it is also important to adopt a perspective for analysis. Within this study, a district perspective was employed given that the purpose of an ROI evaluation is so that stakeholders within the district can determine if they should continue to utilize the examined program. From this lens, it is critical to determine the costs as they associate to the district specifically, rather than how they might work within larger contexts.

Once all costs have been collected, the benefits must be determined. In the case of public schools in the United States, students do not pay to attend school. Instead, schools are funded as a service through local and state tax systems, often through property taxes. In Florida specifically, these funds are provided as a specific per-pupil allocation, which means that there is a fixed amount paid to the school districts if a student completes a course. This allows school

districts to assign a certain number of students to a teacher for a fixed "period" of time and guarantee they will get a set amount of funding from providing a class. This begs the question; how can a school have a financial benefit in an ROI framework if they will be paid a fixed amount of money per student?

The answer to this comes from the fact that schools have specific expectations for student performance, and if students do not meet those measures, they will receive intervention and remediation as classes instead of electives or other alternatives. For example, if a student is unsuccessful on their tenth grade English examination, they may be required to take eleventh-grade "intensive reading" courses. These intervention courses require additional staff to be utilized to help students meet expectations. Within this paradigm, a student who is a year behind expectations would cost one class period of funding for a year to return to expectations. Funds that could otherwise be utilized for different or more varied services, or for more targeted support, instead go to providing teachers for intervention classrooms. If a student were two years behind, it could take two years to return them to expectations, however, if an intervention could return that student to expectations within a year, then a full year of funds for intervening with that student are released to be utilized for other purposes.

It is within this structure that the return on the investment In the program is measured by the *costs of remediation avoided* rather than actual monies earned from student performance. While this is perhaps a less subtle metric than cost-per-unit-growth, it is more plainly interpretable. If 150 students were in a program that returned a 100% ROI, that would mean the program *avoided* the cost of a teacher for those 150 students for a year of remediation. In the examined district, a high school teacher generally serves 150 students per day, ergo this example would result in the school having avoided the cost of providing an "intensive reading" teacher in a future year. A 200% ROI would indicate two years of avoided costs.

## Findings in Relation to the Research Questions

Edgenuity was introduced to the school district in 2019, when students began using the course for the purposes of credit recovery, grade recovery, or in substitution for a teacher when one was unavailable. For the 2022-2023 school year, a total of 2371 students entered the platform and participated in approximately 5447 courses. Of those courses, a total of 1851 courses were completed. The mean time spent in Edgenuity for a course completion is 40 hours and 24 minutes. The minimum time for a course completion was 3 hours. However, the maximum time was 866 hours. In this case, students spent a total of 177,022 hours on the platform, with the course average of 32.5 hours per course, indicating that there are potentially a large number of courses that will be completed before the end of the school year.

The Edgenuity program specifically targets students who need credit recovery or grade forgiveness. The district-wide mean GPA for students not in Edgenuity is 2.87, while for students in Edgenuity it is 2.01. Students using Edgenuity are likely to have fewer credits and lower scores on standardized assessments than their counterparts not in Edgenuity. Students who participate in Edgenuity are also likely to complete more than one course. The average amount of courses completed for students in the program was 2 (each course completed is worth one half-credit, or a semester worth of learning). This is an interesting value given that this evaluation is being

conducted in March: students in Edgenuity are completing the equivalent of a year of learning in the platform in less than one academic year.

Students who completed courses in Edgenuity had higher growth measures of standardized assessment than students not in the program, although not at a statistically significant level. Since the NWEA MAP Reading assessment is only required for students in need of a reading concordant score to graduate, a t-test was conducted among 11th and 12th grade students who took the MAP Reading assessment, grouped by whether they had participated in an Edgenuity reading course.

Among students who completed the MAP Reading assessment (already a delimitation since the assessment is only assigned to students who demonstrate need) when students who were in an Edgenuity Reading course ($n$ = 567) were compared to students who were not in an Edgenuity course ($n$ = 4852), students in Edgenuity saw statistically significantly higher growth than students not in the platform between their Fall and Winter NWEA assessments, $t(672) = 2.361$, $p = .009$, $d = 0.116$ (MD = 1.16). It is also important to note that students in Edgenuity score a mean 211 RIT (Rasch Unit) on their Winter MAP assessment, statistically and practically significantly lower than students not in Edgenuity, who scored a mean 219.

This means that, on average, students in Edgenuity are reading at around a 5th grade level, while students not in the program read at around a ninth-grade level, $t(5417) = -9.042$, $p < .001$; meaning students being identified to participate in Edgenuity are performing significantly lower than the ones not identified for the program.

To further examine these results, an ANOVA was conducted with students who in a reading course in Edgenuity grouped by whether the completed the courses, were still in progress, or had not participated. Students who had completed the course saw an average RIT growth between their Fall and Winter assessment of M = 4.19, while students who were in the process of completing an Edgenuity course grew by M = 2.82, and students who had not taken any Edgenuity course at all grew by M = 2.05. While this growth was higher for students who completed Edgenuity, the results were not statistically significant**,** $F(2, 1329) = 1.834$, $p = .160$, $\eta 2 = 0.003$.

Furthermore, a Tukey post-hoc analysis revealed no individual group scored statistically significantly differently from any other. This might suggest that participation in Edgenuity is associate with improved performance on standardized measures, although there is not a large difference between students who complete a course or students who are simply in the process of completing a course.

The mathematics comparison was also conducted, although the data is less reliable since far fewer students completed the NWEA MAP Math assessment. There is not as wide of an initial gap as there is with ELA; students in a math Edgenuity course average a RIT of 214.5, and students not in a math Edgenuity course average a RIT of 215.4, $t(1328) = -0.789$, $p = .215$. The indication is that there were not statistically significant differences between the students who were chosen to participate in Edgenuity versus those who were not. The difference in growth, however, was considerable.

Students in a math Edgenuity course ($n$ = 232) grew by a mean of 3.29 RIT points between the Fall and Winter MAP Growth assessments. Students not in a math Edgenuity course (n = 1098) grew by a mean of 2.06 RIT. This difference was statistically significant, $t(1328) = 1.655$, $p = .049$, with an effect size of $d = 0.12$. As with ELA, the difference between groups in an ANOVA, when

comparing course completion versus partial participation, was not statistically significant, $F(2, 1329) = 0.661$, $p = .517$, $\eta 2 = 0.001$). Information within Table 1 summarizes the findings.

**Table 1**

*Summary of Findings*

| Assessment (NWEA MAP) | Mean Difference | Effect Size (*d*) | Significance |
|---|---|---|---|
| Reading RIT | 7.41 RIT | -0.40** | <.001 |
| Math RIT | 0.90 RIT | -0.06 | .215 |
| Reading Growth | 1.16 RIT | 0.12** | .009 |
| Math Growth | 1.23 RIT | 0.12* | .049 |

This suggests that participation in Edgenuity is associate with improved growth on standardized measures, although there is not a large difference between students who complete a course or students who are simply in the process of completing a course. Additionally, the growth experienced during the Edgenuity program is not enough to cover the vast gaps in reading ability, although it may be enough to close the gaps in mathematics. See Figure 1 for a depiction of the results.

**Figure 1**

*NWEA Winder Math Growth*

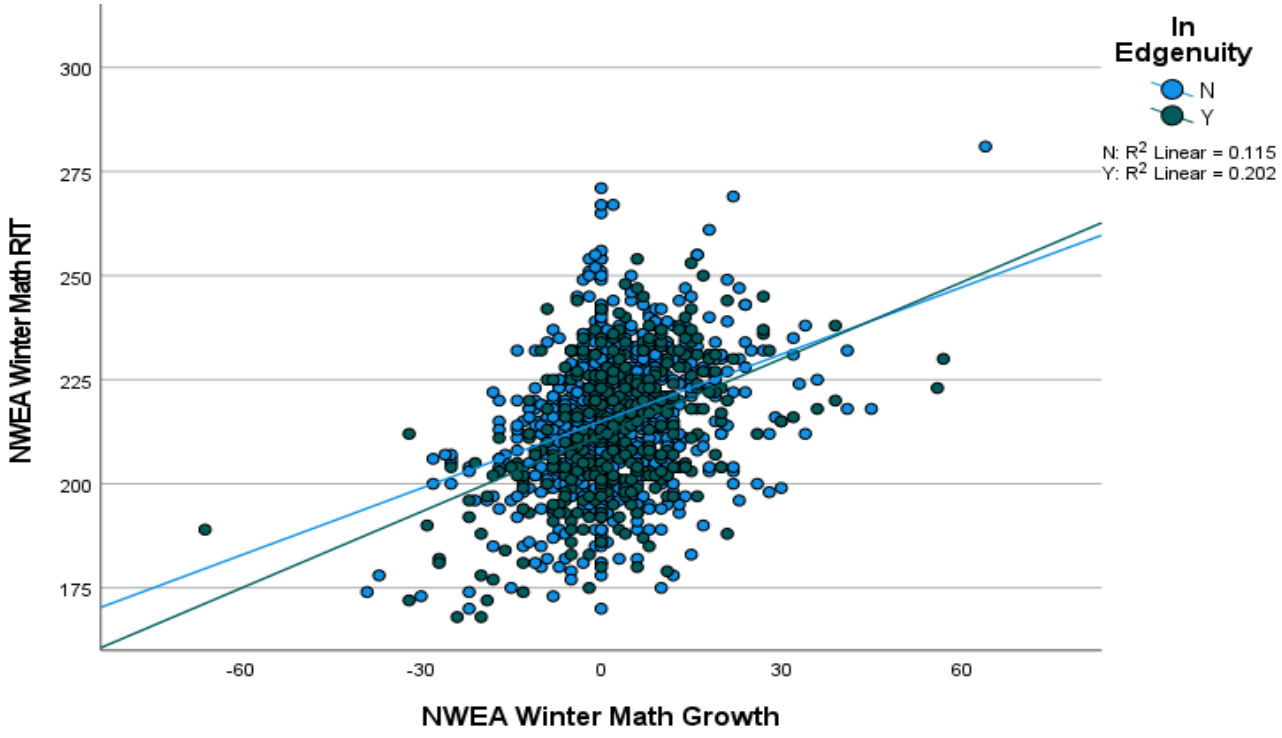
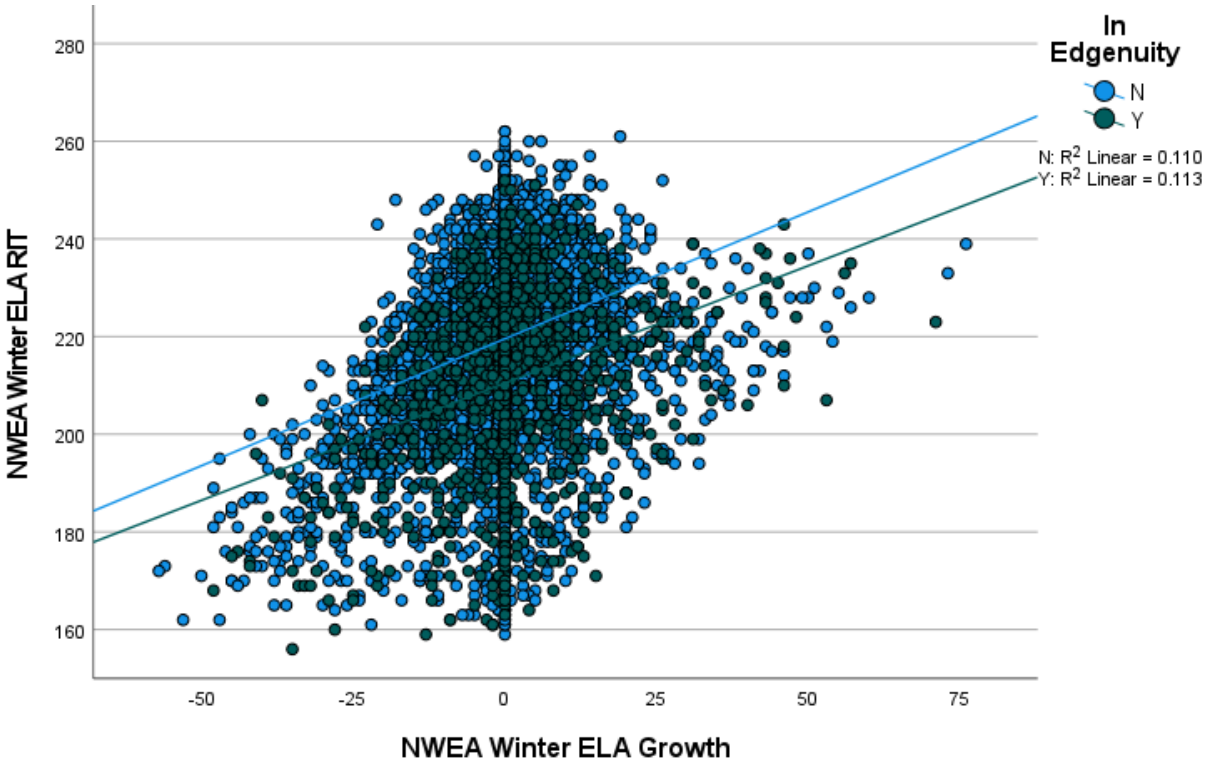


Figure 1 visualization represents the growth experiences in NWEA scores for students in Edgenuity in math (above) and ELA (below). While students in both subjects experience more growth than students not in Edgenuity, in mathematics this is enough to account for the starting disparities in performance, although in ELA it is not (Figure 2).

***Figure 2***

*NWEA Winder ELA Growth*




**Edgenuity Return on Investment**

The final question in the evaluation was related to cost per student and the potential return on investment from Edgenuity. A total of 2371 students used the platform at an initial cost load of $268,600 for user reusable enrollments to Edgenuity's digital libraries, or $113.28 per student. A total of 5447 courses were participated in, which arrives at a cost of $49.31 per course. In order to provide the most conservative ROI calculation as possible, the cost loading process provided by the ROI Institute was followed. For digital interventions, the expectation for ROI is at least 0%, that is, the amount of money spent on increasing student learning returns at least as much value as it cost. In addition to the $268,600 direct cost, $61,100 were spent to provide training to teachers, bringing the cost to $329,700.

The program Edgenuity is traditionally operated during a research class, which is scheduled during the student day and requires a teacher to at least be present in the classroom

with the students to ensure that they can log on to the platform, to answer questions as needed, and to provide supervision for student safety. Their salary cost must be operationalized into the model in order to fully understand the cost of providing Edgenuity to students. The average hourly salary for teachers in this county is $35 per hour ($34.47), with a benefits rate of 19.79%, or a fully loaded cost of $41.93 per hour of teaching (regardless of the quantity of students in a classroom).

Across all high schools, a total of 34 teachers worked with students during the Research period, wherein students spent time on Edgenuity, although it is worth noting that seven of the teachers have courses other than Research on their schedules at some point in the day. However, while calculating the full day rate for all 36 teachers time may be an overestimation, the slight inflation accounts for the potential of teachers who earn over the average pay, which only works to increase confidence in the ROI calculation. At a rate of $41.93 per hour for 34 teachers for seven and a half hour per day for 182 school days, the instructional cost of Edgenuity was approximately $2,060,440 in unavoidable employee wages and benefits (that is to say, there is no option to provide Edgenuity but *not* pay employees while students utilize it during the school day). The monthly cost of internet for last year was $336 per month at each site, for a total cost of $27,216 for schools combined. This brings an "all-in cost" for providing the intervention to a maximum cost of $2,417,356, not accounting for unavoidable sunk costs such as facilities usage, janitorial services, air condition, and technology. At this rate, considering all indirect costs, Edgenuity was $1109 per student in the program, or $443.80 per course. At this point, it is also worth reiterating that each Edgenuity course is the equivalent to one half-credit, or a half-year of education.

In SY2023, this district received a base per-pupil expenditure of $8,629 (FLDOE, 2021). For simplicity, weighted FTE will not be used during the analysis to increase confidence in the ROI measure. High school students in this county have class periods that average out to 49 minutes (this is slightly different for schools that have "block scheduling", where the block ranges from 90 to 106 minutes). Since a student has seven periods a day, for 182 school days, it can be determined that one hour of learning at the high school level is worth approximately $6.77 (for comparison, the DreamBox evaluation found that in elementary schools, one hour of learning was work $7.29 at its base level, a rate that is slightly different after accounting for time spent in transition at high schools). This metric means that one student, learning for one hour, is worth approximate $6.77 of a teacher's time (students with greater need garner greater dollars to meet their needs), and can be used in calculating the costs avoided in interventions. For example, a student who was 100 hours behind, by this measure, would cost $729 in teachers' time to remediate back to Tier 1. For the purposes of this calculation, students spend approximately 148.6 hours a year in Tier 1 mathematics instruction, so a student who was "a year behind" would cost $1,006 in employee wages to remediate. For this reason, it becomes important to determine how far behind a student actually is in this formula, which is something that can be determined with data from the NWEA assessment.

The NWEA Measurement of Achievement Progress (MAP) assessment provides each student with a "RIT Score", which is a measure of where the student is in the K-12 learning continuum. By taking the student scores on this assessment and applying them to the grade level norms, it can be determined which level a student is operating within. For example, a student who scores a 209 on their Winter Reading assessment would be performing at the same level as

a “normal” fifth grader. While it is somewhat reductive to say that a 12th grade student performing at this level would take seven years’ worth of teacher time to remediate to that level of performance (this ignores teacher and student effects, as well as multi-year growth), it does create a useful heuristic for the purposes of ROI evaluation. In this model, that student would need approximately $7,042 of academic support (in a single content area) to catch the student up. In this manner, it can be theorized that a student who grows by a years’ worth of RIT points is an avoidance of 148.6 hours of teacher time costs avoided in remediation. Ergo, if Edgenuity assists a student in growing more than a traditional year, the ROI will be greater than 0%.

For ELA, the 573 students who participated in an ELA credit recovery or grade forgiveness program were approximately a collective 3032 years behind, with the average being 5.3 years of progress (although only means are reported, all students were analyzed independently in a row context). The combined cost to remediate all these students to grade level expectations would be approximately $3,050,192 (in monetary cost, it would also take multiple years). For mathematics, students average 5.2 years of progress behind, with the average cost of remediation being $5,796 per student, for a total of $3,645,684 to remediate all students to grade level expectations.

For students in 11th grade, the growth norm on NWEA MAP for one year in ELA is 1.18 RIT (1.11 for the Fall semester) and for math it is 2.52 RIT (1.77 RIT for the Fall semester). For 12th grade students, the growth norm is 0.52 RIT in ELA (0.05 RIT in the Fall semester) and 1.18 RIT for math growth (0.30 RIT in the Fall semester). Using ELA growth norms for high school seniors, a growth of 1 RIT is approximately one year change, 2 RIT is two years, 4 RIT for three years, 6 RIT for four years, 9 RIT for five years, 13 RIT for six years, 18 RIT for seven years, 25 RIT for eight years, 32 RIT for nine years, 42 RIT for ten years, 55 RIT for eleven years, 70 RIT for twelve years, or 86 RIT for thirteen years growth. Utilizing this measure, students in Edgenuity ELA courses grew an average of ~7 months during the Fall semester, for a combined total of 403 years of academic growth, as measured by the NWEA MAP assessment. As measured by NWEA, this would result in an academic benefit of $405,418 dollars in ELA growth. The same logic applied to mathematics (1 RIT for one; 3 RIT for two; 7 RIT for three; 10 RIT for four; 16 RIT for five; 22 RIT for six; 30 RIT for seven; 40 RIT for eight; 51 RIT for nine; 63 RIT for ten; 78 RIT for eleven; 94 RIT for twelve; 112 RIT for thirteen years growth) finds student in Edgenuity had 1.2 years math growth on average, for a combined total of 167 years of academic growth, or a benefit of $168,002. This is a combined academic benefit of $573,420. However, this only represents the growth for the 501 students measured on NWEA who also completed Edgenuity, which is only a fraction of the costs incurred. Since 2371 students are in Edgenuity, the value of 501 students represents 21.13% of students on the platform. An equivalent portion of the total cost of providing the program ($2,417,356) would be $510,787. This would result in a benefit-cost ratio of 1.12:1, or a return on investment of 12%. This would exceed the expected ROI of 0% and indicate that it costs less to remediate students using Edgenuity than it does to use traditional intervention measures.

This suggests that the use of Edgenuity provides a valuable return on investment *when measured on growth metrics provided by NWEA*. Given that multiple studies have found that using Edgenuity does not provide a large effect on standardized assessments, any ROI at all is surprising.

However, as stated earlier, the primary tangible benefit of using Edgenuity is not its impact on academic performance, but rather the earning of credit for participation. To that end, a second ROI calculation was completed. The math is simpler when determining return on investment based on credits: one credit is the equivalent of one course, or the $1,006 cost by the teacher for base FTE during a class. Since all Edgenuity courses provide one-half a credit (one semester of learning), the benefit is $503 per course completed (in cost avoidance). This measure will almost *invariably* result in a negative ROI since the cost of teacher plus Edgenuity will always be greater than the cost of Edgenuity alone, and there is no way for a student in Edgenuity to ever earn more than the fixed rate of one-half credit per course. The only way to render a positive ROI by this measure would be if all students were completing three or greater courses during a single year period with their teacher (earning 1.5 credits during one class rather than tradition one credit per class). A total of 1068 courses that provided a half credit were completed, which earns a benefit of $537,204. A further 1469 courses are in progress and not-yet-completed, which is a potential benefit of $738,907 for a combined total potential benefit of $1,276,111. Under this measure, the current ROI is -77%, and the potential ROI if all students currently enrolled in their courses complete them would be -47% ROI. At this rate, a total of 4,806 courses would need to be completed for the program to measure a positive ROI, if measured only on the value of student credits earned.

Of course, it is to be expected that a program such as Edgenuity would have a negative return on investment when measured by credits earned given that the program exists *to cover a net negative effect* of the student not earning a credit the first time they participated in a course. If the traditional expectation of academic investment is a student spending one year with a teacher (and the costs associated) to earn one credit, then a student who spends the full year with the teacher *plus an additional year with a second teacher* to earn the same one credit will result in a greater investment for the same return. For this reason, it is highly unlikely that Edgenuity, when measured by credits earned, would ever show a positive ROI, unless all students began progressing at a rate of two years progress in one year. The question that must be asked is whether the cost of the program is worth the investment in offering students the chance to graduate when they otherwise would not receive the opportunity.

It is also worth noting that this measurement only considers students enrolled in credit recovery courses in Edgenuity, and not grade forgiveness courses. Additionally, it is also a relatively restrictive measure as it only considers the tangible benefits of earning a credit, and not the improvements in academics. While a fully robust model would measure the academic benefits for all students, the patchwork nature of the SY23 assessment schedule (brought about by the nascent BEST progress monitoring), does not allow for a full analysis of academic returns. Still, the returns measured for the students in program can be synthesized with the credits return to get a fuller understanding the benefit returns of Edgenuity. Afterall, students in Edgenuity can *simultaneously* improve their academics while also earning a credit. The academic benefit of $510,787 from the academic analysis only captures the benefits of the 501 students who were measured. Assuming the patterns identified from that sample are applicable to the population and not due to random chance (a valid assumption given that the growth measures of students in Edgenuity were statistically significantly different from the growth measures of students not in Edgenuity), this value can be extrapolated to the complete population at $2,417,357. Among the same population, a benefit of $537,204 was created from the credits earned, which results

in a value of $2,954,561. When accounting for student gains in learning along with credits earned, the ROI yielded is 22% (BCR 1.22:1). Loading in the potential student credits earned if all students completed their courses would result in a benefit value of $3,693,468, or an ROI of 53%.

## Implications for Practice and Policy

When considering the academic outcomes of using Edgenuity in addition to the credit benefits to students the value of the program is greater than the cost. While this value is primarily in costs avoided (as in, it would be more expensive to provide credit recovery to students in a traditional class setting than via Edgenuity), it still yields a return on investment when academic gains are included.

This evaluation's findings carry significant implications for both educational practice and policy. The observed positive outcomes in terms of credit recovery success and progress towards graduation shed light on the potential effectiveness of Edgenuity in this district as a valuable tool for supporting students requiring academic intervention. Educators can harness the platform to deliver targeted support and personalized learning experiences, especially in credit recovery programs or instances where teacher availability is limited. However, the varied results regarding academic performance in other subject areas emphasize the importance of integrating Edgenuity as a supplementary resource alongside comprehensive classroom instruction. Policymakers and education leaders must consider the cost-effectiveness and practical implementation strategies of using Edgenuity, ensuring sufficient teacher training, technical support, and student engagement to optimize its impact and alignment with broader educational objectives. By thoughtfully considering these implications, practitioners and policymakers can make more informed decisions about the integration of Edgenuity into educational practices and policies.

## Limitations

While this evaluation provides valuable insights into the effectiveness and ROI of the Edgenuity program, it is important to acknowledge specific limitations. This evaluation relied on existing studies and data. That may have inherent biases or limitations regarding design and generalizability. The evaluation focuses on the specific context of this school district may not fully capture the diverse range of educational settings and student populations. Furthermore, the evaluation does not account for potential variations in implementation fidelity or the nuanced effects of individual student engagement with the Edgenuity platform. These limitations highlight the need for further research and context-specific investigations to fully comprehend the strengths and weaknesses of the Edgenuity program. This study was also delimited to only quantitative results. Many interventions have value in that they lower the cognitive burden and time requirements for teachers to effectively achieve the same results in a different manner, but those non-tangible results were not captured in the course of this study.

## Conclusion and Recommendations for Further Research

Based on the quantitative results, it appears that the utilization of Edgenuity is associated with student growth higher than standard student growth measures, even when students in the

platform are scoring significantly lower than their academic peers. Students completing coursework in Edgenuity had higher growth than their non-Edgenuity peers in both ELA, $d$ = 0.12**, and math, $d$ = 0.12*. This measured effect size of $d$ = 0.12* meets Kraft's (2019) recommendations for moderate effects from academic interventions (0.05 <$d$ > 0.20), although they are well below Hattie's hinge-point ($d$ = 0.40), and also below the expected $d$ = 0.15. This effect is lower than that measured on SuccessMaker (Lewis, 2017) and DreamBox (Foster, 2024), but otherwise exceeds other examined digital interventions such as Freckle, iReady, and Penda. Of the mentioned interventions, however, the Edgenuity program is one of the only ones that targets high school students, and the only one that provides students credit for completed work. When considering just academic outcomes, the Edgenuity program has an ROI of 12%, however when adding credits earned to the measurement, the ROI is between 22% (current) and 53% (potential) depending on how many students currently in progress on their courses complete the course and pass their exam with the requisite grade.

While the *direct cost* of Edgenuity ($49.31 per course) is very high in comparison to other digital interventions (iReady was $6 per student; SuccessMaker was $20 per student; Freckle was $14 per student). The program Edgenuity still provides a return on the investment made and provides the further benefit of allowing students to earn a credit and correct their path towards graduation when they otherwise would not have had the opportunity. Given the cost of the Edgenuity platform, the moderate effect sizes within the field of interventions, and the positive return-on-investment measure, it is recommended that schools continue the use of the Edgenuity platform.

## References


Avellaneda, E. M. (2020). *An Evaluation of the Edgenuity Online Learning Program in a Public High School Using Stufflebeam's Context, Input, Process and Product (CIPP) Model: A Mixed Methods Approach* (Order No. 27831591). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses A&I; ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (2408856835). https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/evaluation-edgenuity-online-learning-program/docview/2408856835/se-2

Avellaneda, . E. M. (2020). The impact of Edgenuity as a credit recovery tool on student achievement. *Journal of Research in Education, 30*(2), 125-138.

Desimone, L. M. (2019). A comparative analysis of the impact of Edgenuity on student achievement in Various Subject Areas. *Journal of Online Learning Research, 5*(3), 251-268.

Dewey, J. (1910). *How we think*. D. C. Heath & Co.

Eadens, D. W., Maddock, D. R., Thornburg, A.W., & Abernathy, D.F. (2022). K-12 teacher perspectives on the pandemic pivot to online teaching and learning. *Journal of Pedagogical Research*, *6*(1), 131-151. https://doi.org/10.33902/JPR.2022175776

Edgenuity. (n.d.). Research foundations. Retrieved from http://www.edgenuity.com/CurriculumResearch/Research-Foundations

Fernandez, C., Landon, C., & Hall, T. (2019). Implementation of online credit recovery: Lessons from Florida districts. *Journal of Interactive Online Learning, 18*(2), 126-142.

Florida Department of Education (2023), *Florida education finance program 2023-24: Second calculation*. School Business Services, Office of Funding and Reporting. https://www.fldoe.org/finance/fl-edu-finance-program-fefp/fl-edu-finance-program-fefp-calculatio.stml

Foster, M. E. (2024). Evaluating the Impact of Supplemental Computer-Assisted Math Instruction in Elementary School: A Conceptual Replication. *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness*, *17*(1), 94-118.

Hollands F. M., Kieffer, M.J., Shand R., Pan, Y., Cheng, H., & Levin, H.M. (2016). *Cost-effectiveness analysis of early reading programs: A demonstration with recommendations for future research*, Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness, *9(1)*, 30-53, doi: 10.1080/19345747.2015.1055639

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

Hypothesi, R. (2015). Exploring the effectiveness of Edgenuity on NWEA scores. *Journal of Educational Technology, 23*(4), 567-582.

Institute of Educational Sciences. (2020) *Standards for excellence in education research: Analyse interventions' costs*. https://ies.ed.gov/seer/cost_analysis.asp

James, W. (1907). *Pragmatism: A new name for some old ways of thinking*. Longmans, Green, and Co.

Kraft, M. A. (2019). Interpreting effect sizes of Education interventions. *Educational Researcher, 48*(2), 113-116.

Lewis, J. M. H. (2017). *Evaluating the Effectiveness of SuccessMaker for African-American Fifth Graders in a South Georgia Elementary School* (Doctoral dissertation, Northcentral University).

Llewellyn, J. (2018). Assessing the impact of Edgenuity on graduation rates: A statewide analysis. *Journal of Educational Policy, 35*(6), 809-826.

Phillips, P. P., Phillips, J. J., Paone, G., & Gaudet, C. H. (2019). *Value for money: How to show the value for money for all types of projects and programs in governments, nongovernmental organizations, nonprofits, and businesses*. Wiley.

Piaget, J. (1977). *The development of thought: Equilibration of cognitive structures.* Viking Press.

Rivers, D., & Reynolds, A. (2020). Cost-Benefit analysis of digital credit recovery programs: A systematic review. *Journal of Education Finance, 45*(1), 34-54.

Selwyn, N. (2011). *Schools and schooling in the digital age: A critical analysis.* Routledge.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes.* Harvard University Press.

Williams, K. T., Barnes, K., & Miller, C. (2021). *The Impact of Edgenuity: A Randomized Controlled Trial. Journal of Educational Technology Systems, 49*(3), 405-426.

# A Comparison of Situational Leadership Framing by School Administrators: During and After Principal Preparation

**James Martinez**
*University of Tennessee*

**Cameron Molidor**
*University of Tennessee*

Traditional principal preparation programs (PPPs) that include coursework and internship opportunities are most commonly the basis by which aspiring school leaders are prepared for future work (Dickens, et al., 2021; Grissom, Jason A., et al., 2018; Kearney & Valadez, 2015; Oliver, et al., 2018). The COVID-19 pandemic provided a challenge for aspiring school administrators, regardless of their personal dispositions or form of preparation (Fernandez & Shaw, 2020; Author & Author, 2021). Using Situational Leadership as a conceptual frame (Hersey & Blanchard, 1977), the purpose of this study was to compare perceptions by school leaders, pre- versus post-principal preparation program, who rely on a particular use of framing (Bolman & Deal, 2013) to guide their professional practice. In the spring of 2023, eight school administrators in their first three years of professional service, all of whom had been enrolled in an online principal preparation program (PPP), were interviewed to compare responses that they provided during their PPP to those expressed while serving as school administrators. In addition to the interviews, the study participants completed the Principal Self-Efficacy Survey (PSES) to indicate feelings of professional confidence. Results of this investigation showed high levels of self-efficacy among participants, especially with regard to instructional leadership, as well as a general agreement among participants regarding their use of situational framing. In addition, results showed a general increase in professional maturity, pre- to post-PPP, gleaned from self-reports about relationships and tasks in the workplace.

*Keywords:* Situational leadership, principal preparation, self—efficacy, COVID-19

Principal Preparation Programs (PPPs) were designed to provide substantive coursework and internship opportunities for teachers who aspired to serve as school administrators (Dickens, et al., 2021; Grissom, Jason A., et al., 2018). With each U.S. state defining unique credentialing requirements for aspiring school administrators, giving due attention to the various ways PPPs prepare administrators is integral to a larger discussion of how best to prepare them for service. Dickens, et al. (2021) provides context to this topic:

> …with widely varying principal preparation requirements from state to state, diverse school populations, and unique circumstances at state, region, and community levels, educational leadership preparation programs are challenged to effectively prepare leaders who are ready to lead in a multitude of contexts. (p. 52)

The consensus among educational stakeholders is that traditional forms of principal preparation (e.g., classwork and field experience) is adequate to prepare principals for the complex demands of their administrative roles (Pannell et al., 2020). Although past research describes opportunities for aspiring school leaders to gain an understanding of the profession within PPP coursework, it also recognizes the importance of practical training outside the classroom setting (Dickens, et al., 2021; Grissom, et al., 2018)

More recent research focuses on the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on educational learning (Author & Author, 2021; Davis & Nixon, 2024). During this global crisis, a greater emphasis on distance learning was swiftly adopted, focused on online discussion boards and video-conference sessions and eliminating in-person collaborative sessions for many, as well as hands-on experiences in particular subject areas (e.g., laboratory sciences, vocational classes). Having access to course data (i.e., discussion board responses) provided by PPP students who had completed part or all of their preparation during the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequently had assumed administrative roles in schools provided the motivation to engage in research comparing these data with current perspectives by these same individuals. Combined with this was an interest in how these former PPP students applied principles of best school administrative practices (e.g., situational awareness framing) and other perspectives associated with situational leadership.

The purpose of this study was to compare school administrators' perceptions of leadership dispositions and situational framing, pre- versus post- Principal Preparation Program. This investigation fills a gap in the research focused on school leader attitudes during and after PPP enrollment, with a particular emphasis on exploring perspectives regarding organizational theory, situational leadership and self-efficacy. This study was guided by the following research questions: (a) How differently do school administrators perceive organizational theory compared to when they were enrolled in a principal preparation program? (b) How well do assessments of situational leadership compare for aspiring school principals during their principal preparation programs versus when they later were serving as school administrators? and (c) How do early-career school administrator ratings of their own professional self-efficacy relate to their ideas of leadership and the use of framing?

As researchers call for more investigation into the practicality and effectiveness of PPPs, this study seeks to contribute to the existing body of literature that compares aspects of school leadership by students enrolled in PPPs with perceptions expressed later while serving as school administrators.

## Review of Literature

The role of a school's principal is paramount when promoting a school's mission, vision and goals. Principals serve in a variety of capacities, from facilitators of the physical plant to lead communicator of school events to enforcers of student discipline and instructional quality (Federici & Skaalvik, 2012). As the leader of the faculty, staff, and students at a school, the principal is vital to ensuring student academic and co-curricular performance while addressing any challenges that may arise onsite or in the local community. A principal no longer serves purely as the manager of the building, but more and more takes on tasks as a team builder, aspirational leader, instructional leader, life coach, and agent of change (Crawford & Cowie, 2011; Westberry & Zhao, 2021; Davis & Nixon, 2024). Teachers enrolled in principal preparation programs (PPP) connect their own leadership strengths and challenges with established organizational theories and best administrative practices.

Research has found that successful PPPs emphasize instructional leadership, university-district partnerships, district evaluations, authentic and high-quality experiences in the field, and cohort support structures (Dickens et al., 2021; Pannell & Sergi-McBrayer, 2020; Clement et al., 2022). That said, research also suggests that PPPs may not be an adequate solution to preparing aspiring school administrators for every aspect of the profession. The consensus of these studies asserts that PPPs have fallen short in their programming, as the majority of these programs serve to evaluate a student's leadership capabilities in accordance with state-level expectations, rather than providing experiences relevant to the evolving duties of school administrators in the 21st century. Moreover, unsuccessful PPPs emphasize the need for a paradigm shift in the way aspiring leaders are evaluated and developed before they enter the workforce to better prepare them for the pertinent aspects of these roles (Grissom et al., 2018; Dickens et al., 2021; Genao, 2021).

With roles that range across the spectrum of leadership, it is valuable to recognize the importance of the Principal Self-Efficacy Survey (PSES), a tool that evaluates a principal's perception of their strengths, comfortability, and areas of improvement within their performance in the role. For this study, self-efficacy can be generally defined as self-perceptions about a person's ability to successfully perform tasks within particular contexts (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004). Research has found that a principal with a high level of self-efficacy serves as an essential motivator to those in administrative positions when navigating ways to combat difficulties, stress, and depression (Baroudi & Hojeij, 2018; Debes, 2020; Federici & Skaalvik, 2012; Hesbol, 2019; McBrayer et al., 2020). Naturally, high self-efficacy alone does not compensate for more traditional administrative skill sets (i.e., management skills, organization, adaptability, intellect) and other actionable attributes that are crucial to a person's performance in a professional setting. That said, highly developed self-efficacy has been found to increase one's confidence in their own abilities and affect one's ability to develop successful leadership strategies (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004; Weissblueth & Linder, 2020).

Some findings suggest that the structure of the PSES isn't an effective mode of self-evaluation, as there could be inaccuracies and inauthenticity. For example, the administrator may alter their answers or provide dishonest responses (Federici & Skaalvik, 2012) or the results of the PSES are representative of the principal's own motivations to produce their desired school outcomes (Skaalvik, 2020) rather than authentically measuring their perceptions of capacity.

Emerging research suggests that the evolving principal position should consider focusing on the additional inclusion of the principal's efficacy of emotional intelligence, in tandem with the traditional PSES, to encompass the broader spectrum of human emotionality that has become an essential function of the job (Blaik Hourani et al., 2020; Gurley & Dagney, 2020; McBrayer et al. 2020). In addition to the PSES, an exploration of situational leadership should be equally considered when evaluating the effectiveness of a school administrator.

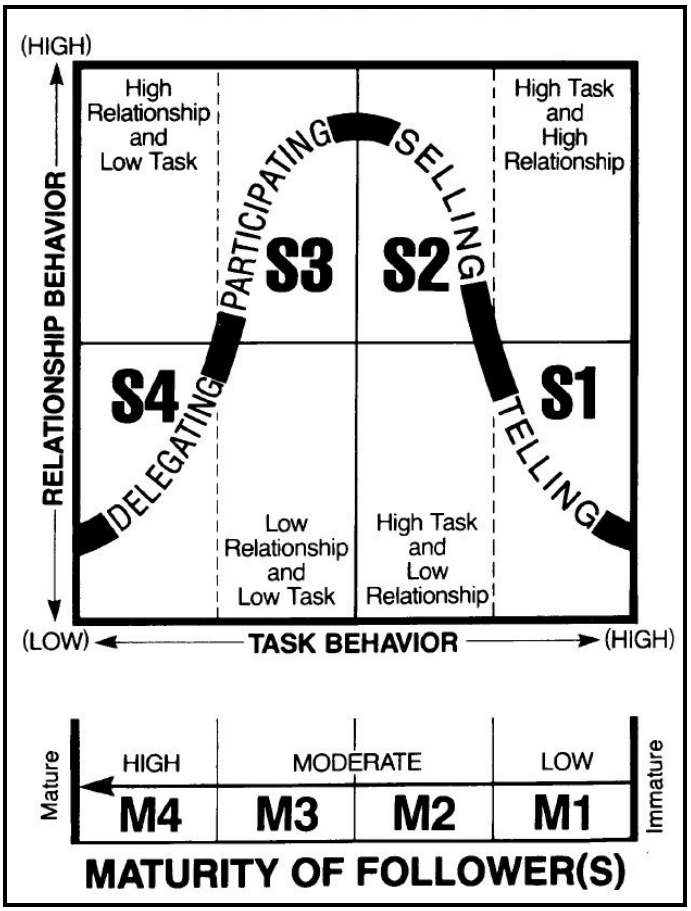
Situational Leadership (Hersey et al., 1982) may be the most significant factor in advancing the mission and vision of a school since administrative leaders may directly, or indirectly, influence every aspect of the institution (Pannell & McBrayer, 2020). Additionally, self-reflection is also needed to provide an accurate evaluation of one's tenable emotional intelligence (Skaalvik, 2020). Debes (2020) found that "[emotional intelligence] explains higher percentages of variance in performance criteria than IQ and managerial competency … suggest(ing) that EI contributes (more) to career advancement than does IQ" (p. 50). Few studies explore any form of self-reflection of teachers in their PPPs, nor the aspiring school leader's perceptions of the effectiveness of their university programs (Fisher, 2010; Weissblueth & Linder, 2020). No studies, to our knowledge, explore preconceived notions of the principalship by teachers who completed their PPPs versus their current notions of their current administrative roles. As PPPs continue to evolve and attempt to better incorporate the reimagined configuration of emotionality and self-reflective inclusions to the PSES structure, it is worth noting that research is lacking key components regarding the comparison of principal self-reflection from active administrators in the field, in a longitudinal exploration of their previous perceptions of efficacy and conceptions of the role of a school administrator from student to practitioner.

## Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is founded on principles of situational leadership as constructed by Hersey et al., (1979), which focuses on the manner in which leaders both self-identify and exhibit professional maturity through relationships and tasks. Task behavior refers to the leader's directions: telling people what, when, where, and how to perform. Relationship behavior refers to two-way communication, including listening and support by the leader. The Relationship versus Task (RvT) diagram (provided in Figure 1) is comprised of four quadrants (telling, selling, participating, and delegating) and further identifies four stratified levels of professional maturity (i.e., M1, M2, M3, and M4).

**Figure 1**

*Professional Maturity: A Relationship versus Task Model of Situational Leadership (Hersey et al., 1982) (used with permission)*




## Method

To compare school administrator perceptions of leadership dispositions and situational framing, both before and after these professionals completed their principal preparation programs (PPPs), data was collected from course assignments, as well as the Principal Self-Efficacy Survey (PSES) and semi-structured interviews while serving as school leaders. These interviews covered topics ranging from perspectives that they and other leaders use, self-reports on where they identified themselves in the Relationship versus Task (RvT) conceptual diagram, and responses to a hypothetical school scenario that illuminated their use of situational framing.

### Participants

The original pool of forty-five master's degree students, all of whom had been enrolled in a PPP in a large, public university in the Southeastern United States between 2019-2022, were contacted via email and asked if they were officially serving as school administrators. Ten of these former students responded affirmatively and, of these, eight agreed to participate in the study. In the final group, seven of the eight school administrators identified themselves as female, one as male, and all ranged in ages between 30 and 41. An internet search confirmed that the final group of eight were serving in an administrative role in a K-12 school, employed by their central

office. Two of these participants were serving at the elementary level, four in middle school, one at the high school level and one in a K-12 school. Of these, four served as assistant principals, one was a principal designee (performed school administrator functions when the principal was unavailable), and one participant was designated as the site's teacher leader. All schools where the participants worked served students whose families were designated as low socioeconomic income (SES), between 14% to 50%. Self-reported demographic and RvT information for all participants is provided in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Study Participant Information (n=8)*

| Participant Name (pseudonym) | Role | School Type | School Econ Dis* % | Age | Sex | RvT Placement** (PPP) | RvT Placement** (in-service) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Amy Keaning | Asst. Principal | Elementary | 18 | 30 | Female | S3/S4 | S3/S4 |
| Ursula Chapman | District Admin | K-12 | 21 | 39 | Female | S2/S3 | S2/S4 |
| Sam Namath | Asst. Principal | Middle | 30 | 33 | Male | S1 | S3 |
| Monica Lehman | Asst. Principal | Middle | 14 | 31 | Female | S4 | S4 |
| Martha Grey | Asst. Principal | Elementary | 16 | 32 | Female | S4 | S3 |
| Wendy Smith | Prin. Designee | Middle | 25 | 30 | Female | S1/S3 | S1 |
| Alison Heart | Teacher Leader Coord. | Middle | 50 | 41 | Female | S3 | S2 |
| Madison Vincent | Asst. Principal | High | 33 | 34 | Female | S3 | S1/S4 |

* School Economically Disadvantaged as reported by State Report Card; ** Relationship versus Task (RvT) Situational Leadership Quadrants: S1-Telling/Directing; S2-Delegating, S3-Facilitating/Counseling, S4-Selling/Coaching

**Principal Self-Efficacy Survey (PSES)**

Using an electronic surveying computer application (Qualtrics™), participants completed the Principal Self-Efficacy Survey (PSES) which assessed their feelings of professional self-efficacy. Likert scales ranged from 1 (none at all) to 3 (very little) to 5 (some degree) to 7 (quite a bit) to 9 (a great deal). This validated survey included eighteen, Likert-scale questions, separated into three areas - efficacy for management, efficacy for instructional leadership, and efficacy for moral leadership. Efficacy for management items allowed participants to gauge their ability to: (a) handle the time demands of the job, (b) handle the paperwork required of the job, (c) maintain

control of their own daily schedule, (d) prioritize among competing demands of the job, (e) cope with the stress of the job, and (f) shape the operational policies and procedures that are necessary to manage their school.

Efficacy for instructional leadership items allowed participants to gauge their ability to: (a) motivate teachers, (b) generate enthusiasm for a shared vision for their school, (c) manage change at their school, (d) create a positive learning environment at their school, (e) facilitate student learning at their school, and (f) raise student achievement on standardized tests. Efficacy for moral leadership items allowed participants to gauge their ability to: (a) promote acceptable behavior among students, (b) promote school spirit among a large majority of the student population, (c) handle effectively the discipline of students at their school, (d) promote a positive image of their school with the media, (e) promote the prevailing values of the community at their school, and (f) promote ethical behavior among school personnel. The Principal Self-Efficacy Survey (PSES) is provided in Appendix A.

**Semi-Structured Interviews**

The research team conducted semi-structured interviews using the Zoom ™ teleconferencing computer application. Using video, responses to questions were recorded that focused on: (a) participants' current professional roles, (b) questions on situational leadership that had been asked previously during their principal preparation program (PPP) organizational leadership and theory class, and (c) participant estimation of which frames, in order of importance, would be best used to assess a fictitious scenario. The questions on situational leadership were originally posed to the participants via an electronic discussion board and were focused on Bolman & Deal's (2013) four frames of situational inspection (political, human resources, symbolic and structural). More specifically, the participants responded to the following statements/questions: (a) Please comment briefly by hypothesizing which of the four frames you think school leaders "look through" the most, and why you think so, (b) Please share which of the frames you feel you "look through" the most in your current work in schools and why you think so? (c) Which of the four frames do you feel you are most capable of "looking through"? and (d) Which of the four frames is the most difficult for you to use in a real-life re-framing scenario?

**Relationship versus Task Diagram and Situational Dilemma**

One additional interview question required the participants to inspect a Situational Leadership "Relationship versus Task" (RvT) diagram and describe where they currently found themselves on the diagram. This question and the related diagram were also presented to each of the participants during their PPP organizational leadership and theory class. The final interview question required each participant to listen to a fictitious dilemma (provided in Appendix B) and subsequently assess the participant's understanding of the relative importance of each of Bolman & Deal's four frames (political, human resources, symbolic and structural) by ranking the order of importance. The fictitious dilemma is focused on a school administrator's response to a parent's concern about the availability of military themed books for students to access in a school library. After the scenario was read aloud by the interviewer, each participant was asked, "Of the four frames, which is the most important frame that an effective administrator needs to focus on

to best understand and address the described scenario? the second most important? the third most important? the least important?"

**Procedures**

To gain an understanding of previous studies that focused on the use of situational leadership in PPP and administrative service, the researchers performed a detailed literature review on these topics. Shortly thereafter, an application to conduct research was forwarded to the researcher's university institutional review board, which was accepted. The research team then contacted forty-five students, using their university email addresses, who had been previously enrolled in a PPP organizational leadership course at a large, public university in the Southeast United States between 2019 and 2022. In this email communication, each potential participant was informed about the nature of the study, data collection methods to be used (electronic surveys and interviews) as well as the study's potential benefits and risks. Ten of the 45 recruited individuals responded affirmatively (response rate: 18%) and a final group of eight individuals confirmed their participation by completing and returning their informed consent forms.

Before being interviewed by the researchers, each participant completed the Principal Self-Efficacy Survey (PSES) which gauged their feelings of professional confidence. After the PSES results were collected, the research team used the Zoom™ computer application to record individual semi-structured interviews that gauged participant views of professional dispositions and situational leadership, each lasting approximately thirty minutes. During inspection of the audiovisual recordings, notes were taken by members of the research team describing behavioral characteristics demonstrated by each of the participants (e.g., gestures, tonal emphases). Except for the situational dilemma and demographic questions, all questions used in the interviews were stated exactly as they had been presented as discussion board questions via the Canvas™ learning management system during each participant's PPP. As was done during their PPP, all participants were shown a Relationship versus Task (RvT) diagram during their interviews and asked to assess their situational leadership style by designating which quadrant(s) they see themselves represented at that time.

Audio portions of the recorded interviews were transcribed and subsequently edited for accuracy. Using audio transcripts of these interviews, open coding was used to analyze participant responses regarding their current service as school administrators, resulting in thirty categories. After the open coding process was complete, axial coding was conducted which resulted on four interrelated themes across all interviews. For questions that matched those which had been previously posed to the participant during their organizational leadership class (i.e., situational framing and RvT), responses were placed side by side for comparison.

## Results

Participant responses to survey and interview questions were analyzed to compare participant feelings of self-efficacy and situational framing during their principal preparation program (PPP) and while serving as school administrators. In addition, numerical data gathered by the Qualtrics™ electronic surveying computer application was used to gauge participant responses to each of the Principal Self-Efficacy Survey (PSES) questions. Descriptive statistics (means,

ranges, and standard deviations) were calculated for each of the eighteen PSES questions (provided in Appendix A), as well as separate calculations for the three PSES subscales (efficacy for management, efficacy for instructional leadership, and efficacy for moral leadership). These results can be seen in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Principal Self-Efficacy Scale (PSES) Subscale Means (Standard Deviations) for Participants*

| Participant | Management | Instructional Leadership | Moral Leadership |
|---|---|---|---|
| Madison | 6.0 (1.1) | 6.7 (0.8) | 6.0 (1.1) |
| Sam | 6.3 (1.0) | 7.3 (0.8) | 6.0 (1.1) |
| Monica | 5.7 (2.1) | 5.7 (1.0) | 6.0 (1.7) |
| Ursula | 7.7 (1.6) | 8.0 (1.1) | 8.7 (0.8) |
| Alison | 4.3 (2.7) | 3.7 (1.0) | 3.7 (1.0) |
| Wendy | 7.0 (2.2) | 6.0 (2.4) | 5.7 (2.1) |
| Amy | 6.3 (1.0) | 7.3 (1.5) | 7.3 (0.8) |
| Martha | 6.7 (0.8) | 8.0 (1.1) | 8.0 (1.1) |
| ***M*** | 6.3 | 6.6 | 6.4 |
| ***SD*** | 1.6 | 1.2 | 1.2 |
| ***Range*** | 4.3-7.0 | 3.7-8.0 | 3.7-8.7 |

*Notes*: Management Subscale Questions: 3, 11, 12, 15, 17, 18; Instructional Leadership Subscale Questions: 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 9; Moral Leadership Subscale Questions: 5, 8, 10, 13, 14, 16; Likert scale: 1=None at All, 3=Very Little, 5=Some Degree, 7=Quite a Bit, 9=A Great Deal

Means for all PSES subscales of efficacy for management, instructional leadership, and moral leadership for all participants were closely aligned, ranging from 6.3 to 6.6, most closely relating to "quite a bit" on the Likert scale. The highest average scores were attributed to instructional leadership (6.6) and the lowest were attributed to management (6.3). Owing to a single participant's low-end responses (Alison), individual participant subscale responses ranged from 3.7 (very little) to 8.7 (a great deal). Omitting her responses, individual participant subscale response lower range values were two points higher at 5.7 (some degree). Generally speaking, participants self-reported rankings of self-efficacy were slightly above average for all scales.

For data gathered during the semi-structured interviews, the audio portions were transcribed and later edited for accuracy. Recordings of visual data (e.g., gestures, emphasized words), were added to these transcriptions. Separate, open coding procedures were performed by both researchers to analyze participant responses, from which thirty categories were produced. Axial coding produced four interrelated themes, namely: (a) personality factors, (b) associations with school mission or vision, (c) workplace contextual factors, and (d) professional relationships. To substantiate these general themes, examples of responses from study participants are provided in the following sections.

**Personality Factors**

When study participants expressed their understandings about the degree that they focus on any particular frame or frames during the work day, as defined by Bolman and Deal (2015), many of them referred to their own personalities or dispositions. For example, when clarifying the reasons why she primarily focuses the structural frame at work, principal designee Wendy Smith shared that, "I think maybe it's a little bit more of my personality…if we have a certain goal like I'm going to try my best to meet that goal…I really am big on policies and procedures and those things being communicated…(so) it would be the structural frame". In relation to the broader themes of the study (i.e., self-efficacy, situational leadership, and professional maturity), personality factors relate to all of these in that school leader dispositions, confidence and the degree that they feel efficacious, affect the manner in which these professionals address unique circumstances presented in the workplace.

**Associations with School Mission or Vision**

In terms of how the participants generally use framing in the workplace, many of the participants felt grounded in their use of their school's mission and/or vision statements to assist them in particular circumstances. When asked to list the most important frame that an effective administrator needs to focus on to best understand and address a particular situational dilemma (i.e., debate on which books should be in the school library), participant Martha Grey stated that, "…so I think the first one would be, um, the structural frame. And just going by you know, what is the mission? what is the vision or the procedures that are in place already for something like this?" In relation to the broader themes of the study (i.e., self-efficacy, situational leadership, and professional maturity), addressing a school's mission and vision relates most directly with situational leadership. School leaders are tasked with grounding professional decisions based on the degree that the results of these deliberations support the mission and vision of their schools.

**Workplace Contextual Factors**

Many of the participants, when asked about the use of situational framing and which frame(s) they would use to guide them during the school day, mentioned the importance for them to more fully understand the context of the situation at hand. For example, participant Monica Lehman, an assistant principal, referred to the use of the symbolic frame when gaining perspective before addressing an issue at work, stating "I think…understanding where you're at, your community, your culture". To further press this point, participant Amy Keating, another assistant principal, stated that when addressing a situation, "…it honestly depends on the day and the season…and I've learned that in real life…". In relation to the broader themes of the study (i.e., self-efficacy, situational leadership, and professional maturity), contextual factors relate most closely with situational leadership as these considerations must be taken into account when school leaders regularly assess specific circumstances when making decisions during the workday.

**Professional Relationships**

Finally, the theme of professional relationships – the manner in which school employees relate to each other - was prevalent in the remarks given by many participants when asked about

situational framing. For example, district administrator Ursula Chapman stated when considering all the frames that school leaders need to use, that "…they are taken into account, all of them to some degree (but) if I had to rest on one, it depends on who they work with". When deciding which frame is most important to address a given situational dilemma (i.e., debate on which books should be in the school library), participant and teacher leader Alison Heart found that it was important to, "…follow…the human resources (frame), to kind of help with that relationship and to make (all parties) feel better about the situation or whatever". In relation to the broader themes of the study (i.e., self-efficacy, situational leadership, and professional maturity), professional relationships are most aligned with all three of these themes. A school leader's level of confidence exhibited in their role, their ability to effectively assess situations at their site, and the degree that they make "veteran" decisions – all have the potential to affect relationships with constituent parties at the school (i.e., parents, teachers, staff, students) and in the broader school community.

**Situational Leadership**

For questions related to situational leadership (i.e., frame designations and those associated to the Relationship versus Task chart), responses between what participants reported while enrolled in their principal preparation program were placed side by side with those the participants reported while employed as school administrators. To compare responses for all participants while enrolled in their PPPs and during their service as school administrators, tables were created which displayed the results for all participants for each of the four questions posed to participants regarding the use of Bolman and Deal's (2013) frames, namely which: (a) [they think] school leaders [they had] worked with "look through" the most, (b) [they] look through the most in [their] current work in [their] schools, (c) [they] feel [they were] most capable of looking through, and (d) [they felt] would be the most difficult for [them] to use in a real-life scenario [in their] workplace. The results for the first query, namely "choose one of these frames that you think school leaders you have worked with 'look through' the most" is presented in Table 3.

**Table 3**

*Participant responses to: "Choose one of these frames that you think school leaders you have worked with look through the most…"*

| Participant Name (pseudonym) | Political | Human Resources | Structural | Symbolic | Current Role |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ursula Chapman | ILR | | PPP | | EPP Supervisor |
| Martha Grey | | ILR | PPP | | Assistant Principal |
| Alison Heart | ILR | PPP | | | Teacher Leader |
| Amy Keaning | | PPP, ILR | | | Assistant Principal |
| Monica Lehman | | PPP | ILR | | Assistant Principal |
| Sam Namath | | PPP | ILR | | Assistant Principal |
| Wendy Smith | | PPP, ILR | | | Teacher Leader |
| Madison Vincent | | | PPP, ILR | | Dean of Intervention |

Note: * PPP: While in Principal Preparation Program; ** ILR: While In Leadership Role; *** EPP: Educator Preparation Program

Comparing results of this first question reveals that three of the eight participants (Keaning, Smith, and Vincent) did not change their answers between the time that they were enrolled as PPP students and later while employed as school administrators, while five had different answers. Also, during the time they were in their PPPs and while in their current roles as school administrators, none of the participants felt that school leaders they had worked with looked through the symbolic frame the most. Additionally, only two of the participants felt that leaders they had worked with in the past used the political frame the most (both responses during their PPP), none of the eight participants responded with this frame while in a leadership role.

The results for the second query, namely "choose one of the [frames] you think you 'look through' the most in your current work in schools" are presented in Table 4. As stated previously, these results only reflect participant feelings during their service as school administrators.

**Table 4**

*Participant responses to: "Choose one of these frames that you look through the most in your current work in schools."*

| Participant Name (pseudonym) | Political | Human Resources | Structural | Symbolic | Current Role |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ursula Chapman | | | ILR | | EPP Supervisor |
| Martha Grey | ILR | | | | Assistant Principal |
| Alison Heart | | ILR | | | Teacher Leader |
| Amy Keaning | | | ILR | | Assistant Principal |
| Monica Lehman | | ILR | | | Assistant Principal |
| Sam Namath | | ILR | | | Assistant Principal |
| Wendy Smith | | | ILR | | Teacher Leader |
| Madison Vincent | | | ILR | | Dean of Intervention |

Note: * PPP: While in Principal Preparation Program; ** ILR: While In Leadership Role; *** EPP: Educator Preparation Program

There was general agreement among study participants the use of human resources and structural frames was most prevalent in their work as school administrators. That said, as was true for the previous question [i.e., (the frames (they thought) school leaders (they had) worked with "looked through" the most], none of the participants felt that they, as current school administrators, looked through the symbolic frame the most in their work, and only one participant stated they looked through the political frame the most as an early-career school administrator.

The results for the third question, namely "which [frame] do you feel you are most capable of 'looking through'?" are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5**

*Participant responses to: "Which one of these four frames do you feel you are most capable of looking through?"*

| Participant Name (pseudonym) | Political | Human Resources | Structural | Symbolic | Current Role |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ursula Chapman | | | PPP, ILR | | EPP Supervisor |
| Martha Grey | | PPP, ILR | | | Assistant Principal |
| Alison Heart | | PPP, ILR | | | Teacher Leader |
| Amy Keaning | | PPP | ILR | | Assistant Principal |
| Monica Lehman | PPP | | ILR | | Assistant Principal |
| Sam Namath | | PPP, ILR | | | Assistant Principal |
| Wendy Smith | | PPP | ILR | | Teacher Leader |
| Madison Vincent | | PPP | ILR | | Dean of Intervention |

Note: * PPP: While in Principal Preparation Program; ** ILR: While In Leadership Role; *** EPP: Educator Preparation Program

As was true for the previous two questions, the participants stated their confidence in the use of the human resource and structural frames, both as aspiring school administrators and while in service. While half the participants did not change their answers between the time they were enrolled in their PPPs and while employed as school administrators (three confirming the human resource frame, and one confirming the structural frame), the other four participants answered with a change to this question (all of whom moved from confidence in human resources/political frames to the structural frame). As was the case with the two previous questions, none of the participants felt, neither during or after their PPP, that the symbolic frame was the one they felt most capable of looking through.

The results for the fourth question, namely "which (of) Bolman & Deal's four frames do you feel would be the most difficult for you to use in a real-life scenario at your workplace?" are presented in Table 6.

**Table 6**

*Participant responses to: "Which of these four frames do you feel would be the most difficult for you to use in a real-life scenario at your workplace?"*

| Participant Name (pseudonym) | Political | Human Resources | Structural | Symbolic | Current Role |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ursula Chapman | ILR | | | PPP | EPP Supervisor |
| Martha Grey | PPP | | | ILR | Assistant Principal |
| Alison Heart | PPP, ILR | | | | Teacher Leader |
| Amy Keaning | PPP, ILR | | | | Assistant Principal |
| Monica Lehman | PPP | | | ILR | Assistant Principal |
| Sam Namath | PPP | | | ILR | Assistant Principal |
| Wendy Smith | PPP | | | ILR | Teacher Leader |
| Madison Vincent | PPP | | | ILR | Dean of Intervention |

Note: * PPP: While in Principal Preparation Program; ** ILR: While In Leadership Role; *** EPP: Educator Preparation Program

This table shows a general agreement by all participants, both during and after their enrollment in a PPP, that the political and symbolic frames would be the most difficult for them to use in a workplace real-life scenario. Stated alternatively, none of the participants responded that it would not be difficult for them to use the human resources and structural frames in a real-life scenario in the workplace. While two of the participants responded similarly in both timeframes (difficulty in using the political frame), five of the six participants moved from political to the symbolic frame, and one from the symbolic to the political frame.

Looking at all results of participant responses to questions about situational framing as described by Bolman and Deal (2013), they expressed confidence in their use of the structural and human resources frames when addressing issues in the workplace, with a corresponding lack of confidence in their use of the symbolic and political frames. These responses were supported by their pre-service experiences in schools and perceptions of school leaders they had worked with in the past.

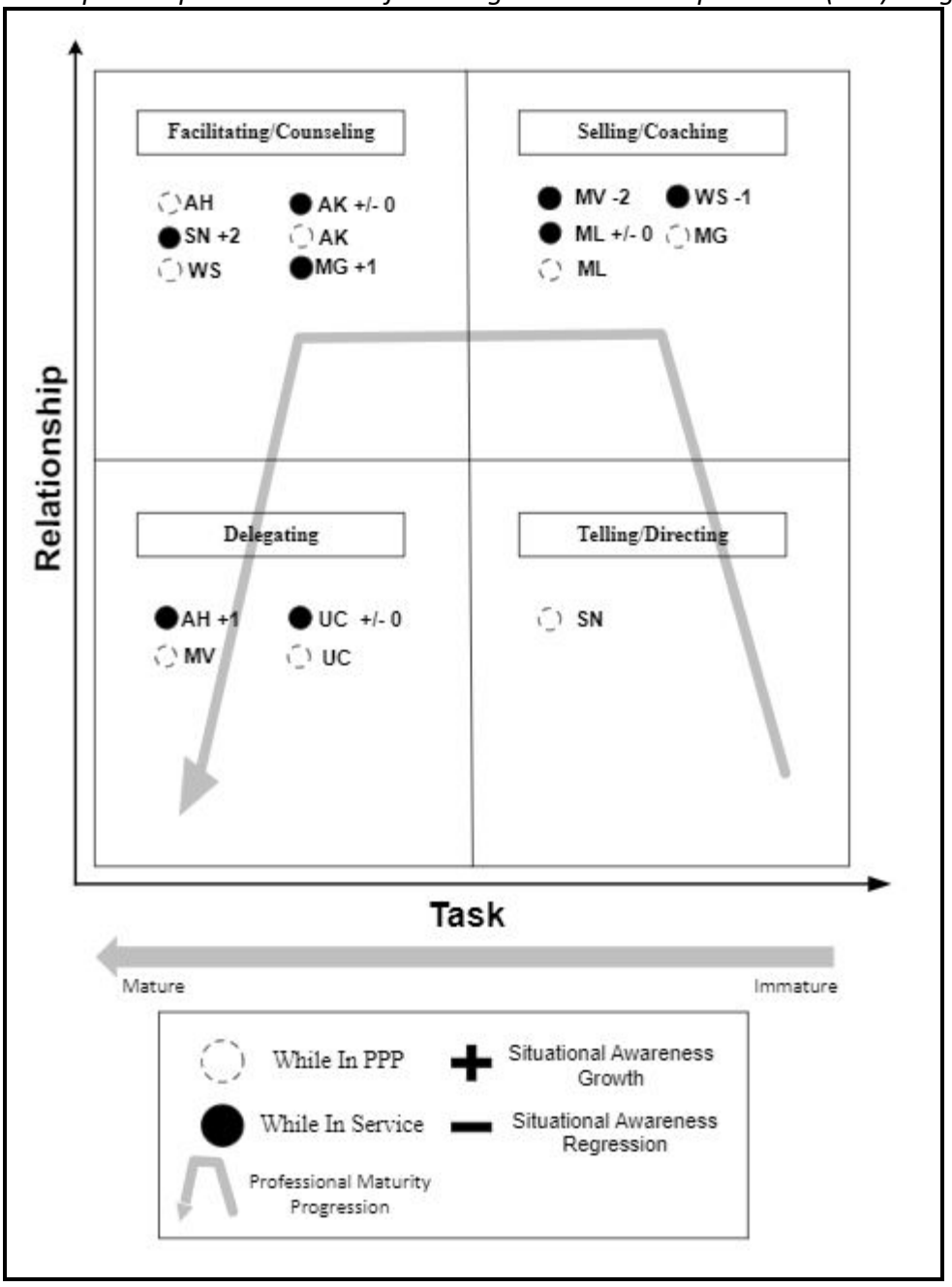
**Professional Maturity**

In terms of participant responses to the Relationship versus Task (RvT) diagram, a composite figure was created to illustrate participant responses reflecting both their feelings about their leadership style during their principal preparation program (PPP) and that during their current role as school administrators. Initials for participant pseudonym first and last names were used for brevity as well as the number of levels changed in terms of their situational awareness progression ("+" for level increase, "+/-0" for no change, and "-" for level decrease) to compare participant responses during their PPP versus those while employed as school administrators. This figure, provided in Figure 10, is based on the premise that, as leaders increase their

professional maturity as they progress from telling/directing (S1) to selling/coaching (S2) to facilitating/counseling (S3) to delegating (S4) (Hersey et al., 1982).

**Figure 10**

*Participant Reponses When Referencing the Relationship vs. Task (RvT) Diagram*




Based on this RvT figure, one can determine the degree that study participants increased their professional maturity between the time that they were enrolled in their PPPs to the time they were interviewed for this study as school administrators. It is important to note that, both during their PPP and during their interview, the participants were presented with a simplified version of the RvT figure which did not show any information about the levels of professional

maturity, as represented by the curved arrow and designations of M1, M2, M3, and M4. By inspecting Figure 10, there are three participants who self-reported themselves trending in a positive direction (i.e., SN+2, MG+1, AH+1), three participants responded by naming the same position (i.e., ML, AK, and UC) and two participants who trended in a negative direction (i.e., WS-1 and MV-2). Therefore, for this small group of participants, a composite tally of their self-reports using the RvT figure are essentially level, on average, with as many increasing as those decreasing, both in direction and magnitude.

Finally, while serving as school administrators, the participants in the study were asked to rank the frames they would use in responding to a fictitious dilemma focused on a school administrator's response to a parent's concern about the availability of military themed books for students to access in a school library. Although there may be some ambiguity about which order is considered "accurate", the researchers were less interested in how close the participants were to an actual answer than how closely their responses were to each other. The results of this inquiry are provided in Table 7.

**Table 7**

*Participant responses to: "Of the four frames, please list the most important frame that an effective administrator needs to focus on to best understand and address the described scenario, the second most important? the third most important? the least important?"*

| Participant Name (pseudonym) | Political | Human Resources | Structural | Symbolic | Current Role |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ursula Chapman | 3 | 1 | 4 | 2 | EPP Supervisor |
| Martha Grey | 3 | 2 | 1 | 4 | Assistant Principal |
| Alison Heart | 4 | 2 | 1 | 3 | Teacher Leader |
| Amy Keaning | 1 | 3 | 2 | 4 | Assistant Principal |
| Monica Lehman | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | Assistant Principal |
| Sam Namath | 2 | 3 | 1 | 4 | Assistant Principal |
| Wendy Smith | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | Teacher Leader |
| Madison Vincent | 2 | 4 | 1 | 3 | Dean of Intervention |

Note: 1=Most Important, 2=2nd Most Important, 3=3rd Most Important, 4=Least Important

Results of this sub-investigation focused on the application of situational framing produced wide ranging results. As table 7 shows, there is little agreement between participants about the order of importance of frames that need to be investigated for the same fictitious dilemma. No two participants placed the frames in the same order, and each frame had at least on participant place it in all four ranks of importance. It is clear that dynamic situations in schools, such as the one provided to the participants, may be seen by a school administrator from a variety of perspectives, but identifying the most important frames prior to addressing a situation, increases the likelihood of resolving school issues promptly and with a high degree of success (Bolman & Deal, 2013). These results, combined with those provided through participant responses about their confidence in use of individual frames, as well as those associated to the

Relationship versus Task (RvT) diagram, further reinforce the need for ongoing study of situational framing of aspiring and fully employed school administrators.

## Discussion

This study was guided by three research questions: (a) How differently do school administrators perceive organizational theory compared to when they were enrolled in a principal preparation program? (b) How well do assessments of situational leadership compare for aspiring school principals during their principal preparation programs versus when they later were serving as school administrators? and (c) How do early-career school administrator ratings of their own professional self-efficacy relate to their ideas of leadership and the use of framing? Investigations of these questions produced mixed results. The comparison between responses of pre-service administrators during their principal preparation program (PPP) (discussion board responses) versus those communicated while in-service (interview responses) on the use of frames showed a great degree of alignment, as evidenced from the data presented in Tables 3-6. In terms of situational awareness, the data provided in Table 7 reveals little agreement in the participants ability as professionals to correctly rank frames of reference, when analyzing a fictitious scenario. Finally, the data in Figure 10 reveals that there was no marked increase using this particular measure of professional maturity among the participants in this study.

Results of this study show that school administrators who had been prepared in the same PPP reported a high sense of self-efficacy in their current roles. In addition, self-reported perceptions of situational leadership (i.e., framing) and professional maturity by this small group of early-career leaders varied greatly between those expressed while enrolled in their PPP versus those expressed after assuming leadership roles. In terms of estimating the degree of professional maturity as measured by the Relationship versus Task diagram (Hersey et al., 1982), there was no evidence that, as a collective group, the participants viewed themselves as increasing in that measure. Assuming that PPPs aspire to increase the professional maturity of aspiring school leaders, the results of this study, while limited due to the small number of participants, coincide with prior studies that advocate for a "paradigm shift" in the way that these professionals are prepared for service (Grissom et al., 2018; Dickens et al., 2021; Genao, 2021).

With regard to the confidence that the participants in this study expressed regarding the use of one or more in a select group of situational frames, they were in overall agreement that their confidence in the structural and human resources frames mirrored those of school leaders they had come in contact with earlier in their careers. The opposite was true of frames that they felt they were "least capable of looking through" as early-career school leaders, namely the symbolic and political frames. Assuming that there should be a balance of the use of frames (Bolman & Deal, 2013), both in terms of professional confidence and exposure to others who exemplify a high degree of expertise in their use, PPPs would do well to not only evaluate aspiring administrator confidence in the use of frames, but also mentor them with sitting school leaders who demonstrate capacity with situational framing that addresses their needs.

Although this study did not address the degree that assessing a principal's self-efficacy, as measured in this study with the Principal Self-Efficacy Survey (PSES) (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004), requires an additional measure of a school administrator's emotional intelligence (Blaik-Hourani et al., 2020; Gurley & Dagney, 2020; McBrayer et al. 2020), the variety of

participant responses to the same situational dilemma provides incentive to investigate the motivations of aspiring administrators from a variety of perspectives.

Comparing understandings of self-efficacy and situational leadership between aspiring and fully employed school leaders provides data that PPPs can use to determine the effectiveness of their programs. This is especially true when considering distinct areas that may need additional emphasis (e.g., symbolic and political situational framing). School district office human resources and supervision personnel would also benefit from an assessment of school leader self-efficacy and the use of situational framing to determine the capacity of school leaders in their schools, and devise professional development to bolster identified needs evidenced by these assessments.

Aside from the limited sample size, this study is limited by the use of participants from one PPP and the validity/reliability of the instruments (i.e., PSES, Situational Framing Graphic) used. Also, none of the participants were employed as school principals, rather they held lesser school administrative roles. Based on the limited results of this study, additional research is recommended into the use of evaluative instruments to measure self-assessment and situational awareness by aspiring school administrators as well as those employed in schools. Using the same protocols employed in this study, larger numbers of participants would assist in validating the instruments used, and assess the reliability of this study. Also, a larger sample size and more frequent assessments of participants (i.e., longitudinal) may result in a more robust investigation of the degree that demographic factors (e.g., age, years of experience, type of PPP, type of school, role in school) affect the degree that aspiring administrators alter their perceptions of the use of situational framing from the time they are preparing for service through their early-career experiences.

## References


Baroudi, S., & Hojeij, Z. (2018). The role of self-efficacy as an attribute of principals' leadership effectiveness in K-12 private and public institutions in Lebanon. *International Journal of Leadership in Education, 23*(4), 457–471. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2018.1529822

Blaik-Hourani, R., Al-Midfa, A., Al-Nuaimi, S., & Al-Kaabi, A. (2020). Emotional intelligence and school leaders: evidence from Abu Dhabi. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 49*(3), 493–517. https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143220913552

Bolman, L. G. & Deal, T. E. (2013). Reframing organizations (5th ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Clement, D., Thornton, M., Miles Nash, A., & Sanzo, K. (2022). Attributes of Highly Diverse Principal Preparation Programs: Pre-enrollment to Post-completion. *Leadership & Policy in Schools, 21*(1), 64–80. https://doi-org.utk.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/15700763.2021.2022708

Crawford, M., & Cowie, M. (2011). Bridging theory and practice in headship preparation. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 40*(2), 175–187. https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143211427978

Davis, J., & Nixon, A. (2024). The Changing Role of Principals: Are District Leaders and University Preparation Programs Providing the Needed Supports? *AASA Journal of Scholarship & Practice, 21*(1), 14–29.

Debes, G. (2020). The predictive power of emotional intelligence on self-efficacy: a case of school principals. *International Online Journal of Education and Teaching, 8*(1), 148–166.

Dickens, K. N., Beavers, J., Malibiran, J. M., & Nelson, A. (2021). Evidence-based leadership preparation program practices: from the perceptions of Georgia rural school leaders. *Georgia Educational Researcher, 18*(1, 2, and 3). https://doi.org/10.20429/ger.2021.180203

Federici, R. A., & Skaalvik, E. M. (2012). Principal self-efficacy: relations with burnout, job satisfaction and motivation to quit. *Social Psychology of Education, 15*(3), 295–320. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-012-9183-5

Fernandez, A. A., & Shaw, G. P. (2020). The coronavirus and COVID-19. *Journal of Leadership Studies, 14*(1), 39–45. https://doi.org/10.1002/jls.21684

Fisher, Y. (2010). The sense of self-efficacy of aspiring principals: exploration in a dynamic concept. *Social Psychology of Education, 14*(1), 93–117. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-010-9136-9

Genao, S. (2021). Doing it for culturally responsive school leadership: utilizing reflexivity from preparation to practice. *Journal of Research on Leadership Education, 16* (2). 158-170. https://doi.org/10.1177/19427751211002226

Grissom, J. A., Mitani, H., & Blissett, R. S. (2018). Principal preparation programs and principal outcomes. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 55*(1), 73–115. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161x18785865

Gurley, D. K., & Dagley, A. (2020). Pulling back the curtain on moral reasoning and Ethical Leadership Development for K–12 School Leaders. *Journal of Research on Leadership Education, 16*(3), 243–274. https://doi.org/10.1177/1942775120921213

Hesbol, K. A. (2019). Principal self-efficacy and learning organizations: influencing school improvement. *International Council of Professors of Educational Leadership,* 14(1).33–51.

Hersey, P., Angelini, A. L., & Carakushansky, S. (1982). The impact of situational leadership and classroom structure on learning effectiveness. *Group and Organization Studies, 7*(2), 216–224.

Hersey, P., Banchard, K. H., & Natemeyer, W. E. (1979). Situational leadership, perception, and the impact of power. *Group and Organization Studies, 4*(4), 418–428.

Ireh, M., & Bailey, J. (1999). A study of superintendents' change leadership styles using the situational leadership model. *American Secondary Education, 27*(4), 22–32.

Martinez, J. A. & Broemmel, A. D. (2021). Pencils down: Educators respond to uncertainty amidst COVID-19 school closures. *International Studies in Educational Administration, 49*(1). 109-132.

McBrayer, J. S., Akins, C., Gutierrez de Blume, A., Cleveland, R., & Pannell, S. (2020). Instructional leadership practices and school leaders' self-efficacy. *School Leadership Review, 15*(1). Article 13.

Pannell, S., & Sergi-McBrayer, J. (2020). An examination of the impact of educational leadership field experience structure on instructional leadership preparedness. *International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation, 15*(1), 92–106.

Skaalvik, C. (2020). Self-efficacy for instructional leadership: relations with perceived job demands and job resources, emotional exhaustion, job satisfaction, and motivation to quit. *Social Psychology of Education, 23*(5), 1343–1366. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-020-09585-9

Tschannen-Moran, M., & Gareis, C. R. (2004). Principals' sense of efficacy. *Journal of Educational Administration, 42*(5), 573–585. https://doi.org/10.1108/09578230410554070

Weissblueth, E., & Linder, I. (2020). The effects of simulations in a simulation center on principals' training and professional self-efficacy. *International Journal of Education Policy and Leadership, 16*(14). https://doi.org/10.22230/ijepl.2020v16n14a965

Westberry, L., & Zhao, F. (2021). A psychometric look at principal professional development. *International Journal of Education Policy and Leadership, 17*(7). https://doi.org/10.22230/ijepl.2021v17n7a1103

## Appendix A – Principal Self-Efficacy Survey

In your current role as administrator, to what extent can you…

| | None at All | | Very Little | | Some Degree | | Quite a Bit | | A Great Deal |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. facilitate student learning at your school? | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 2. generate enthusiasm for a shared vision for the school? | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 3. handle the time demands of the job? | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 4. manage change in your school? | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 5. promote school spirit among a large majority of the student population? | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 6. create a positive learning environment in your school? | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 7.raise student achievement on standardized tests? | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 8. promote a positive image of your school with the media? | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 9. motivate teachers? | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 10. promote the prevailing values of the community in your school? | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 11. maintain control of your own daily schedule? | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 12. shape the operational policies and procedures that are necessary to manage your school? | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 13. handle effectively the discipline of students in your school? | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 14. promote acceptable behavior among students? | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 15. handle the paperwork required of the job? | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 16. promote ethical behavior among school personnel? | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 17. cope with the stress of the job? | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 18. prioritize among competing demands of the job? | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

## Appendix B – Participant Interview Questions

1. Please state your full name.
2. Since you were enrolled in the last year of your administrator preparation program at the University of Tennessee, have you been assigned to any school leadership positions or taken on any leadership roles? If so, please describe.

*I will now share a screen with you that highlights Bolman & Deal's Four Frames, the major theme of EDAM 513 (Organizational Leadership). [show screen and read though all the descriptions]*

3. Please choose one of these frames (political, human resources, symbolic or structural) that you think school leaders you have worked with "look through" the most, and why you think so.
4. Now, please choose one of these (political, human resources, symbolic or structural) you think **you** "look through" the most in your current work in schools, and why you think so.
5. If the answers to the last two questions are not the same, please hypothesize why you think this is the case.

*I will now share with you a relationship versus task diagram, which describes the types of tasks and relationships leaders develop with those they work with.*

6. Given what you see here, describe which quadrant best exemplifies where you are currently as an educational professional.
7. Going back now to Bolman & Deal's Four Frames [show that chart], which one do you feel you are most capable of "looking through"? (it may be different than your previous answer of which you look through the most)
8. Which Bolman & Deal's Four Frames do you feel would be the most difficult for you to use in a real-life scenario at your workplace?

*I will now describe a brief, fictitious scenario which is set in a school. After I do so, you will be asked to rank the four frames, from 1 being the most important frame that an effective administrator needs to focus on to best understand and address the described scenario and 4 being the least important frame to focus on in the given scenario. While I tell the story, you will have access to the "Four Frames" chart. A parent volunteer, working in the library, comes into a high school office at the end of the school year and asks to speak to the principal. The parent tells the principal that she is working with the school librarian to purchase books for students to check out the following school year. The parent states that she and the librarian drafted separate lists of books they think are informative, interesting and previously approved for use by the school district. She also relayed that the budget for purchasing these books is limited, so not all books that she and the librarian wanted can be purchased, so the two of them designated which three from each of their lists were not to be debated by the other. The parent then told the principal that the librarian chose, in the top three of her list, a book entitled, "The Tools of the Infantry Soldier: Guns, Ammunition, and Knives", which included both informational text and detailed images related to ground warfare. The parent then stated that although the book was on the school district approved list, she felt that it should not be made available to students with the current media focus on school violence. The parent finished by saying that she relayed her*

*objections to the librarian, but felt the librarian, a former U.S. Navy sergeant was not receptive to her concerns.*

9. Of the four frames, please list the most important frame that an effective administrator needs to focus on to best understand and address the described scenario, the second most important? the third most important? the least important?

# Professional Development Supporting Principals' Changing Roles as Equity-Oriented Leaders

**Carol A. Mullen**
*Virginia Tech*

**Rebecca B. Hall**
*Assessment Specialist, Division Director of Testing in Virginia*

In these challenging times, it is essential that principals serve as equity-oriented, antiracist, culturally competent leaders accountable for students' performance, school improvement, and policy requirements. Many studies focus on professional development (PD) for teachers but not school leaders, thus the value of the present analysis is that principal PD is the centerpiece. This literature review/conceptual article examines quality PD that advances principals' learning and effectiveness in the context of their changing roles associated with instructional leadership, equity, and technology. The research question was, What does the literature convey about the main influences on effective principal PD that establish the need for equity and antiracism? Sixty-eight scholarly sources were examined in addition to public documents. The authors developed a conceptual framework named Influences on Principal Development to present various factors influencing student achievement. Six findings emerged: principal PD considerations and importance; changes in principal role and reasons for PD; types and practices of PD benefitting principals; barriers to engaging in principal PD; virtual PD platforms and their value; and leveraging virtual PD to support impact. The contribution is to knowledge of the principalship regarding quality PD and the importance of developing equity-minded leaders who impact teacher effectiveness and student performance.

*Keywords*: equity, instructional leadership, literature review, principal professional development

The influence of school leaders on teaching and learning has long been of interest. Principals' role in enhancing student outcomes is next only to teachers' (Cox & Mullen, 2023; Williams & Welsh, 2017). In these challenging times, it is essential that principals serve as equity-minded, antiracist, culturally competent leaders accountable for students' academic performance, school improvement, and policy requirements (Diem & Welton, 2021; Gooden et al., 2018; Lopez & Jean-Marie, 2021). A challenge is that high principal attrition has weakened school districts' ability to hire diverse principals to serve as positive role models (Tran et al., 2023).

This article examines quality professional development (PD) that advances principals' learning and effectiveness in the context of their changing roles. The role of the school principal currently reflects a broad set of responsibilities associated with instructional leadership, equity, and technology. The prominence of instructional leadership is one such change in the principalship (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022; Grissom et al., 2021; Haller et al., 2016; Kraft et al., 2016; Mizell, 2010). Instructional leadership is codified as "curriculum, instruction, and assessment" in the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) (National Policy Board for Educational Administration [NPBEA], 2015). Impactful instructional leadership practices are directed at higher academic standards and student outcomes, including the "racial achievement gap" and principal efforts to address racial/ethnic disparities (Diem & Welton, 2021). Data-driven instructional systems are supported by collaborative planning; data meetings; informal observations with feedback or coaching; transparency and visibility; providing teacher PD; building relationships; and distributing instructional resources aligned to state standards (Cox & Mullen, 2023).

In light of school leader as change agent (Acton, 2021), equity is another area of emphasis in the principalship (Cox & Mullen, 2023; Darling-Hammond et al., 2022; Diem & Welton, 2021; Gooden et al., 2018; Lopez & Jean-Marie, 2021; Stephenson et al., 2021). Per PSEL, equity and cultural responsiveness that promote student success is a standard (NPBEA, 2015). In their decisions and actions, equity-minded principals are culturally responsive, inclusive, and antiracist.

Technology is also instrumental in the evolving principalship role (Ermeling et al., 2015; Parsons et al., 2019; Perry, 2023; Sider et al., 2023). In service of the PSEL standard "curriculum, instruction, and assessment," principals encourage technology effectiveness (NPBEA, 2015, p. 12). Effective principals with technology expertise ensure strong instruction and equitable access to computers and the internet. They support teachers' instructional delivery using in-person, hybrid, and/or virtual formats to maximize student options and learning. Principals adapt to and use new technologies, and they foster teachers' online competency (Stephenson et al., 2021).

Regarding terms, *antiracism* refers to an intentional process led by school and district leaders to eliminate institutional racism by, for example, changing instructional policies and practices, and implementing antiracist principal preparation and development (Diem & Welton, 2021; Gooden et al., 2018; Lopez & Jean-Marie, 2021). *Equity* means just treatment and closing disparities, with the understanding that "equity and cultural responsiveness" are dispositions expected of antiracist leaders, per PSEL (NPBEA, 2015, p. 17). Equity is a tenet in practice, research, pedagogy, preparation, and policy, and equity-oriented leadership is a lever used to improve minoritized populations' outcomes as well as to pursue sustainable goals for diverse communities. A professional standard and expectation of leaders, equity concerns a just distribution of resources, cultural recognition and valuing people, as well as sustainability (Lopez

& Jean-Marie, 2021; Stephenson et al., 2021). *Instructional leadership* indicates principals' knowledge and skills for effectively conducting teacher observations and evaluations, providing coaching and feedback to teachers, and implementing data-driven curriculum and instruction (Grissom et al., 2021). *PD* involves learning, continuing education, or career training that is "sustained, intensive, collaborative, job-embedded, data-driven, classroom-focused" (Every Student Succeeds Act [ESSA], 2015; also, Darling-Hammond et al., 2022; Lavigne et al., 2016). *Principal PD* is any professional learning opportunity designed specifically for school leaders that prioritizes instructional leadership and motivates teachers to improve their practices for student benefit (Grissom et al., 2021); learning new knowledge and skills and identity are all dimensions of PD (Jerdborg, 2023). Unlike school districts in many US states, *school division* applies to the Virginia context due to divisions' budgetary dependency on a local government (county, etc.); public K–12 schools, overseen by a school board, are organized into regions by the Virginia Department of Education ("School division," 2024). *Virtual PD* concerns learning via the internet and the modeling of technology use and digital tools (Stephenson et al., 2021).

Our research question was, What does the literature convey about the main influences on effective principal PD that establish the need for equity and antiracism? In the initial literature we reviewed, it became apparent that PD in schools (a) mainly concerns teachers (Buxton & De Muth, 2012; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Maher & Prescott, 2017; Parsons et al., 2019); (b) is recognized as a critical component of change that links standards to student outcomes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Knight & Skrtic, 2021); and (c) needs to become more significant and applicable to leadership by incorporating equity and antiracism in principal-specific PD (Cox & Mullen, 2023; Darling-Hammond et al., 2022; Diem & Welton, 2021; Gooden et al., 2018; Lopez & Jean-Marie, 2021; Stephenson et al., 2021). Targets of teachers' PD and virtual learning are curriculum and instruction, student learning, and performance.

Despite its importance, principal PD and foci—instructional leadership, equity and antiracism, educator effectiveness, and student outcomes—attract far less attention than teacher PD (Cox & Mullen, 2023; Darling-Hammond et al., 2022; Diem & Welton, 2021; Gooden et al., 2018; Lopez & Jean-Marie, 2021; Stephenson et al., 2021). Thus, the value of this review is that principal PD and dynamics (school division culture and practices, legislation and policy, etc.) that influence the learning of school leaders is the centerpiece. While the research on principal PD directed at instructional leadership is limited (Herrmann et al., 2019), principal learning has been linked to student gains and reduced teacher attrition (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022; Grissom et al., 2021; Haller et al., 2016; Kraft et al., 2016; Mizell, 2010). However, based on our review of current studies on principal PD in the (post)pandemic era, how principals engage in PD to improve their instructional leadership dispositions and skills lacks thorough examination. As found, principals' sense-making of PD and its most beneficial aspects are not well known (Sahlin, 2023; Westberry & Hornor, 2022). The tendency for leadership preparation (and presumably principal PD) to be geared around evidence based or best practice discourages the search for equity-minded strategies. Forging equity-oriented leadership in antiracist principal PD and preparation for benefitting schools has clearly emerged as an expectation (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022; Diem & Welton, 2021; Gooden et al., 2018; Lopez & Jean-Marie, 2021; Stephenson et al., 2021).

Our motivation as a collaborating educational leadership professor and an assessment specialist/former instructional leader was to underscore the value of PD to the principalship for

navigating changing roles. Just as professional learning is more available to teachers than principals (as our review of extant research revealed), studies of teacher PD overshadow consideration in this regard for principals. There is some coverage about the types of professional learning that can improve principals' instructional leadership and other competencies; the benefits and challenges of participating in quality PD, including virtually; and potential effects on schools. Another issue is that the equity lens for principal PD is not consistently recognized in the sources reviewed, which is an area for future research considering the intensification of school inequities in pandemic times. Hence, this exploration of principal learning and leading for equity was both needed and timely. This contribution is to knowledge of the principalship regarding quality PD, the empowerment of principals to meet their needs through professional learning, and the importance of developing an equity mindset as leaders who influence teacher effectiveness and student performance. Given that state and local education agencies do not reliably distinguish PD that is specific to principals' needs and interests (Steinberg & Yang, 2020), based on our review, more attention ought to focus on principal-specific PD and the changing roles of school leadership.

The research we synthesized draws upon evidence-based practices of principal PD for increasing teacher effectiveness and beneficial outcomes for all students. Professional learning that generates these results is dependent on skillful, equity-oriented leaders who develop self-understanding and advocate for others, and who build capacity and support systems that are antiracist, inclusive, and transformative (Gooden et al., 2018; Jerdborg, 2023; Lopez & Jean-Marie, 2021). Given that greater scrutiny of principals and their role in improving education has resulted from the national attention on student achievement (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022; Grissom & Harrington, 2010), knowledge needs to be shared about principal PD and its potential effects. With reference to principal evaluation standards, school leaders are evaluated not only on their own performance but also that of students. Accordingly, the PSEL specifies that effective leaders develop not only the professional knowledge and skills of staff but also themselves by tending to their own effectiveness and growth (NPBEA, 2015). Creating conditions for student progress, they cultivate an environment of continuous improvement that builds instructional capacity and supports success for each learner (Stephenson et al., 2021).

## Methodology

Studies of principal PD mainly in the US context were located using academic databases (EBSCOhost, etc.), web search engines, and educational leadership journals. The sources selected for analysis were in keeping with the premise that all information covered here is endemic to principalship PD. All selected works used some of the search terms. After 178 abstracts were read, 68 scholarly articles and books were examined, in addition to public documents.

Codes were generated from our research question, search terms, and literature results (Table 1).

**Table 1**

*Frequency of Codes in Research Reviewed 2002–2023* (Authors)

| Codes | Frequency (High to Low) |
|---|---|

| | |
|---|---|
| PD *and* Principal | 2812 |
| Instructional Leadership *and* Principal *and* Continuing Education | 125 |
| Principal Role *and* Student Achievement | 85 |
| Online PD *and* Education | 74 |
| Virtual PD *and* Education | 52 |
| Equity/Antiracism *and* Principal | 38 |
| Continuing Education *and* Virtual | 7 |
| Virtual PD *and* Principal | 4 |
| Hybrid PD *and* Education | 4 |

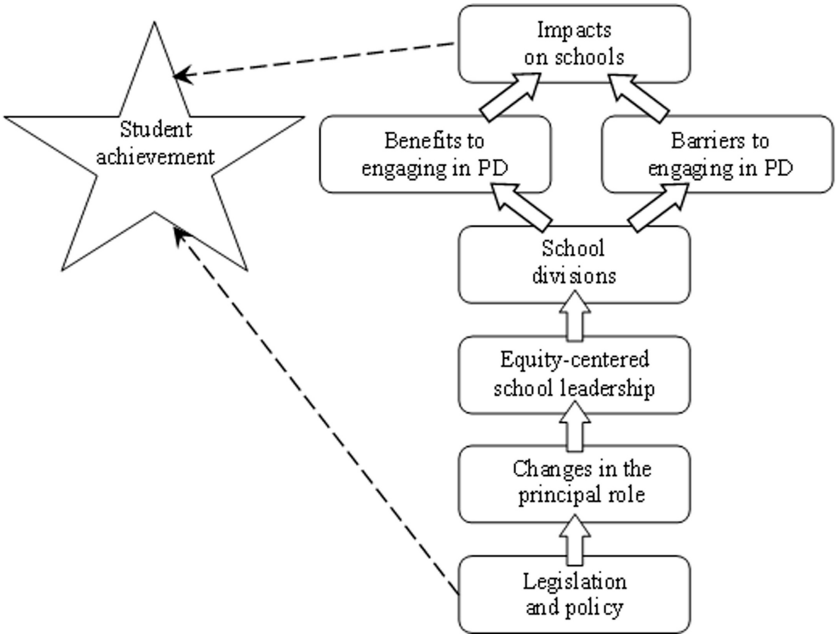
Coding processes followed established qualitative procedures. Sources were searched for particular words, and the frequency count and the context/meaning were recorded. In this manner, articles and documents with the highest relevance to this review (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022; ESSA, 2015; Lopez & Jean-Marie, 2021; Stephenson et al., 2021, etc.) were identified and coded by both researchers. The results were organized in a data summary matrix that logged author/year, purpose/goals, methods/data sources, themes/findings, and implications; in it, color coding was used to track methods, findings, and implications. Categorically aggregating the data produced findings and led to implications. Sources were also cross-referenced with the research question.

Limitations of this review are that it is not international or comprehensive in scope. The implications are restricted to a single country. Also, certain ideas are not explored in detail: principal PD guided by tenets—equity, antiracism, and cultural competency; PD designed for novice versus experienced principals; and applicable surveys, interview protocols, and other tools reported in research. Successful PD programs, features, and preferred virtual platforms and digital tools are also not examined.

## Conceptual Framework

Our conceptual framework for this review study (Figure 1) presents a causal model of various factors influencing principal development. These influences are Policy, Change, Leadership, Equity, Divisions, Benefits, Barriers, and Impacts. Darling-Hammond et al.'s (2022) systematic literature review focused on programmatic elements of effective PD for aspiring and practicing principals (e.g., mentoring/coaching) and associated experiences for participants, whereas our analysis looked at the main influences that drive principal PD on-the-job, with student achievement as the *raison d'etre* and thus overriding goal. Similarly, Darling-Hammond et al. (2022) acknowledged the role of policy for driving quality PD programming, as well as "equity-oriented leadership" in developing principals to meet diverse student needs.

**Figure 1**
*Influences on Principal Development* (Authors)




We designed our figure to visually identify and connect crucial influences on principal-specific continuing education while maintaining student success as the focal point. As depicted, *legislation and policy*—a foundational catalyst—prioritize *student achievement* and, to this end, propel *changes in the principal role*, shape *equity-oriented school leadership*, support principal leadership by *school divisions* for which there are *benefits to engaging in PD* as well as *barriers to engaging in PD*, and guide measurable improvement and *impacts on schools* (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022; ESSA, 2015; Grissom et al., 2021; Gooden et al., 2018; Levin et al., 2020; Lopez & Jean-Marie, 2021; Stephenson et al., 2021).

When statutes and policies requiring principal PD are not fully implemented, principals may falter in their learning and effectiveness (Haller et al., 2016; Manna, 2015; Rodriquez, 2019). Consequently, to satisfy the expectations for delivering effective principal PD, school divisions are required to determine approaches for meeting policy requirements and offer equity-oriented, more comprehensive, and differentiated learning based on need (Acton, 2021; Darling-Hammond et al., 2022; Lavigne et al., 2016; Westberry & Zhao, 2021; Zepeda et al., 2014). The role of divisions/districts is important in determining PD opportunities for principals fitting their contexts and targeted areas of growth, including how they understand and operationalize equity. The gains are expected to create more effectual, equity-minded, and skilled leadership on the part of principals (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022; Grissom et al., 2021; Lopez & Jean-Marie, 2021; Stephenson et al., 2021). Education leaders and researchers may find our framework useful.

## Findings

In this discussion of findings, we address our research question. To clarify, two assumptions held across some or all studies analyzed: (a) principals' PD is essential for their effectiveness in such crucial areas as instructional leadership, equity, and technology, and (b) planning and implementation must be intentional to develop organizational capacity that benefits

stakeholders and sustains outcomes. The sources acknowledging equity-oriented leadership relative to principals' changing roles mostly had a recent publication date.

**Principal PD Considerations and Importance (Finding 1)**

A common refrain in the literature is that effective principal PD is coherent, focused, and designed to arrive at expected outcomes. Such professional learning embeds activities that build upon previous PD, is linked to standards and assessments, and is personalized around educators' needs and goals. Thoughtfully planned and implemented quality PD elicits improvements in school performance (Meyers et al., 2023).

In addition to being well planned, leadership learning should be ongoing. To increase educator proficiency and desirable results for students, PD for principals includes research on change and sustained support for implementation. Drawing upon PD for teachers with implications for leaders, according to Darling-Hammond et al. (2009), PD is more likely to be seen as effective if it is sustained and involves considerable contact hours, which encourage collaboration and active engagement. Improvements in student learning result from follow-up after the main PD activity (Meddaugh, 2014). To sustain learning, PD should be more comprehensive, incorporated into the workday, connect knowledge and application in practice, and involve inquiry, criteria not met by a separate activity unrelated to the setting (Zepeda et al., 2014). Teachers are more inclined to implement new practices when support occurs during classroom implementation (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). Likewise, quality PD engages principals in thinking about instructional strategies that matter, with opportunities for reflection, coaching, and feedback (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022; Lavigne et al., 2016).

Improved leadership has the potential for a strong return on investment in students and their learning (Grissom et al., 2021; Herrmann et al., 2019; Manna, 2015). Notably, effective principal PD can increase the capacity to attract, retain, and develop teachers, which is crucial given the national crisis around teacher shortages (Kraft et al., 2016; Levin et al., 2020). Teachers are more likely to remain in schools led by principals whose learning from PD benefits the organization and supports their instruction (Levin et al., 2020). Because teacher turnover impacts students academically (Cox & Mullen, 2023), improvements in school leadership help to ensure retention and quality teaching and learning (Kraft et al., 2016).

**Changes in Principal Role and Reasons for PD (Finding 2)**

Illuminating why PD is needed specifically for principals, researchers referenced such pervasive realities as accountability for student performance necessitating strong instructional leadership (e.g., Haller et al., 2016). Accompanying these changing expectations of the role is an adjustment in the skills leaders need to know and how they utilize their time (Grissom et al., 2021). Principals need the knowledge, mindset, and skills to support effective teaching and learning that result in improved student performance. In order to fulfill instructional leadership responsibilities, instead of focusing solely on managerial tasks, they must be intentional with how they use their time. The principalship role is complicated and demanding. As school leaders invest more heavily in guiding and evaluating teachers' performance, including their online competency and digital literacy, their workload expands, possibly without extra resources (Argyropoulou et al., 2021).

To determine how principals spend time on the job, Lavigne et al. (2016) analyzed results from the Schools and Staffing Survey. The responding principals (N = 5,950) reported "spending 31% of their time on internal administrative tasks, 27% on curriculum and teaching-related tasks, 23% on student interactions, and 13% on parent interactions" (p. 4). This finding demonstrates what is generally known—that principals are pulled in different directions and that consideration should be given to the types of support and training needed for curriculum and instruction tasks.

**Types and Practices of PD Benefitting Principals (Finding 3)**

The research reviewed also covered some types and practices of PD beneficial to principals. Customized PD is advantageous for developing the knowledge, mindset, and skills to support effective instruction and for providing education around key areas of administration—managing people, processes, and data (Grissom et al., 2021; Levin et al., 2020). To perform well in these ways while demonstrating problem-solving and distributed leadership, leaders need targeted learning opportunities (Meyers et al., 2023) to help with implementing state goals and initiatives for which states and divisions must assume an active role in funding (Manna, 2015).

Although short-term principal PD is common, the complexity of principal leadership requires greater exposure, which may be why longer term or immersive approaches to learning appeal to some principals. Darling-Hammond and coauthors (2022) described these types of PD as "individualized, one-on-one support provided by a coach or mentor"; "opportunities for networking with peers, often in structures like professional learning communities" and sessions with a discernible impact on learning and professional networks; and "opportunities for authentic [learning]" (p. 23). More needs to be known about how principals decide which type of PD to engage in and the effects of participation on personnel and students (Lavigne et al., 2016). Considering how much schools have changed and how quickly, limitations to the Lavigne et al. study were outdated information from principals (collected 2011–2012) and self-reported data.

A qualitative study determined principal PD opportunities in four school divisions in Georgia and adult learning principles. Zepeda et al. (2014) discovered that these systems, which varied in size, demographics, and per capita income, evidenced being purposeful about job-embedded and action-based principal PD. Formal and informal mentoring were valued forms of PD, delivering "just in time" learning responsive to leaders' interests. Principals recognized that changes in accountability demands meant that their approaches needed to be more ongoing, data-informed, and strategic. Because the professional learning received was mainly from the district, it was recommended that school leaders be given more autonomy in the areas of content, learning approaches, delivery type, pace, and goals. Researched practices addressing quality formal learning opportunities with self-directed options were encouraged.

Thus, job-embedded, in-service learning opportunities can have positive impacts when focused on high-leverage practice areas and unique problems (Grissom et al., 2021; Meyers et al., 2023). Whether and how school districts support principals through PD can determine their capacity to be successful in their roles (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022). Inservice school leaders who gained from sustained coaching and mentoring have been rated more effective than their counterparts lacking this on-the-job learning (Grissom & Harrington, 2010). These beneficiaries of networked PD communities reported having learned new ideas, becoming more reflective about their leadership, and experiencing vitality through connectedness (Coenen et al., 2021;

Levin et al., 2020). As Lazenby et al. (2020) found, experienced principals value networking as a way to learn from peers about managing changes to their roles. Personal connections and professional networks most positively influenced learning at work (Acton, 2021).

With the amplification of accountability measures, school districts have made PD more comprehensive and differentiated around needs (Acton, 2021; Westberry & Zhao, 2021; Zepeda et al., 2014). When principals do not experience quality PD student learning can deteriorate (Mizell, 2010). Results from 1,311 surveyed principals in South Carolina revealed that interest in PD was on understanding "[ways to use] data to inform instruction"; "[a full range of] instructional leadership (alignment, assessment, and observation)"; and "how to effectively monitor progress" (Westberry & Zhao, 2021, p. 11). Yet, as Acton (2021) found, leading the change process on behalf of student learning can be missing from PD sessions for principals.

Survey research from the National Center for Education Statistics identified the kinds of PD attracting principal interest and relative to school grade and poverty level (as cited in Lavigne et al., 2016). Data from 6,360 principals were analyzed using logistical regression. Almost all (99%) of the respondents had experienced some form of PD during the 2011–2012 school year, with conferences and workshops most commonly used to advance learning in principal networks.

PD enhances school leaders' knowledge and skills, process of becoming equity-centered, and ideas for improving culture (Jerdborg, 2023). Endeavoring to improve instructional practice, principals motivate teachers to attain higher standards and become more efficacious in support of student outcomes. Also, they allow teachers choice and flexibility, to make small incremental changes, and lead by example. When principals have the tools and resources they need, including PD that works, they can emerge as a change agent (Acton, 2021; Ni et al., 2016).

**Barriers to Engaging in Principal PD (Finding 4)**

Additionally, the studies we read described barriers of principal PD. Importantly, unless a school district is race conscious, resources will not be used for principal and educator PD that fosters "cultural competency." As argued by Diem and Welton (2021), "capacity building and development of more racially equitable practices" depend on district culture. Districts that invest in "racial equity efforts," for example, offer "culturally responsive" learning experiences for diverse student populations (p. 29). In places where politics are racially hostile, school leaders will not be asked to examine data for evidence of inequity along the lines of racial differences in student achievement, school discipline, and structures and practices. Principals who are not learning about minoritized groups' value and cultural assets through antiracist PD may fail to dismantle deficit thinking in their own schools. In contrast, those who lead with equity socialize educators to bring an asset-based understanding of students to the classroom. Comparing school districts in several US states, these researchers narrated district leadership resistance to equity, antiracism, and transformation and commitment to these dynamics.

Also as confirmed in research, nationally, principals want to participate in professional learning, but they encounter workload expectations and overwhelming demands, among other difficulties (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022; Zepeda et al., 2014). School leaders who focus on helping teachers to adjust and develop pedagogically may neglect their own learning. A profound example occurred during emergency remote teaching. In Greece, principals were, like others

around the globe, swamped with making their faculty competent enough to instruct online (Argyropoulou et al., 2021).

Obstacles to principals' involvement in PD also include incompatible working hours, cost of training, inadequate support from employers, and lack of targeted or timely opportunities (Rodriguez-Gomez et al., 2020). Levin et al. (2020) found that 84% of elementary principals surveyed experienced time limitations, inadequate coverage for leaving the building, insufficient financial support, and funding restrictions. Commuting time is another factor that can affect participation in PD (Coenen et al., 2021). The ability to operate remotely via the internet made possible virtual alternatives to place-bound PD (Levin et al., 2020; Zepeda et al., 2014).

PD formats typically default to conferences, workshops, or one-time sessions for principals despite the fact that sustained, on-the-job PD that emphasizes problem-solving and networking and is recommended. Per principals' reports, while they can access a variety of topics through workshops and conferences, these venues may not offer collaborative or applied PD opportunities (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022; Lavigne et al., 2016). Honig (2012) found that district supervisors did not have the time to target support to each principal, which can have a ripple effect. Schools with high student failure and new principals showed a reduction in the time supervisors spent with principals whose instructional leadership skills were weak. Principals planning to leave the field have reported that their districts did not meet their PD needs (Levin et al., 2020).

**Virtual PD Platforms and Their Value (Finding 5)**

Virtual platforms used for principal PD and their value was another thematic finding. The pivot to online learning for K–12 students triggered by COVID-19 had an effect on professional learning and its delivery. Virtual PD occurred out of necessity, with leaders and teachers seeking to adjust to online platforms and digital learning in remote contexts (Charteris et al., 2021).

Advances in technology and increased internet access enable a fuller implementation of PD in online formats for personalizing leaders' learning (Buxton & De Muth, 2012; Charteris et al., 2021; Stephenson et al., 2021). To deliver PD remotely, a digital meeting platform (Zoom, etc.) is used to allow for personal and group messaging, file sharing, and archiving. Synchronous modalities feature live webinars, chat messaging, and conversations with presenters and participants, while modules, recorded videos, and discussion boards typify asynchronous modes (Gottlieb et al., 2020; Parsons et al., 2019).

Of relevance is the fact that benefits of participating in virtual PD are numerous and include reduced costs in travel and facilities, expanded reach, flexibility of scheduling, adaptability of resources, and access to expertise (Buxton & De Muth, 2012; Charteris et al., 2021; Maher & Prescott, 2017; Parsons et al., 2019; Sider et al., 2023). These gains vary based on format, time, content, and audience. As determined by Eddy et al. (2021), ongoing asynchronous and synchronous sessions allow participants to improve their practice over time.

By sponsoring virtual PD, school divisions can attract more participants in rural or remote areas for whom in-person attendance would be impractical (Buxton & De Muth, 2012; Maher & Prescott, 2017). The virtual platform also allows principals to learn from experts and peers who are otherwise not accessible (Lazenby et al., 2020). With the decrease in funding for assistance to principals, high-quality online formats serve as a remedy and opportunity to connect, with

extended access to resources (Maher & Prescott, 2017). By making asynchronous resources available in advance, Eddy et al. (2021) found that participants could explore them and better engage during synchronous sessions. Further, it can be more manageable for educators to maintain connections and share knowledge when learning remotely (Charteris et al., 2021), and virtual PD makes it easier to provide the time and opportunities needed for professional learning with continuous follow-up (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). Thus, online principal learning can aid sustainable change—a crucial point (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022; Lavigne et al., 2016).

Increased engagement and earlier and higher levels of coconstruction are other attributes of virtual PD (Seddon et al., 2012). By reviewing the chat and transcription of recorded virtual PD sessions, Seddon and team identified types of interactions and compared online asynchronous and synchronous interactions. In contrast with face-to-face sessions, webinars allowed for input through text chat, and there were shorter wait times bolstered by instant sharing of reflections.

**Leveraging Virtual PD to Support Impact (Finding 6)**

A new area of research concerns virtual PD and how it might be leveraged to support principals' impact in their schools. Sponsorship of various PD opportunities, including online coaching, attracts school leaders' attention. Ermeling et al.'s (2015) survey study determined that after a blended principal coaching program pivoted online, it proved both active and effective in five schools. The district sponsored the program with positive results for 2 years before offering it virtually due to funding issues. A finding was that blended models are worth considering for maintaining targeted PD and principal coaching. Aptly, the research team identified as a quality control readiness for online support and verifying this before implementation.

PD delivered remotely for principals provides expanded opportunities for self-reflection and internalization of learning and connects these leaders beyond their districts (Irby et al., 2022). Such task-specific PD targets instructional leadership competencies and learning from external experts. The use of virtual "choose your own adventure" cases has given principals time to develop decision-making skills in scenarios relevant to their roles (Sider et al., 2023).

Like place-bound communities of practice, virtual variations for principals can produce long-term, meaningful collaboration and personalized, relevant learning. Lambert and Bouchamma (2021) reported that participants in these reflective learning communities experienced such benefits as a sense of belonging, and that geographical and other differences allowed for varying views and enriched experiences. Meant for school leader education, these communities have focused on real-world problem-solving and networking, resulting in reduced isolation on the job and sustained, relevant participation in PD. Creating a bridge between theory and practice, instructional leadership and other strategies are formulated, implemented, and assessed for school improvement purposes (Coenen, 2021; Darling-Hammond et al., 2022).

In addition to structured online PD opportunities for principals, the use of social media for informal PD has expanded. Daly et al. (2019) explained that formal PD does not always suit principals or fit their unique contexts, which leads to informal connections with experts and colleagues. Social media provides low- to no-cost, just-in-time access to resources, and a professional learning network across the globe (Daly et al., 2019; Lazenby et al., 2020).

Regarding strategies for implementing virtual PD, facilitators will want to determine how to organize and conduct sessions and related opportunities to maximize engagement and

learning. One strategy for carrying out remote PD is to create an environment that fosters communication and codesign (Charteris et al., 2021). A sense of being together and involved is needed in virtual environments. Activities help individuals identify with the community, experience trust, communicate with purpose, and develop relationships. Social interactions can be forged through participants' sharing of work; asynchronous discussion boards; and real-time conversations through videos, chats, and social media. Relationships can expand into rewarding professional networks (Parsons et al., 2019).

Another consideration for facilitators is to determine which format for virtual PD will most likely further the intended outcomes. Growth in new and emerging technologies has ignited a vast range of options (Sider et al., 2023). Topics of interest to principals should be a feature of any PD opportunity, as reinforced by research in Indonesia on the learning for leaders (Sukarno & Sumarwati, 2020). In a 2023 study by Sider and coauthors, virtual formats enabled pedagogical flexibility and promoted understanding during principals' PD sessions.

Virtual and hybrid PD is expected to last given the need for it and advantages (Ermeling et al., 2015; Parsons et al., 2019; Perry, 2023; Sider et al., 2023). The case has been made that individualized approaches to PD and self-selected options are appropriate for principals and that online connectivity makes possible choice and personalization (Sider et al., 2023; Zepeda et al., 2014). Even in pre-pandemic times principals were supposed to receive evidence-based PD and have access to technology-powered forms to promote their meaningful learning, digital literacy, and capacity for leading effective instruction and learning outcomes (Stephenson et al., 2021).

## Implications and Further Research

Some implications and directions for further research were culled from the sources. As argued, the quality and sustainability of principal PD is a persistent issue needing examination. Confirming that principals' participation in PD matters for student outcomes, Meyers et al. (2023) encouraged research on programs that develop leadership capacities. Similarly, Darling-Hammond et al. (2022) called for studies that identify professional learning approaches for leaders that are effectively used in practice. More needs to be known about design-based, research-informed continuous improvement models, programs, and processes for advancing principal PD and their performance (Herrmann et al., 2019). Online technologies provide external assistance to school leaders and are more cost effective; however, Ermeling et al. (2015) found no research on sustained virtual assistance for principals. Therefore, studies of virtual principal PD in post-pandemic times should include examination of online platforms for principal engagement and benefit for self and stakeholders (Irby et al., 2022; Sider et al., 2023).

Importantly, equity-oriented leadership is expected to anchor principal PD in the moral purposes of schooling, whether this learning occurs in-person or online (Stephenson et al., 2021). Equity requires special and ongoing consideration in the development of principals and their impact on schools. A takeaway from Stephenson et al.'s investigation of principal leadership in virtual spaces is that studies of school leaders' "equity of access" often omit the "meaningful use of technology"; conversely, research on their experience and modeling of technology tends to leave out "the equity component" (p. 48). As such, a direction for researchers of principal online learning is to bear in mind relationships between equity and technology and in relation to instructional leadership.

Equity-minded, antiracist PD is particularly important to cultivate in these divisive times (Lopez & Jean-Marie, 2021), given the legal pushback from some state legislatures and boards of education on equity and critical race theory (CRT). To support the PD and capacity building of principals in their response to increased diversity and ongoing oppression, Lopez and Jean-Marie (2021) used anti-Black racism in school as a lens. Based on interviews in Canada and the United States of 41 Black and white school leaders, these researchers created the action-oriented framework Name, Own, Frame, and Sustain (NOFS) intended for practitioners as they challenge racism. They drew upon CRT, their study, and experiences as Black faculty to produce this framework. Enacting NOFS's tenets involves naming anti-Black racism, "owning the issue," framing ways to purposefully disrupt racist policies and practices, and sustaining the work of equity and justice through critical reflection, action, and collaboration (p. 58). This model offers direction for school leaders and PD that promotes consciousness raising, critical leadership, and praxis.

About the issue of powerful learning in virtual spaces and equity, a question for educational leadership faculty is, how do equity-minded leaders leverage learning technologies to improve schools, specifically the performance of teachers and students? To bring about principals' "meaningful powerful learning" and see it take hold in schools (and the research), it is not enough to expose them to PD opportunities and online tools, asserted Stephenson et al. (2021, p. 5). To create the conditions for and benefits of "equity-focused leadership," divisions must provide principals PD that is grounded in daily practice (p. 9). They further explained that to ascertain whether the learning in virtual PD contexts does, in fact, reflect issues of educational equity, processes can be monitored. Principals in low-resourced schools with higher concentrations of vulnerable students may have the most to gain from quality PD (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022).

To support the development of principals' dispositions and skills, we imagine that the "mixed reality simulations" for "difficult parent conference(s)" used by an educational leadership program in New England, USA, could be rethought as equity-themed scenarios and debriefings (Piro, 2023, pp. 23, 26). The "debriefing protocol," which focuses on reactions, assessment, application, and change, could be adapted for this purpose.

Leadership standards can be used more effectively in preservice programs to foster quality programming around continuity in opportunities to learn and vigorous clinical experiences (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022). Notably, advantageous learning for principals is also reported in emergent antiracist preparation research. One such program guided the transformative learning of a mainly white preservice cohort around four values: "gaining and integrating new knowledge, examining self, (re)envisioning the world, and taking antiracist action" (Gooden et al., 2018, p. 7). Practicing principals could gain from the interactive approach to antiracism; examination of leadership attitudes, choices, and behaviors; new awareness of self/other/world (Jerdborg, 2023; Sahlin, 2023); and ways to navigate different cultures (family, district, state, and so forth). Antiracist PD for principals could benefit from this value structure.

Finally, programs and opportunities that facilitate principals' leadership capacities and school impact are worthy of exploration. Pursuing linkages among principal PD, equity, student gains, and teacher effectiveness and retention could shed light on the growth of the leader and benefits. Supporting principals' changing roles as equity-oriented leaders in the workplace is advisable, with positive signs to this effect in healthy district cultures (Diem & Welton, 2021).

District PD for principals who are from minoritized groups (women, people of color, etc.) or in distressed schools with underserved students is ripe for further study (Tran et al., 2023).

## Conclusion

Our article contributes knowledge of principal PD that accounts for the changing role of school leaders in which instructional leadership, equity, and technology are paramount. To provide a window onto interrelated dynamics involved in student achievement, we presented our Influences on Principal Development framework. For this review study, we also addressed what research suggests about the main influences on effective principal PD that establish the need for equity and antiracism. As determined, principal-specific PD deserves more attention so that principals can serve as equity-oriented, antiracist, culturally competent leaders on behalf of each learner's outcomes. With the political division that has seeped into the nation's schools, the importance of developing equity-minded leaders who impact teacher effectiveness and student performance cannot be underestimated.

The pandemic plunged us into teaching and learning remotely. Given the principal's impact and yet alarming attrition, professional learning around crucial skills and dispositions that promote leading effectively is essential. Now it is time to pursue the study of principal development with attention on equity-oriented leadership as a path of justice for the future of school leadership.

## References


Acton, K. (2021). School leaders as change agents: Do principals have the tools they need? *Management in Education, 35*(1), 43–51.

Argyropoulou, E., Syka, C.-H., & Papaioannou, M. (2021). School leadership in dire straits: Fighting the virus or challenging the consequences? *International Studies in Educational Administration, 49*(1), 18–27.

Buxton, E., & De Muth, J. (2012). Adult learners' perceptions of a professional development program comparing live distance learning versus live local learning. *The Journal of Continuing Higher Education*, *60*(1), 12–19.

Charteris, J., Berman, J., & Page, A. (2021). Virtual team professional learning and development for practitioners in education. *Professional Development in Education*, *47*(4), 638–650.

Coenen, L., Schelfhout, W., & Hondeghem, A. (2021). Networked professional learning communities as means to Flemish secondary school leaders' professional learning and well-being. *Education Sciences, 11*(509), 1–33.

Cox, J., & Mullen, C. A. (2023). Impacting student achievement: Principals' instructional leadership practice in two Title I rural schools. *Journal of School Leadership*, *33*(1), 3–25.

Daly, A., Liou, Y., Del Fresno, M., Rehn, M., & Bjorklund, P. (2019). Educational leadership in the twitterverse: Social media, social networks, and the new social continuum. *Teachers College Record, 121*(140304), 1–20.

Darling-Hammond, L., Andree, A., Richardson, N., Orphanos, S., & Wei, R. (2009). *Professional learning in the learning profession: A status report on teacher development in the U.S. and abroad.* Stanford University. https://edpolicy.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/publications/ professional-learning-learning-profession-status-report-teacher-development-us-and-abroad.pdf

Darling-Hammond, L., Wechsler, M., Levin, S., Leung-Gagné, M., & Tozer, S. (2022). *Developing effective principals: What kind of learning matters?* Wallace Foundation. https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/developing-effective-principals-report

Diem, S., & Welton, A. (2021). *Anti-racist educational leadership and policy: Addressing racism in public education*. Routledge.

Eddy, P., Macdonald, R., & Baer, E. (2021). Professional development during a crisis and beyond: Lessons learned during COVID. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, *2021*(195), 199–212.

Ermeling, B., Tatsui, T., & Young, K. (2015). Virtual coaching for instructional leaders: A multi-method investigation of technology-enabled external assistance. *Teachers College Record*, *117*, 1–48.

Every Student Succeeds Act, 20 U.S.C. § 6301. (2015). https://www.congress.gov/114/plaws/publ95/PLAW-114publ95.pdf

Gooden, M., Davis, B., Spikes, D., Hall, D., & Lee, L. (2018). Leaders changing how they act by changing how they think: Applying principles of an antiracist principal preparation program. *Teachers College Record, 120*(14), 1–26.

Gottlieb, M., Egan, D., Krzyzaniak, S., Wagner, J., Weizberg, M., & Chan, T. (2020). Rethinking the approach to continuing professional development conferences in the era of COVID-19. *The Journal of Continuing Education in the Health Professions*, *40*(3), 187–191.

Grissom, J., Egalite, A., & Lindsay, C. (2021). *How principals affect students and schools: A systematic synthesis of two decades of research*. The Wallace Foundation. http://www.wallacefoundation.org/principalsynthesis

Grissom, J., & Harrington, J. (2010). Investing in administrator efficacy: An examination of professional development as a tool for enhancing principal effectiveness. *American Journal of Education, 116*(4), 583–612.

Haller, A., Hunt, E., Pacha, J., & Fazekas, A. (2016). *Lessons for states: The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) increases focus on and investment in supporting principal preparation and development*. US Department of Education. http://www2.ed.gov/ programs/leadership/index.html

Herrmann, M., Clark, M., James-Burdumy, S., Tuttle, C., Kautz, T., Knechtel, V., Dotter, D., Wulsin, C., & Deke, J. (2019). *The effects of a principal professional development program focused on instructional leadership*. US Department of Education. https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/ pubs/20200002/pdf/20200002.pdf

Honig, M. (2012). District central office leadership as teaching: How central office administrators support principals' development as instructional leaders. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 48*(4), 733–774.

Irby, B., Pashmforoosh, R., Druery, D., Eljaouhari, N., Tong, F., & Lara-Alecio, R. (2022). An analysis of virtual professional development for school leaders during COVID-19. *International Journal of Virtual and Personal Learning Environments*, *12*(1), 1–19.

Jerdborg, S. (2023). School leader education as a driving force for personal development in terms of orientation, reflection, exploration, and interplay. *Research in Educational Administration and Leadership, 8*(1), 1–41.

Knight, D., & Skrtic, T. (2021). Cost-effectiveness of instructional coaching: Implementing a design-based, continuous improvement model to advance teacher professional development. *Journal of School Leadership, 31*(4), 318–342.

Kraft, M., Marinell, W., & Shen-Wei Yee, D. (2016). School organizational contexts, teacher turnover, and student achievement: Evidence from panel data. *American Educational Research Journal, 53*(5), 1411–1449.

Lambert, M., & Bouchamma, Y. (2021). The virtual community of practice for school principals: A professional development method. *Creative Education*, 12, 422–440.

Lavigne, H., Shakman, K., Zweig, J., & Greller, S. (2016). *Principals' time, tasks, and professional development: An analysis of schools and staffing survey data*. US Department of Education. http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs

Lazenby, S., McCulla, N., & Marks, W. (2020). The further professional development of experienced principals. *International Journal of Leadership in Education, 25*(4), 533–547.

Levin, S., Leung, M., Edgerton, A., & Scott, C. (2020). *Elementary school principals' professional learning: Current status and future needs.* Learning Policy Institute. https://learningpolicy institute.org/product/elementary-school-principals-professional-learning-report

Lopez, A., & Jean-Marie, G. (2021). Challenging anti-Black racism in everyday teaching, learning, and leading: From theory to practice. *Journal of School Leadership, 31*(1–2) 50–65.

Maher, D., & Prescott, A. (2017). Professional development for rural and remote teachers using video conferencing. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, *45*(5), 520–538.

Manna, P. (2015). *Developing excellent school principals to advance teaching and learning: Considerations for state policy*. The Wallace Foundation. https://www.wallacefoundation. org/knowledge-center/Documents/Developing-Excellent-School-Principals.pdf

Meyers, C., Wronowski, M., & LaMonica, L. (2023). Evidence that in-service professional learning for educational leaders matters. *Journal of Research on Leadership Education*, *18* (1), 103–131.

Mizell, H. (2010). *Why professional development matters.* Learning Forward. https://learningforward.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/professional-development-matters.pdf

National Policy Board for Educational Administration. (2015). *Professional Standards for Educational Leaders 2015*. https://www.npbea.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/ Professional-Standards-for-Educational-Leaders_2015.pdf

Ni, Y., Hollingworth, L., Rorrer, A., & Pounder, D. (2016). The evaluation of educational leadership preparation programs. In M. Young & G. Crow (Eds), *Handbook of research on the education of school leaders* (2nd ed., pp. 285–307). Routledge.

Parsons, S., Hutchison, A., Hall, L., Parsons, A., Ives, S., & Leggett, A. (2019). U.S. teachers' perceptions of online professional development. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *82*, 33–42.

Perry, E. (2023). Teacher professional development in changing circumstances: The impact of COVID-19 on schools' approaches to professional development. *Education Sciences, 13* (48), 1–12.

Piro, J. (2023). Debriefing mixed reality simulations in an educational leadership preparation program: An exploratory case study. *International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation, 18*(1), 18–39.

Rodriguez, S. (2019). *The urgency of principal professional development and the implications for policy and practice* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). California State University, Fresno. https://scholarworks.calstate.edu/downloads/5h73px57h

Rodriguez-Gomez, D., Ion, G., Mercader, C., & López-Crespo, S. (2020). Factors promoting informal and formal learning strategies among school leaders. *Studies in Continuing Education*, *42*(2), 240–255.

Sahlin, S. (2023). Professional development of school principals—how do experienced school leaders make sense of their professional learning? *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 1–18.

School division. (2024). *Wikipedia*. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/School_division#:~:text= Unlike%20school%20districts%20in%20most,county%2C%20city%2C%20town

Seddon, K., Postlethwaite, K., James, M., & Mulryne, K. (2012). Towards an understanding of the learning processes that occur in synchronous online seminars for the professional development of experienced educators. *Education and Information Technologies*, *17*(4), 431–449.

Sider, S., Maich, K., Specht, J., Treadgold, C., & Winger, H. (2023). "Choose your own adventure": Web-based case studies of inclusive education as a form of professional learning for school principals. *Journal of Research on Leadership Education*, *18*(1), 132–154.

Steinberg, M., & Yang, H. (2020). Does principal professional development improve schooling outcomes? Evidence from Pennsylvania's Inspired Leadership Induction Program. *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness, 15*(4), 799–847.

Stephenson, S., Hardy, A., Seylar, J., Wayman, J., Peters, V., Bellin, M., & Roschelle, J. (2021). *Principal leadership in a virtual environment*. The Wallace Foundation. https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/Principal-Leadership-in-a-Virtual-Environment.pdf

Sukarno, S., & Sumarwati, S. (2020). Participants' perceptions of the effectiveness of online continuing professional development for principals in central Java, Indonesia. *International Journal of Instruction*, *13*(2), 477–492.

Tran, H., Buckman, D., Gause, S., Reabold, E., & Sauls, R. (2023). Systemic barriers in district principal development and hiring practices for women and people of color in the principalship. *Journal of Research on Leadership Education,* 1–25.

Westberry, L., & Hornor, H. (2022). Best practices in principal professional development. *AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice, 19*(1), 29–47.

Westberry, L., & Zhao, F. (2021). A psychometric look at principal professional development. *International Journal of Education Policy and Leadership*, *17*(7), 1–16.

Williams, S., & Welsh, R. (2017). ESSA and school improvement: Principal preparation and professional development in a new era of education policy. *Journal of School Leadership, 27*(5), 701–724.

Zepeda, S., Parylo, O., & Bengtson, E. (2014). Analyzing principal professional development practices through the lens of adult learning theory. *Professional Development in Education*, *40*(2), 295–315.

# Preparing Post-Pandemic, Equity-Focused Educational Leaders: Technology Requires Administrators to Reimagine Schools

**Tracy Reimer**
*Bethel University*

**Jennifer Hill**
*St. Cloud State University*

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic led to a significant transition towards online education in pre-K-12 schools, prompting school administrators to confront the disparities revealed by the remote learning model. This paper includes the findings of a multi-phase research project exploring the intersection of educational leadership, technology, and systemic inequities aimed to guide administrator preparation programs to meet relevant, post-pandemic leadership standards. Phase One of the research project, conducted early in the pandemic, highlights the findings from a survey administered to technology directors in Minnesota. The survey aimed to understand how school districts were addressing the technology disparities encountered by students and families during hybrid and distance learning models. Phase Two of the research project, conducted as the pandemic waned, focused on school leaders' evaluation of which practices developed and implemented during remote learning should be sustained. Technology directors participated in a focus group and asserted that the pandemic was an opportunity for educational leaders to reimagine schools for the success of all students. Findings call for revised administrator preparation standards, the implementation of technology plans in every state, and continued focus on identifying and addressing educational inequities.

*Keywords:* Online education, remote learning model, technology disparities

The Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) were widely accepted by administrator preparation programs throughout the nation as the guiding principles to equip school leaders with the readiness to address current and future challenges and opportunities in the evolving landscape of education and society (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015). Shortly after the PSEL were published, in the early years of implementation, the COVID-19 pandemic utterly and irrevocably altered the traditional duties and responsibilities of an administrator (Cannistraci, 2020).

The dramatic shift to remote learning at the onset of the COVID-19 global crisis necessitated rapid and substantial changes in the role of school leaders and the systems serving students and families (IES, 2021-2023). The transition disproportionately encumbered students and families from marginalized backgrounds (Reimer & Hill, 2022), illuminating the digital divide and other historical educational inequities. Compelled to prioritize addressing disparities promptly and effectively, leaders operated in survival mode with limited bandwidth for reflection, efficacy monitoring, and ongoing improvement efforts. As the pandemic subsided, the new digitized education terrain did not just involve remote learning technologies, but also tools for in-person learning. As a result, pre-K schools are modernizing, pixels are replacing pencils, and new competencies are required for effective educational leadership.

## Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore how the COVID-19 pandemic influenced the role of educational leaders to inform the standards guiding administrator preparation programs. This study examined how school leaders addressed the digital divide and other disparities brought to light during the pandemic. It also explored which practices have been sustained as schools transitioned to the endemic phase of COVID-19. A specific focus was educational leaders' understanding of how technology itself can be used to provide equitable access to an effective education within the classroom and the online environment (AASA, CoSN, NSBA as cited in Office of Educational Technology, 2017).

## Research Questions

Phase One: How are educational leaders addressing the digital divide experienced by marginalized student populations as the COVID-19 pandemic required learning models to pivot to hybrid and distance learning?

Phase Two: What technology-related practices, initiated during the COVID-19 pandemic to address inequities experienced by marginalized populations, have been sustained?

## Literature Review

### School Leaders and Emergency Preparedness

Leading as a school principal during the pandemic was challenging for several reasons. One of those reasons was the lack of professional training to prepare for such an event. The Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) developed by the National Policy Board for Educational

Administration was last updated in 2015. These standards "communicate expectations to practitioners, supporting institutions, professional associations, policy makers and the public about the work, qualities and values of effective educational leaders" (p. 4). A careful word search of the standards reveals that there are no standards that contain any of the following words: "pandemic," "emergency" "online learning," or "remote learning."

Further compounding the challenge of leading a school through the pandemic was a lack of planning. The National Center for Educational Statistics at the Institute of Education Sciences published summaries of their annual school survey on *Crime, Violence, Discipline, and Safety in U.S. Public Schools.* In the 2017-2018 school year, only 45.5% of the schools surveyed had a written plan in place for addressing a pandemic disease outbreak (Diliberti, et al., 2019). This number increased to 52% during the 2019–2020 school year (Wang, Kemp, & Burr, 2022).

**School Leaders and Technology Planning**

There appears to be more resources and support for school leaders in the areas of technology planning than pandemic response. PSEL (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015), includes two standards that address technology, one related to curriculum, instruction, and assessment of learning and the other in regard to operating and managing a school.

Additional standards exist to help guide school leadership including those provided by the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE). ISTE developed standards specifically for school leaders including standards that address technology equity (2019):

> Equity and Citizenship Advocate
>
> Leaders use technology to increase equity, inclusion, and digital citizenship practices.
>
> Education leaders:
>
> 3.1.a. Ensure all students have skilled teachers who actively use technology to meet student learning needs.
>
> 3.1.b. Ensure all students have access to the technology and connectivity necessary to participate in authentic and engaging learning opportunities.
>
> 3.1.c. Model digital citizenship by critically evaluating online resources, engaging in civil discourse online and using digital tools to contribute to positive social change.
>
> 3.1.d. Cultivate responsible online behavior, including the safe, ethical and legal use of technology (p. 7).

The State Educational Technology Directors Association (SETDA), established in 2001, is a professional organization comprised of educational technology leaders from around the country. Part of their mission is "ensuring equity of access to all facets of digital learning" (SETDA, 2024, para. 3). Digital learning profiles of each state along with Washington D.C. and Guam exist on their website. The profiles detail the standards, definitions, and technology plans that have been adopted by each state's department of education. Not every state has a mandated technology plan in place. According to SETDA's 2019 report, "32 states have a digital learning plan, 19 states require a district to adopt a digital learning plan, and 29 states have digital learning standards for students" (p. 2).

While there may not be state-specific plans in place across the country to guide the use of educational technology in K-12 schools, the U.S. Department of Education Office of

Educational Technology [ED] publishes a National Educational Technology Plan. The plan centers around three main topics: "The digital use divide, the digital design divide, and the digital access divide" (p. 2-3). The "digital use divide" articulates the difference between students who have had opportunities to use technology paired with higher order thinking skills and those who have not had similar opportunities. This includes skills such as coding, collaboration, and critical thinking (ED, 2024). The plan's recommendations to repair this divide are to develop technology plans, review curriculum, provide professional training for district level and building administrators, and seek to protect data privacy.

The "digital design divide" is the gap between school systems that provide compensated time for educators to develop digital instructional materials and those who do not (ED, 2024). Two of the many ways the plan suggests to close this gap include providing educators and administrators with the training they need to teach and model digital literacy and gathering input from diverse stakeholders when making decisions and implementing change.

The "digital access divide" is the division between those who have access to devices, robust internet access, and instructional content and those who do not. Accessibility is a broad term that encompasses six categories: "physical, visual, auditory, cognitive, digital, and language" (ED, 2024, p. 74). Establishing a district level technology director who can conduct regular assessments and oversee policy, promote inclusion, and model digital citizenship are several of the ways the plan recommends this division be mended (ED, 2024).

**School Leaders and Mental Health Training**

The need for school leaders to be aware of mental health issues is paramount as illustrated in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) 2011-2021 *Youth Risk Behavior Survey.* The CDC (2011-2021) reported that 42% of all teens surveyed in 2021 had felt "persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness" (p. 60), 29% reported "poor mental health" in the past month (p. 62), and 22% "seriously considered attempting suicide" (p. 63). A reported 18% "made a suicide plan within the past year" (p. 65), 10% attempted suicide, and 3% were injured in the process. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recognized the vital role that school administrators play and in late 2023 developed an action guide for school leaders available for free download on their website.

The PSEL (2015) mention "health" several times, twice when referring to the well-being of staff and twice related to the well-being of students. Once school leaders have met these standards and become licensed, they periodically renew their license by taking professional development coursework. It is common for school leaders to renew their teaching license alongside their administrative license. In 2007, the Jason Flatt Act was passed first in Tennessee requiring suicide awareness and prevention training in order to retain a teaching license in the state (Jason Foundation, 2024). As of 2023, Navigate 360, a company that develops training materials for schools, reported that 48 states have suicide prevention training tied to teacher relicensure. A total of 17 states mandate annual training, 21 states along with Washington D.C. have required training that is not annual, and 10 states encourage training on this topic.

**School Leaders and (Dis)Ability Knowledge**

The PSEL (2015) state that effective school leaders: “Confront and alter institutional biases of student marginalization, deficit-based schooling, and low expectations associated with race, class, culture and language, gender and sexual orientation, and disability or special status” (p. 11). Schaeffer (2023), a research analyst with PEW Research Center, reported that 7.3 million students with disabilities attend K-12 public schools. This comprised about 15% of the overall enrollment of students. During the height of the pandemic, the number of students with disabilities decreased by 1%, likely due to a dip in overall school enrollment during that period. The number has since rebounded.

Literature repeatedly expressed that very little research has been done to understand how school principals are prepared to meet the needs of students with special needs (Lasky & Karge, 2006; Rodl et al., 2018; Samuels 2018; Steinbrecher et al., 2015). Sun and Xin (2020) surveyed 2,500 school principals to learn more about their experience providing leadership to the special education programs in their schools. Principals were challenged with a lack of funding, professional development, and available technology. It was noted that little training was being given to school administrators during their licensure coursework. Sun and Xin (2020)
stressed, “It is, thus, urgent for university preparation programs to include special education content, which could provide school leaders with the knowledge and professional skills needed in decision making and service provision to support students with disabilities” (p. 107).

**School Leaders and Equity Leadership**

The 2015 PSEL have an entire section devoted to equity. Standard three is entitled “Equity and Cultural Responsiveness” and states, “Effective educational leaders strive for equity of educational opportunity and culturally responsive practices to promote each student’s academic success and well-being” (p. 11). Eight sub-standards address several areas where effective leaders must advocate for equity in their schools including access to resources, implementation of policy, and confrontation of institutional bias. Ultimately, the 2015 PSEL call upon school principals to “Address matters of equity and cultural responsiveness in all aspects of leadership” (p. 11).

One might wonder how standards calling for equitable school leaders are instilled in aspiring candidates. Rasmussen and Raskin (2021) reflected:

> There is nothing magical about preparing students for principal licensure; many institutions do this. However, in a world where systemic racism runs rampant yet unchallenged, school leaders must embed their newly minted technical skills into an equity frame to disrupt the inequitable practices and policies that continue to exist in schools. (p. 4)

Grooms et al., (2024) considered what content has been included in highly effective principal preparation programs when training equitable leaders. Content included “relationship building” with staff members, fostering “culturally diverse practices” in teacher classrooms, and “opportunities for practical applications'' where principals spend time in the culture where they intend to work (p. 9). Including authentic experiences into principal preparation programs to expand one’s awareness and skills for leading in a diverse culture has been well documented (Miller & Martin, 2015; Bustamante et al., 2009; Gurin et al, 2002). Using equity as a lens to design

content and pedagogy within school principal preparation programs has resulted in candidates feeling more prepared for their roles (Rasmussen & Raskin, 2021).

Developing school principals to lead equitably should not end once a license is granted. Professional development which includes applying equity learning within on-the-job contexts needs to be offered (Rimmer, 2016). Indeed, principals made equity-based decisions when leading schools during the pandemic. Jackson et al., (2022) described how these decisions were related to the professional development of teachers instructing in an online format, the opening and closure of school, compliance with state policies, and equity of resources for students.

## Equity Literacy Framework

Equity literacy is an adaptive and technical approach to establishing and upholding equitable educational environments (Equity Literacy Institute, 2021). This framework includes understanding bias, inequity, and oppression across various identities such as religion, language, immigration status, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic class, gender, sexual orientation, and (dis)ability. Diverging from conventional diversity initiatives, equity literacy emphasizes the need to uphold transformative equity practices (Gorski, 2021). It rests on a commitment to strengthening comprehension of how inequity and equity function within organizations and systems, while also developing the knowledge, skills, and determination to identify, address, and actively promote equity (Reimer & Hill, 2022).

The equity literacy framework challenges the notion that educational disparities stem from deficiencies within marginalized populations, instead highlighting systemic inequities (Thomas, 2018). Educators embracing equity literacy reject deficit narratives and encourage stakeholders to adopt a structural perspective on equity. This viewpoint asserts that the traditional schooling system inherently privileges certain groups, evidenced by unequal access to advanced curriculum, experienced teachers, meaningful learning experiences, arts education, and extracurricular activities (Dudley-Marling, 2015). Marginalized families often face barriers such as limited access to technology, books, tutoring, and other resources crucial for academic success (Lineburg & Ratliff, 2015). Educators with a structural perspective understand that education disparities are rooted in systemic barriers rather than inherent shortcomings or lack of perseverance among historically marginalized students and families (Gorski, 2018).

The Equity Literacy Framework maintains that education outcome disparities persist as long as structural barriers remain unaddressed (Berliner, 2013). Educators must serve as agents of change, challenging the presence of structural inequities in schools and districts. This necessitates disrupting traditional practices, values, and beliefs to pursue innovative solutions and practices.

## Methodology

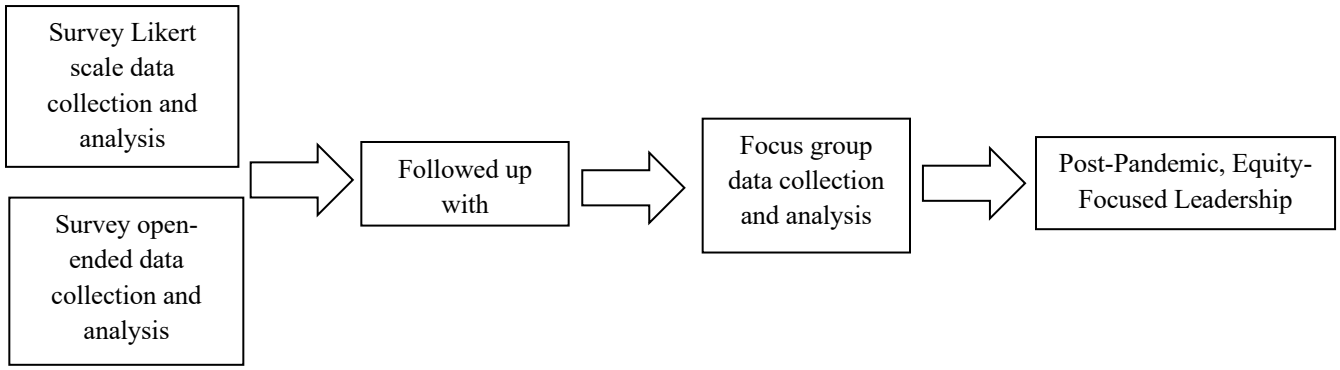
This research project utilized Convergent Explanatory Sequential Design (Harvard, 2023; Ivankova, Creswell, & Stick, 2006) and encompassed a two-phase, multi-year study exploring the convergence of educational inequities, school leadership, and technology through the COVID-19 pandemic.

Phase One, conducted in 2021, involved the email distribution of a mixed methods survey to Minnesota district technology directors. This survey utilized Likert scales to identify the school leaders' primary concerns related to the digital divide and included open-ended questions to understand how districts addressed inequities (Reimer & Hill, 2022). Participants were recruited using names and email addresses available on the Minnesota Department of Education website, which listed 505 district technology coordinators. Surveys were completed by 56 participants, which was an 11% response rate. Participants provided initial insights into leaders' priorities and efforts to address disparities. However, further investigation was deemed necessary to gain deeper insights and understand long-term implications.

Phase Two aimed to gather rich, detailed accounts of school leaders' perspectives on technology's influence on educational systemic inequities during and beyond the pandemic. Data was collected through a two-hour focus group conducted via video conferencing technology (Zoom). Technology directors were invited via e-mail to participate in the study. Eight directors confirmed their participation, two asked to email their responses, and one did not attend the Zoom meeting. Five technology directors ultimately took part in the focus group, discussing how their districts' leaders utilized technology to navigate the pandemic, what was learned in the process, and what practices will be sustained moving forward.

**Figure 1**

*Convergent Explanatory Sequential Design*




## Instruments and Protocol

### Mixed Method Survey

Phase One aimed to learn how Minnesota school leaders addressed the digital divide and other inequities experienced by marginalized students during the COVID-19 pandemic. A 10-question survey asked participants to identify inequities in their communities and share how their school leaders responded to the inequities.

**Table 1**

*Addressing Inequities During the COVID-19 Pandemic*

| Item | Response Scale |
|---|---|
| Rate the level of concern regarding a lack of technology devices in the home for your district's students learning in a hybrid or distance learning model.<br><br>Rate the level of concern regarding a lack of access to internet/wifi for your district's students learning in a hybrid or distance learning model.<br><br>Rate the level of concern regarding a lack of adult academic support/supervision in the home for your district's students learning in a hybrid or distance learning model.<br><br>Rate the level of concern regarding a lack of technology savviness/knowledge in the home for your district's students learning in a hybrid or distance learning model. | Options:<br><br>1 = not a concern for district students<br>2 = minimal concern for district students<br>3 = moderate concern for district students<br>4 = significant concern for district students |
| Open Ended Responses:<br><br>How has your district responded when students do not have devices to complete hybrid or distance learning school work?<br><br>How has your district assisted students and families in accessing the Internet or hot spots?<br><br>How has absenteeism/truancy been addressed by your district?<br><br>Within homes, there is a range of support and instruction adult caregivers provide to their child(ren) in distance or hybrid learning models. How has your district attempted to identify and address these differences?<br><br>During distance or hybrid learning, how does your district provide assistance to adults/caregivers who do not have the technology skills to support their children?<br><br>As your district pivoted to hybrid or distance learning, are there other inequities you have discovered that are not included in this survey? How are these inequities being addressed? | |

**Focus Group Protocol**

Phase Two involved a focus group protocol centered on identifying and addressing the needs of underserved student populations (Gorski, 2021). This protocol (Table 2) comprised eight open-

ended questions crafted to guide conversation without imposing limitations (Patten, 2014), affording the researchers the versatility to modify or adapt questions based on participants' responses, experiences, and perspectives (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2015). The researchers employed follow-up questions such as "tell me more" and "you mentioned" to elicit a detailed, comprehensive narrative. This approach enabled the researchers to “respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic” (Merriam, 2015, p. 90).

**Table 2**

*Focus Group Questions*

1. Can you share any surprising or unexpected things that you learned while educating students remotely or hyflex during the pandemic?
2. How did your school utilize technology to address SES inequities during the pandemic?
3. How did your school utilize technology to address racial/ethnic inequities during the pandemic?
4. How did your school utilize technology to address (dis)ability related inequities during the pandemic?
5. How did your school utilize technology to address mental health-related inequities during the pandemic?
6. Of these practices, what have you sustained?
7. Were there any practices or initiatives that you tried or implemented during the pandemic that you stopped using or discontinued using?
8. Is there anything else you would like to add regarding serving students and families during the pandemic and practices that have been discontinued or sustained?

## Data Analysis

Phase One survey Likert scale responses were exported to Excel for statistical analysis. The percentage of participants reporting each level of concern (none, minimal, moderate, or significant) for identified inequities was calculated. Open-ended responses were analyzed via iterative, manual coding. All participants’ responses were collected and organized by research question. Responses were read once to gather a general understanding. The second and third reads of the responses included identifying meaning units. The fourth and fifth reads of the responses resulted in determining if meaning units were similar and should be combined into a shared code, if meaning units were frequently mentioned and were stand-alone codes, or if meaning units were infrequently mentioned and would not be included in a code. Codes were reviewed by a co-researcher with multiple discussions to work through code disagreement, incorporate feedback, and increase trustworthiness. Codes documented in more than two responses were then synthesized and organized by theme.

Phase Two focus groups Zoom recordings were transcribed using a transcription service. Transcripts were then organized into a three-column table, as shown in figure 2. The left-hand column contained the number associated with the participant because participant identifiers

(such as names, district names, school names, and locations) were redacted to safeguard confidentiality. The middle column contained the transcribed text from participants, organized into stanzas as recommended by Saldaña (2014) to facilitate analysis. The right-hand column provided space to note codes.

**Figure 2**

| Speaker | Response | Codes |
|---|---|---|
| Prompt | **Can you share any surprising or unexpected things that you learned while educating students remotely or hyflex during the pandemic?** | |
| 6 | Well, it certainly was a trying time all together for everyone, as we had to completely [205]change our method of delivering instruction with very little notice and I get emotional when I think about how hard both the Discovery teachers that I work with worked, and how committed my technology team was to doing whatever it takes to make sure we can control everything that we could control. Through it all, I asked everyone to do two things as guiding principles for us, to [206]control what we can control (and there was a lot that we couldn't control) and walk through it all together. "Together we're better" is our motto and we truly lived and breathed it through the distance learning that spring. | [205] Changing delivery modes<br>[206] Relinquishing control |

Prompts were listed at the top of the table. Responses from each participant were listed below each prompt, formatted in stanzas, and identified by participant number. The transcripts were thoroughly read, with key ideas in each stanza highlighted. A key idea was defined as an action that was taken by the participant or the participant's school district. Key ideas usually contained verbs. Key ideas were highlighted in different colors, one color assigned to each participant's responses.

The highlighted segments were revisited, read a second time, and assigned a number and a code that was recorded in the right-hand column, aligned with the highlighted stanza. The coding strategy employed terms ending in "ing" to encapsulate the main idea conveyed in each stanza. There were 213 codes initially identified. This approach to analysis is known as process coding. "Processes can consist of observable human actions mental processes, and more conceptual ideas" (Saldaña, 2014, p. 8). Process coding was chosen as an analytical tool given the focus of the research questions on actions.

Upon completing the initial reading and coding, a second researcher independently reviewed the transcript stanzas, assigning her own set of codes to ensure inter-rater reliability. The two researchers then convened to discuss areas of agreement and discrepancy. Codes were subsequently organized into subcategories to identify emerging concepts corresponding to each focus group question. These concepts were also labeled using terms ending in "ing" to denote actions taken. Interview questions and concepts that emerged are shown in Table 3 below.

**Table 3**

*Concepts by Interview Question*

| Interview Question | Emerging Concepts |
|---|---|
| Can you share any surprising or unexpected things that you learned while educating students remotely or hyflex during the pandemic? | • Increasing teachers' technology proficiency and instructional skills at an extremely rapid rate<br>• Addressing educational equity barriers through online learning<br>• Sustaining preference for remote modality after the pandemic |
| How did your school utilize technology to address SES inequities during the pandemic? | • Providing students technology devices<br>• Ensuring students have adequate internet access<br>• Identifying, addressing, and monitoring family technology needs and basic needs |
| How did your school utilize technology to address racial/ethnic inequities during the pandemic? | • Pausing focus on culturally relevant teaching in the transition to remote/hyflex instruction<br>• Implementing culturally responsive initiatives pre-pandemic, through the pandemic, and post-pandemic<br>• Decreasing student joy in learning due to inherent detriments of technology |
| How did your school utilize technology to address (dis)ability related inequities during the pandemic? | • Building teachers' capacity to meet the needs of SPED students when learning online<br>• Utilizing intentionality in technology tools, add ons, and materials to serve students receiving special education service |
| How did your school utilize technology to address mental health-related inequities during the pandemic? | • Prioritizing serving student mental health as a post pandemic initiative |
| Of these practices, what have you sustained? | • Sustaining effective technology instructional practices, tools, and platforms<br>• Serving families better through bilingual supports and technology support/devices<br>• Reimaging school<br>• Protecting student data privacy<br>• Advocating for continued funding stream to education<br>• Shifting enrollment in traditional brick and mortar schools, charter schools |
| Were there any practices or initiatives that you tried or implemented during the pandemic that you stopped using or discontinued using? | • Ceasing to offer hybrid learning model<br>• Declining enrollment in online learning model/online schools |
| Is there anything else you would like to add regarding serving students and families during the pandemic and | • Enrollment Shifts<br>• Rethinking Education<br>• Funding |

| | |
|---|---|
| practices that have been discontinued or sustained? | |

## Findings

### Phase One: How are educational leaders addressing the digital divide experienced by marginalized student populations as the COVID-19 pandemic required learning models to pivot to hybrid and distance learning?

#### Provided Devices

Out of the 56 respondents, 53 districts provided devices to students; 28 stated their district was operating under a 1:1 model, 15 indicated otherwise, and 10 did not specify their 1:1 status. Districts without a 1:1 platform either provided devices to students upon request, allowed students to rent devices, or distributed one device per family. In cases where necessary, devices were delivered directly to students' homes.

#### Ensured Internet Access

Districts supported students and families in obtaining Internet access during the pandemic primarily by providing hotspots or collaborating with local Internet service providers (ISPs) to negotiate free or reduced-price access. Despite the availability of funds for devices and Internet access, challenges persisted. Distribution to families was sometimes delayed, and factors such as rural locations, lack of cellular service, and adverse weather hindered the reliability and adequacy of Internet access. In some instances, multiple hotspots per family were necessary to meet the demand for reliable connectivity. However, even with a hotspot provided for home use, some households still lacked Internet access. To address this issue, one school opened its doors to allow hybrid learning for students on-site, while another district compiled information onto flash drives or provided paper copies of homework assignments.

#### Dealt with Increased Absenteeism

School districts addressed attendance in online learning models in a variety of ways.
Some districts retained their existing attendance policies from in-person learning, while others modified their policies for remote instruction. For instance, one district enacted a policy where parents were contacted if students hadn't attended online classes for three consecutive days. However, merely signing into a class did not always indicate engagement. Some students logged in but did not actively participate in their online instruction. To provide additional support, certain districts hired paraprofessionals during online learning. Additionally, students who were not participating online were given the opportunity to attend in-person classes at school.

Communication regarding attendance between home and school was facilitated through various methods, including phone calls, home visits, conferences, and software alerts. A range of staff members, such as deans, principals, counselors, social workers, advisors, distance learning liaisons, student success coordinators, student care teams, family literacy specialists, and

classroom teachers, were involved in establishing these connections. Leaders emphasized the importance of showing compassion, prioritizing relationships, and problem-solving when working with families during the pandemic. Despite the districts' efforts, some families remained unresponsive to attempts at engagement, which was consistently reported as a challenge. In such cases, the county intervened to assist with truancy issues if necessary.

**Assisted Caregivers with Technology-Related Support**

The overwhelming majority (52 out of 56) of the participants confirmed the necessity of providing adult caregivers with technology assistance and training during hybrid and fully online learning models. Among the four schools that did not express the necessity, two relied on students to be self-sufficient technology users.

Caregiver needs were determined by surveying families and efforts were implemented according to the results. These efforts involved distributing information (i.e. instructional documents, short videos, and online resources) about the districts' remote learning models to assist caregivers in utilizing digital tools, troubleshooting issues with devices, and navigating software applications. Information was provided in multiple languages to ensure accessibility for all members of the community. Furthermore, districts reduced the number of apps and platforms used by teachers to alleviate "parent paralysis."

Districts created physical help desks, support phone lines, and online portals specifically to provide students and families with technology assistance. Virtual office hours were conducted, and teleconferences (ex. Google Meet, Zoom) and phone calls were offered and extended beyond the school day to help with homework in the evening. New staff were hired and existing staff members were reassigned to positions responsible for supporting families with titles such as Tech Team Digital Navigators. School employees made home visits, and parents were encouraged to attend online classes with their children when able.

**Phase Two: What technology-related practices, initiated during the COVID-19 pandemic to address inequities experienced by marginalized populations, have been sustained?**

**Choosing to Remain a Remote Learner**

When reflecting on the practices they have continued, technology directors highlighted a notable trend: the preference for maintaining a remote learning approach even post-pandemic. Many districts opted to establish an online counterpart to their traditional in-person instruction.

There was a recognition that remote learning could be beneficial for certain student populations, including those with disabilities, multilingual learners, and students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Specifically noted were benefits of online learning for students who have anxiety or overstimulation with peer interaction and some EL students because they were surrounded by their family. In addition, technology directors discovered the significant impact of providing multilingual support to better serve families.

**Enhancing Teachers' Technological Proficiency**

School districts recognized the significant learning curve teachers faced at the outset of remote learning. Participants expressed admiration for the progress made and a commitment to

maintaining effective instructional technology practices, tools, and platforms. Technology directors noted a surge in Chromebook distribution, particularly at the secondary level, and observed Google's increasing popularity as a software platform directly attributable to the pandemic. Technology was universally accepted as an integral part of the learning process.

Teachers have continued to refine their technological skills. They are more consistently utilizing learning platforms and exploring software such as GoGuardian to improve classroom management in remote settings. The conversation around software usage in classrooms is evolving from technical proficiency to effective pedagogy.

### Reimaging Pre-K-12 Education

Technology directors expressed optimism about the opportunity to reimagine schools in the aftermath of the pandemic. They emphasized the need to facilitate change and rethink traditional approaches to education. Leaders acknowledged the impact of innovation on instruction and pondered the lingering challenges and new possibilities. There is a growing recognition of the need to reconsider what skills are best acquired through schooling and how to engage students more effectively.

## Conclusions

### Implications for Practice

When the PSEL are updated for a post-pandemic world, it is important they reflect the dynamic and evolving role of the school principal. Standards need to be added related to emergency preparedness (Diliberti et al., 2019) and meeting the needs of students with mental health concerns (CDC, 2023) and disabilities (Sun & Xin, 2020). Standards should continue to focus on equity in all areas of leadership. Preparation programs need to implement relevant standards and allow for training of new and existing principals through authentic experiences (Miller & Martin, 2015). Equity-centric licensure coursework paired with opportunities for school leaders to immerse themselves in the communities they serve will lead to a clearer understanding of student needs and how to meet them (Rasmussen & Raskin, 2021).

Well funded technology plans with dedicated technology directors to administer them need to be required in every state. The focus of these plans must be on how to equitably address the digital use, design, and access divides that are outlined in the National Educational Technology Plan (ED, 2024). Enhancing digital use, moving passive consumers of technology to active creators and critical thinkers can be guided by the ISTE standards for students and educators. These standards support student learning using technology in areas such as "innovative design, computational thinking, creative communication, and global collaboration" (n.p., 2024). Standards are also published to guide teachers, administrators, and academic coaches. Artificial Intelligence must be embraced in education to avoid creating an additional digital divide (Trucano, 2023). Organizations such as TeachAi provide educators with toolkits to help instruction in this new space (TeachAi, 2023).

The digital design divide can be crossed with greater mandated support and funding at the state level, nationwide. Drawing upon the trends reported by SETDA (2019), there is vast

room for improvement. All states should be required to develop and implement a digital learning plan that is properly funded, for devices and internet access for students, and for professional development time for teachers who are instructing in technology integrated in-person environments, hybrid/blended environments, and fully online environments. Digital learning standards need to be implemented, digital curricula materials need to be adopted, including access to Open Educational Resources (OER), and teachers need to be trained in online learning best practices like those outlined by Quality Matters in their course design rubric standards (2019).

Digital access encompasses more than simply handing students a device and internet access. According to the 2024 National Educational Technology plan, accessibility is multi-faceted and includes "physical, visual, auditory, cognitive, digital, and lingual features" (ED, p. 74). Strong collaboration between the principal and licensed school library media specialist, technology department, English language learner teachers, and special education teachers can help to provide access to students. School library specialists/teacher librarians are highly qualified to develop and deliver effective curriculum addressing "digital health, digital safety, and digital citizenship" (p. 84) that are outlined in detail in the 2024 plan. Resources, standards, and curricula abound to help collaborate and teach these subjects from the American Library Association (2018), Common Sense Media (2023), and The Internet Education Foundation (2023) which recently launched an award-winning website called *Copyright & Creativity for Ethical Digital Citizens: Resources for Teaching Copyright and Fair Use*. Ultimately, the mending of the digital divide will begin to heal with each stitch of the equity needle, each school leader's decisions working as thread.

**Implications for Future Research**

This research project elicited expertise from technology directors related to their school districts strategies aimed to address technology inequities during and just after the pandemic. School principals were not surveyed or interviewed because of the demands on their time and breadth of new responsibilities during the global crisis. This presents a limitation to this study because it is deprived of their building-level perspective and an opportunity for further research in order to glean their insights. Future research may involve identifying, addressing, and monitoring educational disparities, including the use of artificial intelligence in 2024 and beyond.

**References**


American Library Association. (2018). *Shared foundations: Collaborate.* https://standards.aasl.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/SharedFoundations_Collaborate_2017.pdf

Berliner, D. C. (2013). Effects of inequality and poverty vs. teachers and schooling on America's youth. *Teachers College Record, 115*(12), 1-26. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/016146811311501203?casa_token=BCJsGAmNJ2IAAAAA:nqpK46S-meNABEFkqnOKZkmI0T76ESssTSGfIz9MFIuxhp8oun-csv-vIDiZEppZI_EId_QXuEk

Bustamante, R. M., Nelson, J. A., & Onwuegbuzie, A. J. (2009). Assessing schoolwide cultural competence: Implications for school leadership preparation. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *45*(5), 793-827.

Cannistraci, L. (2020). The fundamental skills of k-12 technology directors. *EdTech Digest.* https://www.edtechdigest.com/2020/10/05/the-fundamental-skills-of-k-12-technology-directors/. Accessed 30 June 2022.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2011-2021). *Youth risk behavior survey: Data summary and trends report.* https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/pdf/YRBS_Data-Summary-Trends_Report2023_508.pdf

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (December 2023). Promoting mental health and well-being in schools: An action guide for school and district leaders. https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/mental-health-action-guide/pdf/DASH_MH_Action_Guide_508.pdf

Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches (4th ed.)*. Sage.

Common Sense Media. (2023). *Digital citizenship curriculum.* https://www.commonsense.org/education/digital-citizenship/curriculum?topic=news--media-literacy&grades=k%2C1%2C2

Diliberti, M., Jackson, M., Correa, S., and Padgett, Z. (2019). *Crime, violence, discipline, and safety in U.S. public schools: Findings from the school survey on crime and safety: 2017–18.* (NCES 2019-061). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved February 17 2024 from http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch.

Dudley-Marling, C. (2015). *Preparing the nation's teachers to teach reading: A manifesto in defense of "teacher educators like me."* Garn Press.

Equity Literacy Institute. (2021). *The equity literacy framework.* https://www.equityliteracy.org/equity-literacy

Gorski, P. (2018). *Reaching and teaching students in poverty: Strategies for erasing the opportunity gap*. Teachers College Press.

Gorski, P. (2021). *Basic principles of equity literacy.* Equity Literacy Institute. https://www.equityliteracy.org/equity-principles

Grooms, A. A., White, T., Peters, A. L., Childs, J., Farrell, C., Martinez Jr, E., ... & Duran, S.

(2024). Equity as a crucial component of leadership preparation and practice. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, *97*(1), 8-15.
Gurin, P., Dey, E., Hurtado, S., & Gurin, G. (2002). Diversity and higher education: Theory and impact on educational outcomes. *Harvard Educational Review*, *72*(3), 330-367.
Harvard. (2023). *Basic mixed methods research designs.* Harvard Catalyst. https://catalyst.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/HCAT_MMR_sm.png
Hill, J., & Reimer, T. (2023). Technology as a tool to address educational inequities: Practices implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic that have been sustained. *Educ Inf Technol*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-023-12236-z
Institute of Education Sciences. [IES]. (2021-2023). *School pulse panel*. U.S. Department of Education. https://ies.ed.gov/schoolsurvey/spp/
International Society for Technology in Education. [ISTE]. (2019). *ISTE Standards.* https://iste.org/standards/education-leaders.
International Society for Technology in Education. [ISTE]. (2024). *ISTE standards: For students.* https://iste.org/standards/students
Internet Education Foundation. (2023). *Copyright & creativity for ethical digital citizens: Resources for teaching copyright and fair use.* https://copyrightandcreativity.org/
Ivankova, N. V., Creswell, J. W., & Stick, S. L. (2006). Using mixed-methods sequential explanatory design: From theory to practice. *Field Methods*, *18*(1), 3–20. https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X05282260
Jackson, M., Bass, L., Jackman-Ryan, S., Hoeflaken, K., & Picart, J. A. (2022). Locating equity in principals' pandemic decision-making practices. *Peabody Journal of Education*, *97*(3), 274-290.
Jason Foundation. (2024). *Jason Flatt Act.* https://jasonfoundation.com/about-us/jason-flatt-act/
Lasky, B., & Karge, B. D. (2006). Meeting the needs of students with disabilities: Experience and confidence of principals. *Nassp Bulletin*, *90*(1), 19-36.
Lineburg, M. Y., & Ratliff, B. C. (2015). Teaching students in poverty in small and mid-sized urban school districts. *Advances in Educational Administration, 22*, 85-108.
Merriam, S. (2015). *Qualitative Research: a guide to design and implementation.* John Wiley & Sons.
Miller, C. M., & Martin, B. N. (2015). Principal preparedness for leading in demographically changing schools: Where is the social justice training? *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, *43*(1), 129-151.
National Policy Board for Educational Administration (2015). *Professional standards for educational leaders*. Reston, VA.
Navigate 360. (2023). *Suicide prevention in schools: Which state requires it?* https://navigate360.com/blog/which-states-require-suicide-prevention-training-in-schools/
Office of Educational Technology. (2017). *Reimaging the role of technology in education: 2017 national education technology plan update*. U.S. Department of Education. https://tech.ed.gov/files/2017/01/NETP17.pdf
Patten, M. (2014). *Understanding research methods: An overview of the essentials.* Glendale: Pyrczak Publishing.

Quality Matters. (2019). *Course design rubric standards: Fifth edition.* https://www.qualitymatters.org/qa-resources/rubric-standards/k-12-secondary-rubric

Rasmussen, N., & Raskin, C. (2023). Men's voices: Black and White aspiring principals reflect on their preparation to be racial equity leaders. *Journal of Research on Leadership Education*, *18*(2), 228-252.

Reimer, T., & Hill, J. (2022). Crossing the digital divide and the equity expanse: Reaching and teaching all students during the pandemic. *Journal of Leadership, Equity, and Research*.

Rimmer, J. (2016). Developing principals as equity-centered instructional leaders. *Equity-centered capacity building: Essential approaches for excellence and sustainable school system sustainability.* https://capacitybuildingnetwork. org/article9

Rodl, J. E., Bonifay, W., Cruz, R. A., & Manchanda, S. (2018). A survey of school administrators' training and support related to evaluating special education teachers. *Journal of School Administration Research and Development*, *3*(1), 19-31.

Saldaña, J. (2014). Coding and analysis strategies.
https://samspo.github.io/Faq/Saldana2014.pdf

Samuels, C. A. (2018). The important role principals play in special education. *Education Week*, *38*(9), 26–28.

Schaeffer, K. (July 24, 2023). What federal education data shows about students with disabilities
in the U.S. *Pew Research Center.* https://pewrsr.ch/3q5KJ6T

State Educational Technology Directors Association. [SETDA]. (2024). *SETDA: About us.* https://www.setda.org/about/

State Educational Technology Directors Association. [SETDA]. (March, 2019). *State K12 instructional materials leadership: Trends snapshot.* https://www.setda.org/master/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/DMAPS_snapshot_3.26.19.pdf

Steinbrecher, T. D., Fix, R., Mahal, S. A., Serna, L., & McKeown, D. (2015). All you need is patience and flexibility: Administrators' perspectives on special educator knowledge and skills. *Journal of Special Education Leadership*, *28*(2).

Sun, A. Q., & Xin, J. F. (2020). School principals' opinions about special education services. *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth*, *64*(2), 106-115.

TeachAi. (2023). Ai guidance for schools toolkit. *Code.org, CoSN, Digital Promise, European EdTech Alliance, & PACE.* https://www.teachai.org/toolkit

Thomas, P. L. (2018, May 30). More on rejecting growth mindset, grit. *Paul Thomas.* https://medium.com/@plthomasedd/more-on-rejecting-growth-mindset-grit-52e5eb47374e

Trucano, M. (2023). Ai and the next digital divide in education. *Brookings.* https://www.brookings.edu/articles/ai-and-the-next-digital-divide-in-education/

U.S. Department of Education: Office of Educational Technology. [ED]. (2024). *National educational technology plan*. Washington, DC: https://tech.ed.gov/files/2024/01/NETP24.pdf

Wang, K., Kemp, J., and Burr, R. (2022). *Crime, violence, discipline, and safety in the U.S. public schools in 2019-20: Findings from the school survey on crime and safety* (NCES 2022-029). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for

Education Statistics. Retrieved [February 26, 2024] from http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2022029

# When Complexity and Uncertainty Became Life: Delaware School Principals Roles and Leadership Practices During COVID-19 Crisis - A Mixed Method Case Study

**Shelley Rouser**
*Delaware State University*

**Chetanath Gautam**
*Delaware State University*

**Charles L. Lowery**
*Virginia Tech*

This study explores and explains crisis leadership through surveys and experiential narratives of school principals in the State of Delaware. The study focuses on the lived experiences of school principals for decision-making and responding to the impact that the pandemic (i.e., COVID-19) has had on the educational concerns of students, schools, and communities. The aim is to understand deeply what and how building leaders view their experience leading schools during the Crisis, mainly related to COVID-19. Finally, the study aims to contribute to academic literature on improving leadership practice amid the global Crisis.

*Keywords:* School Leadership, COVID-19, Leadership during crisis

This study aims to better understand leading schools during significant crises, such as global pandemics. Efforts are made to inform school leaders, policymakers, and leadership preparation programs and improve school leadership decision-making and response in future crises that may arise due to other imminent major world crises (Azorín, 2020; Netolicky, 2020; Sahlberg, 2020). There are several existing studies on crisis response by school leaders (Bishop et al., 2015; Connolly-Wilson & Reeves, 2013; Howat et al., 2012; Kennedy-Paine et al., 2013; Kitamura, 2019; Simmons & Douglas, 2018; Zenere, 2013). These studies document past crises, such as school shootings, hurricanes, wildfires, and terrorist attacks, to name a few. However, in modern times, the COVID-19 pandemic generated Crisis is unprecedented. The COVID-19 pandemic affected society and human life at a scale that arguably never occurred before. Including social, governmental, and financial sectors, as well as the education system (d'Orville, 2020; Harris, 2020; Harris & Jones, 2020; Müller & Goldenberg, 2020; Sahlberg, 2020; Zhao, 2020) felt the highest burn. Educational leaders in general and school principals faced a social and moral concern related to equitable and ethical decision making not typically encountered (Escotet, 2020; Harris, 2020; Netolicky, 2020). These specific phenomena and principals' responses have been studied worldwide; however, adding deeper contextual texts to the research literature and contributing to a greater understanding of school building level leadership during the pandemic is still desirable. Therefore, this study aims to examine the nature of the leaders' experiences, perceptions, and practices of school building leadership inductively during this period and how school principals confronted and contended with educational discontinuity and the crisis introduced by the COVID-19 pandemic in Delaware, one of the U.S. states in the northeast.

## Research Questions

The study has one major question: How did principals experience or perceive their crisis leadership competencies and practice as educational agents for their students, schools, and communities during the COVID-19 pandemic?

The following sub-questions support the following central question:

**Quantitative Research Question**

- How do principals rate their crisis leadership preparedness, competencies, and responses of dealing with the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic?

**Qualitative and Quantitative Questions**

- How do principals perceive the impact of the pandemic on their leadership practice during the COVID-19 crisis?
- What processes did principals use to maintain instructional leadership during a time of school disruption and educational discontinuity caused by COVID-19?

**Qualitative Only Questions**

- How did principals re-imagine decision making for allocation of resources during the pandemic?
- What lessons did principals learn regarding serving students, schools, and communities during the COVID-19 pandemic?

- How do principals perceive educational equity was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic?

## Relevant Foundational Literature

### Emerging Issues for Schools/Education Due to COVID-19

In a very short time, much has been written about COVID-19 and its impact on education. According to Education Next (2020), the novel coronavirus "upended the world of education just as it has radically changed the rest of our economy and our day-to-day lives" (para. 1). As such, educators have had to deal with pandemic-related school closings, unprepared transitions to distanced learning, disruptions with homeschooling and online education, and the effects on standardized testing and school budgets (Greenberg, 2020; Hanushek & Woessmann, 2020; Horn, 2020; Peterson, 2020). In short, the preponderance of literature has dealt with learning loss (aka "Covid Slide") due to school closings and the disruptions from transitions (from stay-at-home to back-to-school, to mixed environments) (Allensworth & Swartz, 2020; Borman, 2020; Kuhfeld et al., 2020; Kuhfeld & Tarasawa, 2020).

Predominantly, this scholarship has confronted and contended with conceptual concerns regarding educational discontinuity and the Crisis introduced by the COVID-19 pandemic (d'Orville, 2020; Harris, 2020; Müller & Goldenberg, 2020; Sahlberg, 2020; Zhao, 2020). With very little empirical data focusing on school leader perceptions or decision-making processes during this time, it is difficult to discuss the long-term effects of these closings and transitions on education from an educational leadership perspective. Some literature has considered how the impact of COVID-19 might change the nature or structure of education and the educational system (Azorín, 2020; International Commission on the Futures of Education, 2020; Luthra & Mackenzie, 2020; Strauss, 2020).

Additionally, some literature has dealt with the exacerbated educational inequities for specific demographics, primarily minorities and lower socio-economic classes, due again to closings (Education Trust, 2020a, 2020b; Herold, 2020). Several other studies have dealt with students' mental health during the pandemic (Arat & Karatas, 2020; Horowitz, 2020; Pfefferbaum & North, 2020). At this juncture, except for very few studies from the United Kingdom, little investigation or inquiry has focused on school leadership and the response and decision-making of these key social actors during the pandemic (Comanducci, 2020; Harris & Jones, 2020; Netolicky, 2020).

### School Leadership in the US During Crisis

A recent theoretical analysis by Grissom and Condon (2021) demands researchers look into crisis management in schools: "The widespread nature of the COVID-19 school closures, in contrast, offers an opportunity to understand crisis leadership in schools on a large scale" (p. 321). They suggested education researchers seize upon the time and begin to "build a more systematic understanding of the crisis responses of schools and districts" (p. 321). Hence, it is necessary to understand the roles of principals as leaders during an unprecedented universal crisis. Numerous studies (Boin et al., 2014; Crayne & Medeiros, 2020; Harris, 2020; Mutch, 2015) discussed school leadership in times of crisis. However, as mentioned above, to take a comprehensive picture of

the pandemic leadership of school leaders, more such studies are still required since these studies are still not able to fully explain the impact caused and how school's crisis leadership practices evolved in the United States.

**Research Context**

Delaware, situated in the northeastern region of the United States, is the context of this scholarly inquiry. Despite its relatively small geographical size, Delaware boasts a considerable educational infrastructure encompassing over 200 schools distributed across 19 districts and 23 charter schools. The state has identified eight communities as Promise Communities, encompassing all counties, 17 zip codes, and multiple school districts and charter schools.

Demographic analysis, as per the U.S. Census 2020 (Census, 2023), children under 18 years are most affected by poverty, with subsequent impacts noted among the working-age population (18-64 years) and then among seniors (65 years and older). There are pronounced disparities in poverty rates when dissected by race and ethnicity; Black individuals are more than twice as likely to experience poverty relative to their White counterparts, and Hispanics are nearly three times more likely to be impoverished compared to non-Hispanic Whites. Geographical disparities are also evident, with higher poverty rates in southern counties and urban areas, notably the capital city with a poverty rate of 18.5% and the most densely populated urban area at 23.9%, double the state's overall poverty rate.

Delaware's population of 1,031,890 has increased by 4.2% since the 2020 census. The state's demographic composition is predominantly White (68%), with significant Black or African American (23.8%) and an expanding Hispanic or Latino (10.3%) community. Educational attainment is high, with over 91% holding at least a high school diploma and 34.5% with a bachelor's degree or higher. The housing market is primarily owner-occupied (72%), and the median household income stands at $79,325, reflecting economic resilience (Census, 2023)

However, challenges persist in the educational domain. A 2023 study by the American Institutes for Research (AIR) (Atchison et al., 2023) found a significant decline in Delaware's fourth and eighth-grade math and reading scores on the National Assessment over the past decade, more pronounced than in neighboring states. The report criticizes the inequitable allocation of public-school funding, adversely affecting low-income, Black, and ELL students, as well as students with disabilities. This inequity necessitates targeted interventions and policy reforms. COVID-19 made schools utilize a hands-on approach, and how schools responded to the most vulnerable populations of their school community needs to be clarified. Were the school leaders prepared? Did they have plans in place?

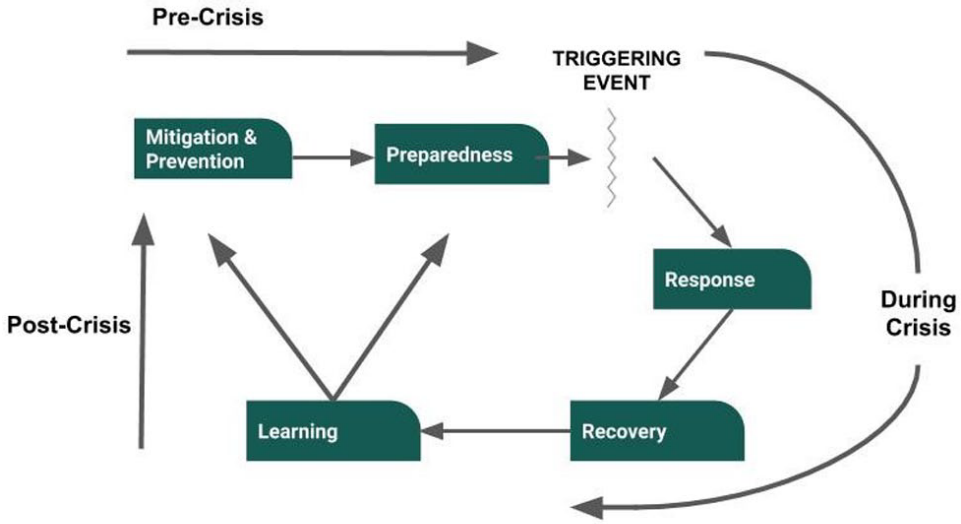
A report by CRESP in December 2021 suggests that there has been a decline in student enrollment in Delaware's educational landscape, despite an increasing population trend due to the COVID-19 pandemic (CRESP, 2021). Although discussions have taken place in Delaware on "Crisis Preparation" and leadership during crises, there is a lack of comprehensive documentation about how Delaware school leaders managed the COVID-19 crisis, the lessons learned, and recommendations for future preparedness. The implications of the pandemic on educational equity and outcomes remain unclear. This study is pioneering in exploring Delaware schools' crisis management strategies, practices, and learnings using a crisis management framework by Wooten & James (2008).

## Crisis Management Framework

This study utilized Wooten and James's (2008) Crisis Management Life Cycle in schools and districts as a theoretical basis for further exploration of principals' perceptions. The framework extensively addresses the role of various elements such as mitigation and prevention, preparedness, response, recovery, and learning in the lifecycle of a crisis. The crisis generally can be understood in terms of four stages, pre-crisis, triggering events, during crisis, and post crisis.

**Figure 1**

*Crisis management life cycle in schools and districts*




Adapted from Wooten and James (2008).

The COVID-19 Pandemic is being more understood, researched, and managed in the United States after the development of vaccines, and after mutation of virus, the disease receded. However, the impact of the pandemic on school leadership was a very relevant topic of study. School leaders are in the Post-Crisis Stage of the crisis management lifecycle. Further exploration and deeper insights into principals' roles and leadership practices are essential for developing the existing framework or creating a greater understanding of the impact of multifaceted global crises. This framework will equally help analyze the COVID-19 stories of the local context of Delaware.

# Methods

## Research Design

The purpose of the mixed-methods case study is to identify the experiences of K12 school leaders (i.e., principals) in Delaware, a state in the Northeast region of the United States. The study adopted a convergent parallel design in which the researcher concurrently conducts the

quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis in the same phase, which gives equal weight to both qualitative and quantitative components, analyzes the two components independently, and interprets the results together (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011). The study attempted to address the central question and the sub-questions listed in the previous section. The researchers believe that convergent parallel mixed methods are a good fit to address the research problem at hand. The quantitative data was collected using a researcher-developed survey tool. Qualitative data is collected through virtual interviews. The study is supported to explain and/or support the results of the qualitative and quantitative components (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

**Sample Selection**

The study was planned to be conducted in Delaware, one of the states in the Mid-Atlantic region. Since the state is very small, such in-depth studies in Delaware have not been performed before. A representative sample of at least 100 principals was to take the survey. Some 50 principals responded; however, only 34 responses are included due to incomplete responses from the remaining. A representative sampling of principals, Suburban and Rural locations, along with various racial background and genders, was selected purposively for a one-on-one interview to illuminate the circumstances of the phenomena studied (Patton, 2015). For this study, principals of K12 schools in a state participated in interviews (indicating their willingness on the survey) that was conducted by video, audio-recorded, and transcribed for analysis.

**Data Collection**

The quantitative data was collected from the researcher-created crisis leadership preparedness, competencies, and practice survey (PRCPS). It examines principals' satisfaction level on their preparedness, competencies, and responses based on their demographic variables like gender, year of experience, educational background, typology of schools, race, etc. The survey tool also included some open-ended questions for narrative responses. This data was analyzed along with the data obtained from interviews. The larger part of the qualitative data was collected from the one-on-one semi-structured interviews to explain experiences from a deeper personal level and collective experience. Concurrent data collection and analysis enabled researchers to remove their personal biases.

**Population and Sample Description**

A 100 randomly selected population sample frame, that was about 45% of all building principals of the schools in the state, received an email invitation for the survey. All the completed surveys were considered as quantitative data. Researchers sent survey reminders at certain times to increase response rate. One-on-one interviews of 4 principals was conducted. The study sample is purposeful.

**Data Analysis Plan**

**Table 1**

*Data Analysis Framework*

| Research Question | Data Collection | Analysis Matrix |
|---|---|---|
| Central: Question | Survey/Interviews | SPSS Software NVivo for Thematic Coding |
| Quantitative Sub-Question | Survey (Quantitative Section) | SPSS software to complete descriptive statistics and correlations |
| Qualitative Sub-Question | Survey (Qualitative Section)/ Interviews | NVivo for open coding, followed by selective coding |

**Quantitative Data.** Researchers analyzed survey data using SPSS software to provide descriptive statistics (mean, median, and range, standard deviation) to examine the overall experience. Cross tabulation is used to summarize the experiences.

**Qualitative Data.** Individual interviews were transcribed and open coded for initial codes (Saldana, 2015) using NVivo. Subsequently, the open codes were combined to themes using a process called selective coding (Saldana, 2015). The quantitative results were compared with qualitative responses of the survey data to identify further insights and explain the themes.

## Research Quality

In the study, the researcher meticulously followed rigorous standards to ensure the quality of research, achieving credibility through data triangulation and member checks, and ensuring transferability with a detailed mixed-methods approach that allows findings to be applicable in other contexts. The research process was transparent and methodically documented to establish dependability, while confirmability was secured through member checking and validation of survey tools to link results directly to the data. Ethical considerations were at the forefront, with IRB approval, informed consent, and stringent data security measures, ensuring ethical compliance and participant confidentiality throughout the research.

## Delaware Principal Quantitative Results

**Cronbach's Alpha**. A Cronbach alpha coefficient was calculated for all numeric variables. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was evaluated using the guidelines suggested by George and Mallery (2018) where > .9 excellent, > .8 good, > .7 acceptable, > .6 questionable, > .5 poor, and ≤ .5 unacceptable. The items of the tool, Crisis Leadership Survey, had a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .90, indicating excellent reliability.

**Descriptive Statistics**. Frequencies and percentages were calculated for Demographic variables High Need Schools, Gender, Race, Education, School Typology, Leadership Experience, and Total Educator Experience. Frequencies and percentages are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Frequency Table for Nominal Variables*

| **Variable** | *n* | *%* |
|---|---|---|
| Highneed | | |
| 75% - 100% Economically Disadvantaged Students | 9 | 26.47 |
| 50% - 74% Economically Disadvantaged Students | 13 | 38.24 |
| 25% - 49% Economically Disadvantaged Students | 7 | 20.59 |
| 0 - 24% Economically Disadvantaged Students | 5 | 14.71 |
| Gender | | |
| Male | 9 | 26.47 |
| Female | 25 | 73.53 |
| Race | | |
| White | 21 | 61.76 |
| Black or African American | 12 | 35.29 |
| Education | | |
| Master's Degree | 26 | 76.47 |
| Doctoral Degree | 8 | 23.53 |
| Typology: Rural, Urban, Suburban | | |
| Suburban | 19 | 55.88 |
| Urban | 10 | 29.41 |
| Rural | 5 | 14.71 |
| Missing | 0 | 0.00 |
| Total Years of Leadership Experience | | |
| 15+ years | 10 | 29.41 |
| 6-10 Years | 11 | 32.35 |
| 2-5 Years | 5 | 14.71 |
| 11-15 years | 8 | 23.53 |
| Total Years of Educator Experience | | |
| 20+ years | 24 | 70.59 |
| 16-20 years | 6 | 17.65 |
| 11-15 Years | 3 | 8.82 |
| Missing | 1 | 2.94 |

*Note.* Due to rounding errors, percentages may not equal 100%.

**Descriptive Statistics**. Summary statistics were calculated for all numeric variables.

**Table 3**

*Summary Statistics Table for Interval and Ratio Variables*

| Variable | *M* | *SD* | *n* | $SE_M$ | Min | Max |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Functional Crisis Management Plan | 3.97 | 0.83 | 34 | 0.14 | 2.00 | 5.00 |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Regular Participation Crisis Management | 3.24 | 1.13 | 34 | 0.19 | 1.00 | 5.00 |
| Adequate Preparation Crisis Management | 3.32 | 0.98 | 34 | 0.17 | 1.00 | 5.00 |
| Resources Crisis Management | 3.18 | 1.00 | 34 | 0.17 | 1.00 | 5.00 |
| Always prepared for COVID-19 & Other | 3.50 | 1.05 | 34 | 0.18 | 1.00 | 5.00 |
| Functional Communication Plan | 3.94 | 0.98 | 34 | 0.17 | 1.00 | 5.00 |
| Systems Of Communication COVID-19 | 4.09 | 0.87 | 34 | 0.15 | 1.00 | 5.00 |
| Leadership Team CMS | 4.38 | 0.55 | 34 | 0.09 | 3.00 | 5.00 |
| Comprehensive Distance Virtual Learning | 3.91 | 0.90 | 34 | 0.15 | 2.00 | 5.00 |
| Adequate Training On Alternative Technologies | 3.74 | 0.99 | 34 | 0.17 | 1.00 | 5.00 |
| Adequate Resources | 3.97 | 0.76 | 34 | 0.13 | 2.00 | 5.00 |
| Adequate Instructional Materials And Practices | 3.94 | 0.74 | 34 | 0.13 | 2.00 | 5.00 |
| Ability High Student Engagement | 3.35 | 1.01 | 34 | 0.17 | 2.00 | 5.00 |
| Meet Each Student Learning Needs | 3.18 | 1.03 | 34 | 0.18 | 2.00 | 5.00 |
| Continue Necessary Services | 4.21 | 0.59 | 34 | 0.10 | 2.00 | 5.00 |
| Student Safe | 4.03 | 0.72 | 34 | 0.12 | 2.00 | 5.00 |
| Comfort Students | 3.88 | 0.73 | 34 | 0.12 | 2.00 | 5.00 |
| Disseminate Trustworthy Information | 4.18 | 0.72 | 34 | 0.12 | 2.00 | 5.00 |
| Professional Standards Include Crisis Management | 4.06 | 0.79 | 33 | 0.14 | 1.00 | 5.00 |
| Crisis Management Educational Leaders Preparation | 4.32 | 0.53 | 34 | 0.09 | 3.00 | 5.00 |
| Crisis Management Schools Ongoing PD | 4.15 | 0.70 | 34 | 0.12 | 2.00 | 5.00 |
| Crisis Management Professional Development for School Leaders | 4.32 | 0.53 | 34 | 0.09 | 3.00 | 5.00 |
| Principals Leaders Require Crisis Leadership Support Services | 4.35 | 0.54 | 34 | 0.09 | 3.00 | 5.00 |
| *Note.* '-' indicates the statistic is undefined due to constant data or an insufficient sample size. | | | | | | |

**Pearson Correlation Analysis**. A Pearson correlation analysis was conducted among Crisis Management Plan, Communication Plan, Instructional Leadership, Schools Responses, and Learning Opportunities. Cohen's standard was used to evaluate the strength of the relationships, where coefficients between .10 and .29 represent a small effect size, coefficients between .30 and .49 represent a moderate effect size, and coefficients above .50 indicate a large effect size (Cohen, 1988).

**Table 4**

*Pearson Correlation Results Among CMPlan, CommunicationPlan, InstructionalLeadership, SchoolsResponses, and Learning Opportunities*

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Combined Variables** | *r* | 95.00% CI | *n* | *p* |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Crisis Management Plan-Communication Plan | .42 | [.10, .67] | 33 | .082 |
| Crisis Management Plan-Instructional Leadership | .52 | [.22, .74] | 33 | .016** |
| Crisis Management Plan-Schools Responses | .61 | [.34, .79] | 33 | .002** |
| Crisis Management Plan-Learning Opportunities | .31 | [-.03, .59] | 33 | .183 |
| Communication Plan-Instructional Leadership | .33 | [-.02, .60] | 33 | .183 |
| Communication Plan-Schools Responses | .41 | [.08, .66] | 33 | .088 |
| Communication Plan-Learning Opportunities | .38 | [.04, .64] | 33 | .117 |
| Instructional Leadership-Schools Responses | .50 | [.18, .72] | 33 | .023** |
| Instructional Leadership-Learning Opportunities | .31 | [-.03, .59] | 33 | .183 |
| Schools Responses-Learning Opportunities | .52 | [.21, .73] | 33 | .016** |
| *Note. p*-values adjusted using the Holm correction. | | | | |

The results of the correlations were analyzed with the Holm correction, which adjusts for multiple comparisons based on an alpha value of .05. The analysis showed a significant positive correlation between Crisis Management Plan and Instructional Leadership, with a correlation coefficient of .52. This indicates a large effect size (p = .016, 95.00% CI = [.22, .74]). In other words, when Crisis Management Plan increases, Instructional Leadership tends to increase as well.

Furthermore, there was a significant positive correlation between Crisis Management Plan and Schools Responses, with a correlation coefficient of .61. This also suggests a large effect size (p = .002, 95.00% CI = [.34, .79]). When Crisis Management Plan increases, Schools Responses also tend to increase.

A moderate positive correlation was observed between Instructional Leadership and Schools Responses (correlation coefficient of .50, p = .023, 95.00% CI = [.18, .72]). This suggests that when Instructional Leadership increases, Schools Responses tend to increase.

Another significant positive correlation was observed between Schools Responses and Learning Opportunities, with a correlation coefficient of .52, indicating a large effect size (p = .016, 95.00% CI = [.21, .73]). This suggests that as Schools Responses increases, Learning Opportunities also tend to increase.

No other significant correlations were found. You can refer to Table 4 for a detailed presentation of the results of the correlations.

**Qualitative Data Analysis**

**The Participants.** The four school principals interviewed shared their unique experiences and challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. The first, a newcomer to the role, faced difficulties in transitioning to virtual and hybrid learning, managing COVID-19 protocols, and dealing with increased stress and changing staff dynamics. An experienced principal from Delaware described this period as her career's most challenging, dealing with the shift to online learning and adapting to constantly changing guidelines while transitioning from instructional

leadership to crisis management. The third principal, with a background in the Department of Education and as a consultant, focused on the unprecedented challenges of the pandemic, particularly in adapting to online platforms, addressing equity issues, and coping with stress and burnout. Finally, the fourth principal, leading a middle school, emphasized mental health, resilience, and empathy, focusing on counseling, community building, and addressing educational equity and resource allocation issues exacerbated by the pandemic.

## Thematic Analysis: The Enormous and Unprecedented Crisis

The COVID-19 pandemic presented unprecedented challenges for educational leaders, forcing them to adapt quickly and effectively to a rapidly changing landscape. Many principals felt inadequately prepared for the scale and nature of the COVID-19 pandemic. This theme examines the preparedness of principals during the pandemic, drawing upon the findings of various studies and reports. Participating principals expressed a strong sense of unpreparedness when faced with a crisis of the scale and nature of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although they possessed some skills applicable to such an outbreak, its unique challenges exceeded any previously-learned capabilities or experiences they might possess.

One principal was confident due to their experience in communication and administrative roles; for instance, one stated, “I felt prepared since I have been sending weekly newsletters out to our staff as well as communicating with our community for years.” While this indicates some degree of confidence when handling routine administrative tasks or communicating, it doesn’t guarantee preparation for pandemic challenges. Principals noted a shift from instructional leadership to crisis management: “We’ve all become managers, with instruction being one area people had to let go of at some point... You now find yourself managing information that changes daily.” This represents a pivot in their responsibilities, which they were not initially equipped for. One school leader expressed that no one was prepared for such an unprecedented pandemic to hit educational institutions. As one participant shared, “This [first] year has been one of the hardest on my soul. It has been awful. However, this made my second year harder.” Here, the principal highlights the profound personal and professional challenges they have experienced throughout their tenure at the school.

Finally, one principal declared their unpreparedness by noting, “I just wasn’t prepared for that... but ultimately we survived.” This statement displays an admirable sense of resilience despite not having anticipated this particular crisis. While principals possessed relevant experience in education and administration, the scale and specific challenges associated with COVID-19 presented unique difficulties, which forced them to adjust and evolve their leadership roles accordingly.

**Crisis Response.** This theme signified that the initial response to the crisis demanded school leaders to adapt to the constantly emerging and shifting challenges and do so in ways that were not typified in their preparation or routine practice. Crisis response was primarily discussed in terms of communication, adaptability, keeping up with state and federal guideline revisions and redactions, collaborative efforts and networking, and insurance of technology as a service, support, and resource.

Communication during the crisis emerged as a cornerstone of effective leadership. Participants represented varying levels of confidence in communication and administrative skills,

a significant disparity that emerged when it came to pandemic preparedness. Although some principals expressed confidence in their communication and administrative skills, this did not fully translate to pandemic preparedness. As a result, a significant shift from instructional leadership to crisis management was experienced by many principals. Nevertheless, during the pandemic, all four principals discussed engaging in effective and consistent communication strategies. Adaptability to changing circumstances and policies was crucial, such as when mask mandates were lifted. Moreover, the crisis response required school leaders to successfully repurpose existing resources to facilitate a swift transition to remote learning. The uncertainty faced by participants during the transition to crisis management during the pandemic was a shared experience for all. Throughout the pandemic, principals discussed adept communication strategies, including tackling misinformation, keeping stakeholders well-informed, and utilizing diverse communication channels. Principals employed diverse strategies to combat misinformation and update stakeholders. This was primarily by utilizing technology more effectively and efficiently. But it also included scheduling Zoom meetings for digital "townhalls" and online "open houses." Additionally, one principal emphasized the development of policies to ensure safety, highlighting the role of active participation in disseminating crucial safety information. As another participant stated, "We did whatever we could." The ability to adapt quickly to changing circumstances, exemplified by the back-and-forth shift of mask mandates and politicization of pandemic guidelines, became a pivotal aspect of their communication-driven crisis response.

Several principals underscored the necessity for adaptability, coining the term "survival policies" to encapsulate the ever-evolving nature of their roles. One leader reflected on the managerial shift, noting, "We have all become managers. Instruction was the first thing people had to relinquish, yet you still manage an ever-evolving stream of data each day." In response to the crisis, they believed they had to prioritize crisis management over traditional instructional leadership practices became evident.

Effective crisis management requires school leaders to repurpose existing resources, facilitating a rapid transition to remote learning. Resource allocation and collaboration took center stage, with principals recognizing the importance of relying on each other to restructure roles, reallocate resources, and discern where investments were needed. This resulted in innovative strategies for resource allocation that effectively leveraged professional networks. As one participant put it, "We realized that we [as principals] needed to rely on each other . . . to restructure jobs, reallocate resources, and figure out where we need to invest money." Consequently, creative resource allocation strategies that leveraged professional networks effectively had to be found. School leaders often gathered for support among each other: "We commiserate, we sit, and I find myself laughing as both the charter school world and the district roll are intertwined with my life because of my Principals Association membership." They also had to quickly adapt to changing guidelines, like when one participant stated that they "received a press release informing me that the governor decided to lift the mass mandate in schools altogether." Regular learning and reflection among school leaders was a staple for these participants. They shared strategies, such as enforcing safety measures like wearing masks, and contemplated ways to navigate evolving circumstances.

Technology played a crucial role in maintaining educational continuity, as exemplified by a principal expressing gratitude for access to computers and iPads. Additionally, initiatives like

providing internet services beyond school premises underscored a commitment to facilitating remote learning access for all students. In the quest for a swift transition to remote learning, the reuse of existing resources, like one-to-one computer initiatives and pre-existing Zoom licenses, exemplified proactive measures taken by schools. These instances illustrate how leveraging available resources contributed to a seamless adaptation to the challenges posed by the pandemic. One principal highlighted the significance of technology: “We were fortunate that every child had his or her own computer, and then in between, Delaware State University gave us iPads for them.” Another stated, “We committed resources to ensure we provided an internet service outside our school where children could come anytime with their parents in the parking lot.” These exemplar quotes highlight the view that the participants shared on how effectively technology can maintain continuity in education.

**Recovery.** During the ongoing crisis and after, the challenges faced highlighted a noticeable shift in focus towards mental health/social-emotional learning (SEL) concerns, trauma consciousness, and the need for critical spiritual leadership. As one administrator noted, the process of readjusting students to communal living led to an increase in discipline infractions, heightened mental health anxiety, and concerns for general overall well-being of staff, students, and stakeholders. Consequently, the principals in this study agreed that the pandemic led to an increase in the emphasis on Social-Emotional Learning as a crucial aspect of education in response to emerging challenges and/or critical events. As a participant confided, “It has been difficult getting the students back used to living together again, so you have seen an uptick in discipline infractions... mental health anxiety . . . has been very difficult for many, so the SEL piece has recently come in.” Principals have recognized the strain on educators and the significance of providing ample support for teachers and frontline staff. Efforts to show love and assistance have manifested through coaching programs and therapeutic approaches, aiming to equip educators with the tools needed to navigate the evolving educational landscape. One participant referenced the need “to ensure we give our teachers and frontline staff as much love and support as possible.” Principals emphasized providing teachers with necessary assistance through coaching programs or therapy approaches. This included an increase in the focus on adult-related trauma.

The impact of trauma on the school system had been acknowledged, according to participants. But most of the efforts had been in educating teachers about student trauma. There was an evident and urgent need to implement solutions for coping with and mitigating educator trauma. One principal shared, “We have discussed trauma within the school system and taught teachers about trauma; however, what’s difficult is dealing with their experiences of it ourselves. We definitely recognize there’s an urgent need.” One leader clarified that they had spent time discussing and learning more about student trauma and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), which was crucially imperative, but the COVID-19 crisis led them to the recognition that educator trauma was important as well. This leader emphatically noted, “There needs to be solutions put in place to deal with it.” However, the challenge lies in effectively addressing the personal experiences of trauma among educators.

In response to the crisis, innovative approaches had to be adopted, particularly in the realm of Special Education services and scheduling. Principals described the creation of tailored schedules grouping children with similar needs, allowing Special Education teachers to provide personalized one-on-one support. One of the four confirmed,

> We created a schedule where children of similar needs were combined so special education teachers could work directly with them one-on-one. We then had to reconstruct the school day in terms of extra help sessions on Fridays; adapting schedules and educational strategies in response to varied learning requirements became critical.

Adapting educational strategies and reconstructing the school day has become imperative to meet the varied learning requirements imposed by the crisis.

The crisis forced educators to confront their limits, both personally and professionally. This newfound awareness has prompted educators to acknowledge the toll the crisis has taken on them, with some making the difficult decision to leave. The importance of self-care and recognizing personal boundaries has become paramount, underscoring the need for educators to prioritize their well-being amidst the challenges they face.

Recognition of Limits and the Need for Self-Care: The crisis led educators to recognize their personal and professional boundaries: "We learned we could adapt and survive, while some made decisions to leave." This acknowledgement highlights both its toll on them as educators as well as the necessity of taking proper care of themselves during times of trouble.

**Learning.** Following the height of the crisis, school principals engaged in reflective practices to distill valuable lessons, underscoring the importance of collaboration, adaptability, resilience, and the acknowledgment of personal limitations. This introspective period prompted a shift in professional development priorities, redirecting focus towards leading instruction during times of distress, exploring innovative learning approaches, and prioritizing mental health.

The recognition of the critical need for mental health and social-emotional learning support emerged prominently among principals. Understanding the impact of the crisis on the well-being of both students and staff, educators prioritized fostering an environment that addressed not only academic needs but also the emotional and psychological aspects of the educational community. Self-care and work-life balance were identified as essential components to navigate the challenges posed by these trying times.

Participants delved into the spiritual and reflective experiences of principals during the pandemic, revealing a profound engagement with soul-searching, the emergence of new leadership styles, and an increased focus on equity. During this time of deep learning, principals felt intensely engaged with their humanity and limitations as leaders. Although this could be easily interpreted as a vulnerability, this did not seem in line with their view on learning from the pandemic. There was simply an understanding among the participants that immediate solutions are not always required. As one of the participants suggested, the pandemic taught them "to manage problem-solving and manage people in such a way that doesn't require you to give an instantaneous answer." This reflected a more measured and reflective approach to leadership and decision-making.

Equity work and diversity became focal points for reflective practice, with one principal expressing the difficulty of discussions around diversity and equity yet acknowledging the necessity of introspection to address these issues within the school community. One principal in the study asserted, "This was by far the hardest equity work we have done. These were difficult meetings at times when discussing diversity and equity. But then again, what does that look like for students?" Another principal shared, "The pandemic really exposed inequities... as a new leader and trying to navigate my way through that. That was very challenging, but now I think I have become stronger."

Adversity served as a source of developing her strength, sharing how navigating through the challenges of the pandemic led to personal and professional growth. This demonstrated a collective internal journey that led these four principals to personal and professional advancement.

Adversity, disappointment, and sustainability were also minor subthemes that emerged during the participants reflections on personal and professional growth and spiritual development. One participant disclosed, "I was very dismayed to hear that some students did not receive at least equal levels of instruction. This has prompted us to build more sustainable programs. This has always been key for us, but the pandemic really drove the need home for us."

The principals emphasized the need for sustainable solutions while expressing dismay at disparities in educational delivery. This acknowledgment reinforced the commitment to building enduring programs that ensure equal levels of instruction for all students. The intersection of legislation and cultural considerations was also highlighted during this reflective period. Principals recognized the opportunity presented by the crisis to evaluate curriculum and teaching methods in alignment with new state laws promoting equity. This dual commitment to legislative compliance and cultural responsiveness showcased a comprehensive approach to addressing the evolving educational landscape.

**Need for New Policies.** One of the subthemes related to recovery and learning was the realization that new or emerging policies had to be developed or adjusted to address the pandemic's unique challenges and ensure schools' effective functioning. This important subtheme illustrates that principals navigated a crisis by creating new policies, using technology effectively, maintaining regular and open communication channels with their schools' staff and stakeholders, and adapting quickly changing situations to ensure the effective operation of schools. Principals overall reflected on the crisis as an opportunity for learning in this area and framed policy lessons they learned through the crisis with themes of collaboration, adaptability, resilience, and acknowledgment of one's limits being central themes of discussion. One major area they recognized was in the domain of policymaking. They addressed needed policies in the area of engaging stakeholders, providing for developed crisis management, allowing for more adaptability in decision making, addressing inequities, and framing professional development and preparation programs in a new or enhanced light. Professional development and preparation policies, in their collective opinion, should address mental health and social emotional well-being, dealing with trauma, and support for teachers and other frontline staff.

In terms of stakeholder engagement, they saw a need to explore ways that collaboration and support. As one principal stated, "We learned a great deal by leaning on each other." Here "each other" referred to everyone—other principals, teachers, support staff, and community members, including parents. This highlighted how much collaboration is required during a crisis situation. Similarly, their experiences revealed to them that they needed more effective crisis management policies in place. Another principal shared, "Now I understand more things related to this crisis, so I feel confident about leading in others." The participants in this study felt that stakeholder engagement played an essential role in working to influence policy in communication and crisis management further, acknowledging their dependence on outside sources for support and advocating for themselves.

Policy development also occurred in terms of equity awareness. The pandemic exposed the inequalities between communities in a way, unlike planned efforts. As one principal noted,

"The pandemic really exposed disparities. I think, overall, I have gained strength from my increased awareness." Overall, principals stated that they all emerged from the pandemic with a stronger understanding of the various challenges students faced during this crisis. School leaders often had to respond in nimble and creative ways to address these disparities during the pandemic. For example, school districts implemented tailored programs addressing disparities in technology availability, ensuring all students had access to remote learning capabilities. Moreover, collaborative efforts were forged with community organizations to provide additional resources and support for marginalized students, reflecting a concerted commitment to creating a more inclusive and equitable educational landscape. Given the financial limitations that many households experienced during lockdowns, schools had to, as one principal quoted, "become all things to all."

Throughout the crisis, principals worked diligently to actively engage in professional development (PD) efforts both formally and informally, focus on areas of concern, including leading instruction during times of stress and distress, explore novel learning and leadership approaches, and prioritize the mental health of stakeholders. They also emphasized that PD and preparation of leader in regard to crisis leadership and management should be an integral part of the professional community of the schools and perhaps even university preparation programs. These principals also learned how to cope better under pressure and make wiser decisions. At least three of the four participants referred to having developed personal resilience or ability to cope with stressful situations due to their pandemic leadership experience.

## Discussion

The experiences of school principals during the COVID-19 pandemic elucidate the intricate interplay between leadership adaptation and educational challenges. In response to the pandemic, principals were compelled to pivot from a primary focus on instructional leadership to encompassing crisis management, as delineated by the Wooten and James (2008) Crisis Management Life Cycle. Initially, principals exercised signal detection, acknowledging the looming crisis, which necessitated a pre-emptive transition to remote instruction coupled with the enactment of health directives to mitigate inequities.

These leaders adjusted their approaches to meet the demands of crisis containment and damage control, endeavoring to preserve community ties, bolster mental health, and uphold decisive resilience. Their stories reflect the crisis's singular demands, emphasizing the need for leadership that is both adaptable and compassionate—qualities pivotal to the Wooten and James model's prevention and preparation phase. Each principal's distinct narrative enriches our comprehension of the pandemic's ramifications on educational systems, paralleling the business recovery stage as they aimed to maintain academic continuity amid obstacles.

The pandemic has underscored the essence of all-encompassing readiness in school leaders, a principle that permeates the Crisis Management Life Cycle. The combination of technical understanding and skilled crisis navigation exhibited may guide future strategic planning, as suggested in the learning phase of the Wooten and James framework. Principals' responses illuminated their improved crisis navigation capabilities, community rapport, and communication strategies; the narratives stressed the virtues of agility and the cultivation of

resilience, insights that are congruent with the full breadth of the crisis management paradigm as outlined by Green (2020).

**Impact of Pandemic on Leadership Practice**

The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a dramatic transformation of leadership practice. Principals reported moderate levels of preparedness prior to the crisis. The preparedness contrasted totally with real-time challenges presented by unfolding crises; consequently, established instructional practices shifted into adaptive crisis management strategies as leaders grappled with unfolding challenges as soon as they arose (Smith & Riley 2021). This shift echoes extant literature that holds crisis as an impetus for change (Smith & Riley 2021). This evolution in practice corresponds with literature that describes the crisis as an impetus for change (Smith & Riley 2021).

**Instructional Leadership during COVID-19**

During the pandemic, instructional leadership took on new dimensions. Quantitative findings indicated an expansion in methods used by principals to deliver instruction: traditional face-to-face engagement gave way to virtual platforms, and increased allocations were made for digital infrastructure compared with face-to-face contact – further evidence of adaptive nature of leadership (Martin & Bolliger, 2021). This shift illustrated adaptive nature of instructional leadership during crisis periods while echoing research that highlights online learning environments (Martin & Bolliger, 2021).

**Reimagining Decision Making for Resource Allocation**

Principals were forced to reconsider their approach to decision-making during crises, especially regarding resource allocation. Quantitative data indicated an upsurge in decision-making activities during this period, and qualitative insights pointed to more democratic and consultative processes as a response. This adaptation allowed schools to meet urgent needs such as providing technology access for remote learning or supporting students with special needs, further contributing to discussions surrounding leadership adaptability during crises (Johnson & Jones 2021).

**Educational Equity and COVID-19 Pandemic**

One key finding from both quantitative and qualitative data was its impact on educational equity. Principals reported an increase in preexisting inequities due to pandemic infection and identified specific strategies needed to support marginalized groups (Lopez & Donovan 2020). This finding aligns with advocacy and discussions around the pandemic's disproportionate effect on vulnerable populations (Lopez & Donovan 2020). Vulnerable were more impacted.

In summary, the COVID-19 Crisis has been an eye-opening experience for educational leadership. It demonstrated the need and value of flexible decision-making that prioritized equity. Furthermore, these findings contribute to our growing body of knowledge regarding crisis

leadership as a basis for creating robust leadership strategies in response to future crises, especially in school leadership. The crisis exposed a reality of lack of preparedness as discussed in Crisis Management Life Cycle.

**Significance and Conclusion**

Therefore, this study aimed to better understand how principals confronted and contended with educational discontinuity and Crisis introduced by the COVID19 pandemic (d'Orville, 2020; Harris, 2020; Harris & Jones, 2020; Müller & Goldenberg, 2020; Sahlberg, 2020; Zhao, 2020). Researchers used Wooten and James (2008) framework to understand this phenomenon in Delaware. The study explored school principals' social, managerial, and moral concern in equitable and ethical decision making not typically encountered in the past (Escotet, 2020; Harris, 2020; Netolicky, 2020). The study centers to explain school principals' leadership behavior and guide practitioners in practical applications in controlling or managing situations such as those created by a global pandemic, or guide scholars and practitioners alike in providing a perspective or stance to be taken toward data relating to such a pandemic.

Given the critical changes to instructional practices and numerous disruptions due to the COVID19 Crisis, school leaders had to reconsider their praxis as they interact with students and stakeholders. Not only have these disruptions caused fundamental shifts in the meaning of school culture and climate, but the interruptions also present new concerns for leaders of schools and districts for student success and achievement. No longer being regularly present in the classroom or in the school setting many students became disconnected from needed resources—e.g., free and reduced lunches, internet access, technology, one-on-one interventions, IEP accommodations, socio-emotional development, mental health counseling, school as a safe place, etc. However, this discontinuity also provided school leaders an opportunity to reflect on existing inequities and inconsistencies that have existed in their schools. Working toward a theory of equitable and ethical praxis in times of disruption holds the potential to inform these concerns.

## Conflict of Interest

We hereby declare that we have no financial or personal relationships with other people or organizations that could inappropriately influence or bias our work submitted to this journal. This manuscript is composed of original content that has not been published elsewhere, and all sources used are properly disclosed. No external funding was received for the research presented in this manuscript.

## References


Allensworth, E., & Schwartz, N. (2020, June). School practices to address student learning loss. *EdResearch for Recovery*. https://annenberg.brown.edu/sites/default/files/EdResearch_for_Recovery_Brief_1.pdf

Anderson, J. (2020, April 16). School leadership during Crisis. *Harvard EdCast*. https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/20/04/harvard-edcast-school-leadership-during-crisis

Arat, M., & Karatas, K. (2020). Psychological effects of COVID-19 pandemic on society and its reflections on education. *Turkish Studies, 15*(4), 1-13. https://dx.doi.org/10.7827/TurkishStudies.44336

Atchison, D., Levin, J., Fatima, S., Trauth, A., Srikanth, A., Heberle, C., Gannon-Slater, N., Junk, K., & Wallace, L. (2023). *Assessment of Delaware Public School Funding*. American Institutes for Research.

Azorín, C. (2020). Beyond COVID-19 supernova. Is another education coming? *Journal of Professional Capital and Community*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1108/JPCC-05-2020-009

Boin, A., Kuipers, S., & Overdijk, W. (2014). Leadership in times of Crisis: A framework for assessment. *International Review of Public Administration, 18*(1), 79-91. doi: 10.1080/12294659.2013.10805241

Borman, G. (2020). What can be done to address learning losses due to school closures? The Answer Lab. Center on Education Policy, Equity and Governance. https://theanswerlab.rossier.usc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Answer-Lab-COVID-19-Slide-202006-Final-1.pdf.

Census (2023). Quick Facts: Delaware. The United States Census Bureau Retrieved from https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/DE/PST045223

Chun Tie, Y., Birks, M., & Francis, K. (2019). Grounded theory research: A design framework for novice researchers. *SAGE Open Medicine*, *7*, 2050312118822927.

Comanducci, M. (2020, April 7). School leadership in times of Crisis. *ASCD Leadership SmartBrief*. http://smartbrief.com/original/2020/04/school-leadership-times-crisis

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

Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2008). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (3rd ed.). Sage.

Crayne, M. P., & Medeiros, K. E. (2020). Making sense of Crisis: Charismatic, ideological, and pragmatic leadership in response to COVID-19. *American Psychologist*. Advance online publication. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/amp0000715

CRESP. (December 2021). *Understanding the Impact of COVID-19 on Delaware Public School Students (T21-037.4)*. Newark, DE: Center for Research in Education and Social Policy.

d'Orville, H. (2020). COVID-19 causes unprecedented educational disruption: Is there a road towards a new normal? *Prospects, 49*(1), 11-15. https://oi.org/10/1007/s11125-020-09475-0

Daniel, S. (2020). Education and the COVID-19 pandemic. *Prospects, 49*(1/2), 91-96. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11125-020-09464-3

Daniels, N. (2020, May 5). When the pandemic ends, will schools change forever? *The New York Times.* https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/05/learning/when-the-pandemic-ends-will-schools-change-forever.html

de Miranda, D. M., da Silva Athanasio, B., Oliveira, A. C. S., & Simoes-e-Silva, A. C. (2020). How is COVID-19 pandemic impacting mental health of children and adolescents? *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction, 51*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijdrr.2020.101845

Earp, J. (2020, August 12). Changing school leadership during COVID-19. *Teacher Magazine*. https://www.teachermagazine.com/au/articles/changing-school-leadership-during-covid-19

Escotet, M. A. (2020). Pandemics, leadership, and social ethics. *Prospects, 49*(1/2), 73-71. https://doi.org//10.1007/s11125-020-09472-3

Gamboa, S., & Siemaszko, C. (2020, October 26). Texas now tied with California for most Covid-19 cases in country. NBCNews. https://nbcnews.com/news/us-news/texas-now-tied-california-most-covid-19-cases-country-n1244785

Green, T. D. (2020). Communication strategies for educational leaders in a crisis. *Leadership and Policy Quarterly, 1*(2), 109–115.

Grissom, J. A., & Condon, L. (2021). Leading schools and districts in times of Crisis. *Educational Researcher*, *50*(5), 315-324.

Hanushek, E. A., & Woessmann, L. (2020). Education, knowledge capital, and economic growth, In S. Bradley & C. Green (Eds.), *The economics of education* (2nd ed.) (pp. 171-182). Academic Press. https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-815391-8.00014-8.

Harris, A. (2020). COVID-19 – School leadership in Crisis? *Journal of Professional Capital and Community,* Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1108/JPCC-06-2020-0045

Harris, A., & Jones, M. (2020). COVID 19 – School leadership in disruptive times, *School Leadership & Management, 40*(4), 243-247, doi: 10.1080/13632434.2020.1811479

Harris, D. N. (2020, April 24). How will COVID-19 change our schools in the long run? *Brookings: Brown Center Chalkboard*. https://www.brokkings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2020/04/24/how-will-covid-19-change-our-schools-in-the-long-run/

Horowitz, J. M. (2020, April 15). *Lower-income parents most concerned about their children falling behind amid COVID-19 school closures*. Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/04/15/lower-income-parents-most-concerned-about-their-children-falling-behind-amid-COVID-19-school-closures/

International Commission on the Futures of Education. (2020). *Education in a post-COVID world: Nine ideas for public action*. UNESCO.

Johnson, S. M., & Jones, R. (2021). Crisis leadership in education: The efficacy of principals' training during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 49*(4), 620–634.

Kimmerer, R. W. (2002). Weaving traditional ecological knowledge into biological education: a call to action. BioScience, 52(5), 432-438.

Kuhfeld, M., & Tarasawa, B. (2020). The COVID-19 slide: What summer learning loss can tell us about the potential impact of school closures on student academic achievement. The Collaborative for Student Growth NWEA White Paper.

https://www.nwea.org/research/publications/the-covid-19-slide-what-summer-learning-loss-can-tell-us-about-the-potential-impact-of-school-closures-on-student-academic-achievement/

Kuhfeld, M., Soland, J., Tarasawa, B., Johnson, A., Ruzek, E., & Jiu, J. (2020). Projecting the potential impact of COVID-19 school closures on academic achievement. *Educational Researcher, 49*(8), 549-565. doi: 10.3102/0013189X20965918

Lichtman, G. (2020, April 15). Will the COVID-19 Crisis really change education? *Education Reimagined: Insights*. https://education-reimagined.org/will-the-covid-19-crisis-really-change-education/

Lopez, A., & Donovan, L. (2020). Equity in crisis: The disproportionate impacts of COVID-19 on vulnerable students. *Journal of Educational Equity, 14*(3), 1–11.

Luthra, P., & Mackenzie, S. (2020, March 30). 4 ways COVID-19 could change how we educate future generations. *World Economic Forum*. https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/4-ways-covid-19-education-future-generations/

Martin, F., & Bolliger, D. U. (2021). Engagement matters: Student perceptions on the importance of engagement strategies in the online learning environment. *Online Learning, 25*(1), 205–222.

Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldana, J. (2014a). Chapter 11: Drawing and verifying conclusions. In *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook*. SAGE.

Miles, M., Huberman, A. M., & Saldana, J. (2014b). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook*. SAGE.

Müller, L. M., & Goldenberg, G. (2020). *Education in times of Crisis: The potential implications of school closures for teachers and students*. Chartered College of Teaching.

Mutch, C. (2015). Leadership in times of Crisis: Dispositional, relational and contextual factors influencing school principals' actions. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction, 14*, 186-194.

Netolicky, D. M. (2020). School leadership during a pandemic: Navigating tensions. *Journal of Professional Capital and Community,* Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1108/JPCC-05-2020-0017

Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (4th ed.). Sage.

Pfefferbaum, B., & North, C. S. (2020). Mental health and the Covid-19 pandemic. *New England Journal of Medicine, 383*, 510-512. https://doi.org/10.1056/MEJMp2008017

Popa, S. (2020). Reflections on COVID-19 and the future of education and learning. *Prospects, 49*(1), 1-6.

Porterfield, C. (2020, November 1). Texas overtakes California as state with the most coronavirus infections with more than 950,000 total cases. *Forbes*. https://

Rios, B. (2020, June 5). Changes in education as a result of COVID-19 Crisis are here to say, experts say. *EURACTIV*. https://www.euractiv.com/section/economy-jobs/news/changes-in-education-are-here-to-stay-experts-say/

Robson, D. (2020, June 3). How Covid-19 is changing the world's children. *BBC Future*. https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20200603-how-covid-19-is-changing-the-worlds-children

Sahlberg, P. (2020). Will the pandemic change schools? *Journal of Professional Capital and Community,* Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1108/JPCC-05-2020-0026

Saldaña, J. (2012). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. SAGE.

Smith, A., & Riley, D. (2021). School leadership in times of crisis. *School Leadership & Management*, 41(1-2), 5–10.

Soland, J., Kufeld, M., Tarasawa, B., Johnson, A., Ruzek, E., & Liu, J. (2020, May 27). The impact of COVID-19 on student achievement and what it may mean for educators. *Brookings: Brown Center Chalkboard*. https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2020/05/27/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-student-achievement-and-what-it-may-mean-for-educators/

Strauss, V. (2020, April 26). How past crises changed America's public schools—'And so too will covid-19.' *The Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2020/04/26/how-past-crises-changed-americas-public-schools-so-too-wil-covid-19/

Tavory, I., & Timmermans, S. (2019). Abductive analysis and grounded theory. In A. Bryant & K. Charmaz (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of current developments in grounded theory* (pp. 132-146). SAGE Limited.

Vegas, E., & Winthrop, R. (2020, December 22). Education plus development – 2020: A year of turmoil but also hope in education. Brookings. https://brookings.edu/blog/education-plus.development/2020/12/22/2020-a-year-of-turmoil-but-also-hope-in-education/

Zhao, Y. (2020). COVID-19 as a catalyst for educational change. *Prospects*, *49*, 1-5. doi: 10.1007/s11125-020-09477-y

## Appendix A

## Crisis Leadership Study Tools

### Crisis Leadership Preparedness, Competencies, and Practice Survey (PRCPS)

**Section A. Demographics Questions**
Please provide us with the following demographic information.

**Select the typology that best describes your school:**
Rural Suburban Urban

**Select the socio-economic status percentage that best describes your school:**
0 - 24% Economically Disadvantaged Students
25% - 49% Economically Disadvantaged Students
50% - 74% Economically Disadvantaged Students
75% - 100% Economically Disadvantaged Students

**Gender**
Please Identify Your Gender
Male
Female
Other

**Race**
Please Identify Your Race
White Non-Hispanic
White Hispanic
Black or African American
Asian
American Indian or Alaska Native
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander

**Education Level**
Bachelor's Degree,
Master's Degree
Doctoral Degree
Other (Please specify)

**Years of Experience as School Leader/Principal**
1 Year or Less
2-5 Years
6-10 Years
11-15 years

15+ years

**Years of Experience in Education**
5 or Less
6-10 Years
11-15 Years
15-20 years
21+ years

**Competencies and Practice Survey Questions**

**Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements (Strongly agree=5 Somewhat agree =4, Neither agree nor disagree =3, Somewhat disagree =2, Strongly disagree=1**

**Crisis Analysis/Preparedness and COVID-19**
1. My school always has a functional crisis management plan that can be immediately activated in crisis situations.
2. We regularly participate in professional development opportunities for leaders, teachers and staff on crisis management.
3. I believe that we had adequate academic and/or professional preparation to lead during the Crisis.
4. We always have recourses allotted for crisis situations.
5. My school is always prepared for a crisis including one caused by COVID-19.

**Communication**
1. We had a functional communication plan and guidelines that helped/is helping us remain connected to all our stakeholders during COVID-19 Crisis.
2. We were/are able to establish systems of communication with a mix of strategies to reach different constituencies, especially during response and recovery from COVID-19.
3. My leadership team, including me, developed/demonstrated skills like emotional control and empathy prior to and during the Crisis.

**Instructional Leadership**
1. Comprehensive distance/virtual learning plans in place
2. Adequate training of alternative technologies
3. Adequate material, human, and technological resources for students, teachers, and other stakeholders.
4. Overall, we were able to provide adequate instructional materials and practices in place
5. We were/are able to achieve highest possible student learning during the COVID-19 Crisis.

**Responses**
1. We were/can meet each student's learning needs during the Crisis.

2. We were/can continue necessary schooling related services including counseling, food, and access to digital technology.
3. We were/can keep our students and their families safe.
4. We were/are able to comfort the students/families/staff who experienced COVID-19 related tragedies in their family/community.
5. We were/can disseminate trustworthy information about the COVID-19 Crisis.

**Learning/Opportunities**

A. I believe that professional standards for educational leaders should include a distinct section for "crisis management cycle" which includes assessment or mitigation, prevention, preparedness, response, recovery, and learning
B. Crisis management should be more explicitly incorporated into educational leaders' preparation experiences.
C. Crisis management should be a core part of schools ongoing professional development program.
D. There should be professional development opportunities or forums for school leaders where principals/leaders can share their crisis management experiences.
E. Principals and leaders require crisis leadership support services.

**Additional Comments (open-ended section to elaborate on any of the questions from the survey)**

**Interview Participation**

Are you willing to participate in a 30-minute one-on-one interview to elaborate on your responses?

**Interview Questions**

**Crisis Leadership Preparedness, Competencies, and Practice Interview Questions**

1. Please introduce yourself.
2. In one word to a sentence, how do you recall or name the crisis faced by you as a school leader?
3. What is your present state of feeling about COVID-19 related crisis? Where are you now?
4. Were you prepared for this? In what ways were you prepared and in what ways were you not?
5. Briefly explain how did you initially respond to this crisis?
6. How do you see yourself as a school leader today as a result of leading your school through this crisis? What impact did (is) the COVID-19 pandemic have in your leadership practice?
7. How do you evaluate your role as an instructional leader today?
8. What processes/approaches have you utilized in leading instruction during this crisis?
9. How did you mitigate the multiple facets of disruptions on student learning?
10. What did you do to allocate equitable school resources during pandemic?
11. Please share some of the crucial decisions that you made on redistribution of resources due to the crisis.
12. What lessons did you learn regarding serving students, schools, and communities during the COVID-19 pandemic?
13. How did/did not the pandemic impact your understanding of the principalship (i.e., “role of the principal”)?
14. How is your perception about educational equity influenced by COVID-19 pandemic?
15. What suggestions do you have for principal preparation in academic/professional programs and professional development to prepare leaders for unprecedented crises like COVID-19?

# The Impact of School Leadership on Middle School Teacher's Multicultural Awareness and Inclusivity

**Mary Boudreaux**
*Southern Connecticut State University*

This study investigates the perceptions of multicultural awareness and inclusivity among teachers across various urban middle schools, aiming to understand the impact of school leadership on promoting an educational environment that values diversity. Employing a quantitative analysis of survey data collected from 217 teachers in 16 schools, the research focuses on key areas: the encouragement from school leaders to teach about diverse cultures, teachers' experiences with colleagues of different races and ethnicities, comfort in discussing race, engagement with race-related topics, and the perceived support for speaking out against racism. The findings reveal significant variability in teacher perceptions across schools, with overall scores ranging from a high level of proactive engagement and support to a low level of challenges and reluctance to address race-related topics. Notably, schools with higher scores generally exhibited strong leadership commitment to diversity, suggesting a correlation between leadership practices and promoting an inclusive school culture. The study underscores the critical role of targeted professional development and the need for school policies that support open dialogue about race. It concludes that enhancing teacher comfort and engagement with multicultural topics is essential to fostering inclusive educational environments. This research contributes to the discourse on educational leadership's impact on multicultural awareness in schools, highlighting areas for further investigation and intervention.

*Keywords*: Multicultural Awareness, Teacher Perceptions, School Inclusivity, Leadership

In the evolving landscape of global education, the imperative for schools to cultivate culturally aware and inclusive environments has never been more critical (Banks, 2009; Minko, et al., 2019). As demographic shifts continue to diversify student populations, the pivotal role of school leadership in fostering an atmosphere of understanding, respect, and open dialogue about race and ethnicity gains prominence (Liou & Hermanns, 2017). This empirical study aims to delve into the nuances of how school leadership influences the development and sustainment of multicultural awareness and inclusivity in educational settings. By examining teacher perceptions across various schools, this research seeks to identify the relationships between leadership practices and the cultivation of a school culture that not only values diversity but also actively encourages and facilitates honest conversations about race and ethnic differences.

## Background

Previous research highlights the critical role that educators and school leaders play in embodying and imparting the values of diversity and inclusivity (Bustamante et al., 2009). Schools act as microcosms of society, where societal norms and values are both mirrored and questioned. Within this setting, the attitudes and behaviors of school leaders towards cultural diversity are pivotal, significantly impacting the school's overall atmosphere and the success of its inclusivity initiatives (Brion, 2022). Additionally, the capability of teachers to openly discuss racial and ethnic differences and their sense of support in tackling issues of racism are essential for fostering an educational environment where all students are empowered to succeed (Bristol, 2015; Shields & Edwards, 2005).

### *Contextual Challenges Public Schools*

In addressing multicultural awareness and inclusivity in schools, it is crucial to consider the specific societal and community contexts that shape these educational environments. For instance, public schools in the United States operate within a broader state and community framework that is increasingly influenced by legislative and societal pressures concerning the inclusion of racial and identity-based content in education (Feingold & Weishart, 2023). Recent trends toward discriminatory censorship and restrictive regulations pose significant challenges for educators and administrators aiming to foster an inclusive curriculum These external pressures can often dictate the scope and nature of what is taught, potentially stifling efforts to discuss and address important social issues within the classroom.

### *Impact of Censorship in States like Florida and Texas*

In states like Florida and Texas, recent legislative measures have introduced significant censorship concerning educational content, particularly around race, gender, and historical narratives. These measures have created a contentious educational environment, where teachers and administrators are frequently constrained in their ability to discuss and teach about certain identity-based issues. This type of legislative censorship impacts the curriculum and influences the overall school culture, potentially hindering efforts to promote diversity and inclusivity. The restrictions can lead to a chilling effect where educators may feel compelled to

avoid certain discussions to align with state mandates, thereby limiting students' educational experiences and understanding of complex societal issues. Recognizing the implications of such censorship is crucial for comprehending the broader challenges faced by schools in these states, shaping how they can navigate and still strive to fulfill their educational missions within these constrained circumstances.

These considerations are crucial for understanding the variability in teacher perceptions and the implementation of multicultural practices within public schools. Recognizing these external constraints is essential for developing strategies that support educators and administrators in effectively promoting inclusivity while navigating the pressures and limitations imposed by broader societal and legislative frameworks.

## Purpose of the Study

Educators and school leaders in the Northeast, much like their counterparts in other regions, find themselves navigating a complex terrain where community values and state legislations may sometimes be at odds with the goals of promoting diversity and inclusion within educational settings. Recent legislative actions have increasingly sought to limit discussions on race, gender, and other identity-based topics, compelling schools to carefully balance compliance with state laws against the imperative to maintain an open and inclusive environment. This balancing act places schools in a challenging position where following new regulations may conflict with their broader educational objectives and personal values.

The primary objective of this study is to analyze teacher perceptions across several key aspects of school culture. These include the extent to which the teaching about diverse cultures is encouraged, experiences with colleagues of different races and ethnic backgrounds, comfort levels in discussing race-related topics, and the perceived support for speaking out against racism. By employing a quantitative approach, the study aims to uncover patterns and variations in how the commitment of school leadership to cultural awareness and inclusivity is perceived across different educational settings. This analysis will help identify both strengths and areas needing attention, guiding efforts to enhance inclusivity and effectively address the challenges posed by conflicting societal and legislative pressures.

## Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its comprehensive exploration of teacher perceptions regarding diversity and inclusion within school cultures, an area that is particularly pertinent given the current societal and legislative challenges impacting educational equity. This research addresses a critical gap by quantitatively measuring aspects of school culture that are often discussed qualitatively and anecdotally. It provides empirical evidence on how these cultural aspects are perceived across different educational settings, highlighting disparities and variances that might not be evident without such a systematic analysis. The study’s focus on the perceptions of encouragement for teaching diverse cultures, experiences with colleagues from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, comfort in discussing race-related topics, and perceived support for anti-racism initiatives directly ties into key challenges in educational equity, such as

the need for more inclusive environments and the push against increasing legislative restrictions on curriculum content.

The findings of this study have the potential to impact educational equity significantly, policy, and practice in several key ways. By identifying how perceptions vary by school and district, this research can inform policymakers and educational leaders about the areas where improvements are necessary and possible. For instance, if certain schools show lower comfort levels in discussing race-related topics, targeted professional development programs can be designed to address these specific needs. Moreover, understanding the nuances of teacher perceptions can help shape policies that support more robust and inclusive educational practices, ensuring that diversity and inclusivity are not just aspirational goals but integral parts of the educational process.

Furthermore, this study's outcomes could guide future research directions by highlighting the factors that influence positive perceptions of inclusivity and the barriers that hinder them. Researchers can use these insights to conduct deeper, qualitative studies that explore why these perceptions exist and how they impact student outcomes. This could lead to a richer academic discourse on how to effectively implement and sustain inclusive educational practices amidst a backdrop of changing societal norms and legislative pressures.

This research contributes to the broader discourse on educational leadership and its impact on fostering an inclusive school culture (Niesche & Keddie, 2015). Insights gained from this study could better inform policy recommendations, leadership training programs, and curriculum development to address the challenges and opportunities within multicultural educational environments. Ultimately, by understanding the relationship between school leadership practices and teacher perceptions of cultural inclusivity, stakeholders can better navigate the complexities of creating educational spaces that reflect and are responsive to the diverse societies they serve (Lopez, 2016). Overall, the study offers a critical examination of the intersections between educational practice, policy, and the broader social and legislative context, providing a foundation for more informed decisions that could enhance educational equity across various settings.

## Research Questions

Based on the data and the focus of the empirical research study on the impact of school leadership on multicultural awareness and inclusivity within educational settings, the following research questions were formulated:

1. How do teachers perceive the level of encouragement from school leaders to teach about diverse cultures, and how does this vary across different urban middle schools?
2. What are the experiences of teachers with colleagues of different races and ethnicities, and how do these experiences reflect the overall inclusivity of the school culture?
3. To what extent do teachers feel comfortable having honest conversations about race with their colleagues, and what factors influence this comfort level?
4. How engaged are teachers with race-related topics in their professional development and classroom discussions, and what challenges do they face in engaging with these topics?

5. How important do teachers believe it is to have conversations about race, even if these conversations are uncomfortable, and how is this importance reflected in school practices?
6. How frequently do teachers discuss current racial news and events in their classrooms or with colleagues, and what impact do these discussions have on the school culture?
7. What level of support do teachers feel they receive from their school in speaking out against racism, and how does this support affect their willingness to address racism?
8. Are there differences in perceptions of multicultural awareness and inclusivity among teachers from various urban middle schools, and what factors contribute to these differences?

## Literature Review

### Educational Leadership and Multicultural Awareness

Educational leadership plays a crucial role in fostering inclusive and diverse school cultures (Tooms & Boske, 2010). Santamaría and Santamaría (2015) emphasize the significance of culturally responsive practices in educational leadership to counteract educational injustice and promote sustainable change. Additionally, Rodríguez et al. (2015) discuss the positive influence of diverse school leaders on school settings serving diverse student populations, further underlining the pivotal role of leadership in embracing diversity and inclusivity in educational institutions. Leaders who prioritize diversity and inclusivity not only foster positive attitudes towards multiculturalism among teachers but also establish a school-wide ethos that values and supports diversity (Khalifa, et al., 2016). Furthermore, transformative leadership approaches have been linked to more effective integration of multicultural curricula, enhancing students' cultural competence and empathy (Shields, 2010).

Grooms et al. (2024) point out that educational leaders play a pivotal role in fostering culturally diverse educational practices and creating inclusive learning environments to meet the diverse needs of students. The authors draw from Collins-Ayanlaja, Brookins, & Taysum's (2018) insights, which show that leaders can prepare themselves for leadership positions by prioritizing cultural literacy and leveraging it to enhance parental engagement within their districts. Likewise, Baker et al. (2023) explain that leadership preparation programs must shift towards preparing future educational leaders to have a more humanistic approach within their supervisory practices. This shift can create a more inclusive and supportive educational environment catering to the diverse needs of students from various backgrounds.

### Teacher Perceptions of Multicultural Education

Teachers' perceptions of multicultural education and inclusivity are pivotal for effectively implementing diversity initiatives within schools. Research indicates that teachers' attitudes towards and comfort with discussing race-related issues play a substantial role in their engagement with multicultural education practices (Abacioglu et al., 2020). Several factors

shape these perceptions, including teachers' personal beliefs and biases, which significantly influence their approach to diversity (Grant & Asimeng-Boahene, 2006; Nieto, 2004).

Professional development opportunities are also critical, as they equip teachers with the knowledge and skills needed to address and embrace cultural differences effectively (Gay, 2002). School leadership's support is another crucial factor; depending on whether leaders advocate for and prioritize diversity, it can either enable or hinder the implementation of inclusive practices (Portin et al., 2009).

Moreover, the demographic makeup of the teaching staff itself influences multicultural education outcomes. Studies suggest that a more diverse teaching workforce tends to foster a more inclusive school environment, as it brings a variety of perspectives and experiences that enrich the educational setting and promote a broader understanding of multicultural issues (Nevarez, et al., 2019). This diversity among teachers not only enhances the educational experience for students by providing multiple cultural perspectives but also models inclusive behaviors that students can emulate. Thus, fostering a diverse teaching staff and supporting them with appropriate professional development and leadership backing are essential steps towards enhancing multicultural education and inclusivity in schools.

Collectively, these factors underscore the complexity of implementing effective multicultural education initiatives. They highlight the need for comprehensive strategies that address personal, professional, and institutional dimensions to enhance the efficacy of diversity practices within schools.

**Impact on School Culture**

The impact of multicultural awareness and inclusivity on school culture is profound and transformative. As elucidated by Banks & Banks (2019), the engagement with culture within educational contexts is an ongoing, dynamic process that requires continuous effort and adaptability from educators. They argue that understanding culture is not a static endeavor or a finite goal but rather an evolving journey that necessitates educators' willingness to engage with culture as a complex, emergent, and interactional phenomenon. This perspective challenges the notion of culture as a set of static, individual representations and encourages viewing cultural practices as fluid and constantly developing (Banks & Banks, 2019, p. 35).

The integration of multicultural education into school curricula and practices not only enhances academic outcomes for students from diverse backgrounds (Ridho & Tumin, 2022) but also fosters a more equitable, empathetic, and respectful school environment (Adams & Rodriguez, 2019). Research underscores that schools embracing this approach cultivate a culture characterized by open dialogues about race and ethnicity, equitable opportunities for all students, and a curriculum that mirrors the diversity of the student body (Banks, 2019). However, despite these positive outcomes, significant challenges persist in ensuring that multicultural education is deeply and effectively integrated into school cultures, moving beyond superficial treatment to effect real cultural transformation (Sue, et al., 2022).

A primary obstacle in the path of advancing multicultural education is the resistance from various stakeholders within the educational system, including educators, administrators, and parents. This resistance often stems from what Banks & Banks (2019) describe as a deficit perspective, where there is a prevailing misconception about the aims and benefits of

multicultural education. Some fear that emphasizing multicultural content could detract from traditional academic priorities. Additionally, this resistance is frequently rooted in biases or a reluctance to confront and address issues of privilege and systemic inequalities. Overcoming these barriers is crucial for educators and leaders committed to fostering genuinely inclusive educational environments where multicultural education is embraced as essential to the academic and social development of all students.

## Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for a study on multicultural awareness and inclusivity in urban middle schools, focusing on the influence of educational leadership and teacher perceptions, integrates concepts from transformative leadership theory and multicultural education theory. This framework underpins the investigation into how leadership practices and teacher attitudes towards diversity impact the cultivation of an inclusive school culture.

### Transformative Leadership Theory

Transformative leadership theory (Shields, 2018) posits that leaders can instigate significant change within their organizations by focusing on values, ethics, and long-term goals. In the context of this study, transformative leadership involves school leaders adopting practices that not only advocate for but actively implement policies and curricula that embrace multiculturalism and inclusivity. This approach to leadership emphasizes the importance of creating an equitable educational environment that supports all students' cultural, racial, and ethnic identities. Transformative leadership in education challenges inequities and encourages critical dialogue around social justice issues (Freire, 2018), making it a pivotal aspect of fostering multicultural awareness in schools.

### Multicultural Education Theory

Multicultural education theory provides a framework for understanding how education can be used to promote diversity and equity within schools. Banks and Banks (2019) identify multicultural education as a process that incorporates the diverse cultural experiences of students into the curriculum and teaching practices, aiming to empower students from all backgrounds. This theory underscores the necessity of integrating diverse perspectives into educational content and pedagogy, thus preparing students to thrive in a pluralistic society (Gay 2004). Within this study, multicultural education theory informs the examination of curricular content (Sleeter & Carmona, 2016), teacher training (Gay, 2023), and classroom practices (Tonbuloğlu, et al., 2016) as they relate to promoting an inclusive school culture (Banks & Banks, 2019).

### Integration of Theories

Few studies have integrated educational leadership and multicultural education (Vassallo, 2022). Integrating transformative leadership and multicultural education theories creates a comprehensive theoretical framework for exploring the dynamics of multicultural awareness and inclusivity in urban middle schools. This framework suggests that the effectiveness of multicultural education initiatives is significantly influenced by the extent to which school leaders exhibit transformative qualities, such as the promotion of equity, the encouragement of open dialogue on race and ethnicity, and the implementation of inclusive policies.

Furthermore, this framework posits that teacher perceptions of multicultural education—shaped by their experiences, professional development, and the school leadership's stance on diversity—play a crucial role in the successful integration of multicultural content and practices into the school curriculum (Banks & Banks, 2019). Teachers' willingness to engage in and facilitate conversations about race, as well as their ability to implement inclusive pedagogical strategies, are seen as key factors in promoting a school culture that values diversity and inclusivity (Shields, 2018).

### Implications for Research

This theoretical framework guides the investigation into how school leadership and teacher perceptions influence the development of multicultural awareness and inclusivity within urban middle schools. It informs the research design, including the selection of variables for study (e.g., leadership practices, teacher attitudes, curricular content), and provides a basis for interpreting findings within the broader discourse on educational equity and reform. Through this lens, the study aims to contribute valuable insights into the mechanisms by which schools can become more inclusive and welcoming environments for all students.

## Method

### Participants

The study utilized archived public data consisting of responses from teachers across a diverse range of urban middle schools within an urban school district in the Northeast Region of the United States. This study's participants were teachers from 16 middle schools within the large urban school district. The district was selected due to its diverse student population and ongoing efforts to enhance multicultural education and inclusivity. A sample of 217 teachers from an archived pool of participants was used in this study, representing various educational disciplines, including mathematics, science, language arts, and social studies.

While specific demographic details such as race and gender were not retrieved from the archived data and survey responses, the participant group was diverse regarding years of teaching experience. This range provided a broad perspective on the educational environment within urban middle schools. Approximately 70% of the teachers had more than five years of teaching experience, indicating a predominance of experienced educators familiar with the dynamics of teaching in a diverse setting. The remaining 30% were newer to the profession, having less than five years of experience, and contributed fresh insights into the evolving challenges and opportunities of fostering inclusivity in education.

This mix of seasoned and relatively new teachers offers a valuable lens through which to explore how school leadership impacts the development and maintenance of a culture that values diversity and supports open discussions on multicultural issues.

**Instrumentation**

The data were derived from a structured survey originally designed by Panorama Education (2019). The Panorama Equity and Inclusion Survey demonstrates robust reliability and validity, underpinned by thorough methodological processes, including literature reviews, expert consultations, and pilot testing. Its reliability is confirmed through coefficient alpha scores indicating "good" reliability, while structural validity is established via confirmatory factor analysis. This ensures the survey accurately measures constructs related to student experiences and perceptions of equity and inclusion, making it a reliable tool for capturing meaningful insights in educational settings to assess teacher perceptions of school culture in relation to multicultural awareness and inclusivity. Responses were captured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) across eight key domains:

1. Encouragement by school leaders to teach about diverse cultures.
2. Experiences with colleagues of different races and ethnicities.
3. Comfort in having honest conversations about race.
4. Engagement with race-related topics.
5. Comfort discussing race topics with colleagues.
6. Perceived importance of conversations about race, even if uncomfortable.
7. Frequency of discussions about racial news and events.
8. Perceived support for staff to speak out against racism.

**Data Source and Procedure**

This study is based on the analysis of archived public data provided by a local school district. The dataset forms part of a public collection aimed at evaluating aspects of school culture, focusing on multicultural awareness and inclusivity. The use of archived data ensures the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants, aligning with ethical research standards by minimizing participant risk.

Given the archival nature of the data, the procedure for the original data collection included online survey administration, where teachers were invited via email. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, with assurances of confidentiality to encourage candidness.

The dataset is publicly available for research and educational purposes, accessible through the school district's public records or educational research databases. This availability supports the study's reproducibility and provides a foundation for further research into the influence of school leadership on creating inclusive and culturally aware environments.

The selection of this dataset is highly relevant to the study's goals. It offers valuable insights into teacher perceptions within the northeast region of the United States, known for its significant cultural and racial diversity. Such diversity makes the dataset an ideal resource for exploring the complexities of cultural awareness and inclusivity in schools.

The archived data were meticulously reviewed, with specific survey items pertinent to cultural awareness and inclusivity extracted for analysis. This approach allowed for a detailed examination of teacher perceptions across various dimensions of school culture, offering nuanced insights into the conducive factors for an inclusive educational environment.

**Limitations of the Study**

While extensive in its scope and analysis, this study presents several limitations that must be acknowledged. Firstly, the quantitative nature of the research may not fully capture the intricate nuances and context-specific details that are crucial for understanding the varied teacher perceptions and responses. Quantitative data often provide broad overviews but can overlook the subtleties of individual experiences and the unique cultural, socio-economic, and institutional contexts of different schools. Such nuances are vital for a deeper understanding of the reasons behind the variability in teacher perceptions and engagement with multicultural and inclusivity issues.

Furthermore, the reliance on self-reported data from teachers could introduce biases such as social desirability bias, where respondents might provide answers they believe are expected rather than reflecting their true feelings or practices. This aspect could affect the authenticity and reliability of the data regarding teachers' actual experiences and attitudes.

Additionally, the study's design might not account for external factors that influence teacher perceptions, such as recent community events or changes in school policy, which could have significant but unmeasured impacts on the findings. Thus, while the study offers valuable insights into multicultural awareness and inclusivity in urban middle schools, these limitations suggest that the conclusions drawn represent a generalized snapshot rather than an exhaustive exploration of individual teacher experiences. Likewise, these findings serve as a preliminary snapshot, offering useful insights while highlighting the need for further research to explore the complex, nuanced realities within each educational setting.

**Data Analysis**

Descriptive statistics were employed to analyze the teacher perceptions reflected in the dataset. Mean scores, standard deviations, and ranges for each domain were calculated to identify trends and variations in views on multicultural awareness and inclusivity. Comparative analyses were also conducted to highlight potential differences in perceptions among teachers from diverse school settings.

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics summarizing teacher perceptions on various aspects of school culture, provides a nuanced understanding of how educators perceive the role and impact of school leadership on promoting multicultural awareness and inclusivity. Table 1 offers a comprehensive overview of the mean scores and standard deviations, for teacher perceptions across eight key aspects of school culture. These aspects include the encouragement by school leaders to teach about diverse cultures, experiences with colleagues of different races and ethnic backgrounds, comfort in having honest conversations about race, engagement with race-related topics, comfort discussing race topics with colleagues, the perceived importance of

conversations about race even if uncomfortable, the frequency of discussions about racial news and events, and the perceived support for staff to speak out against racism.

**Table 1**

*Descriptive Statistics Summary of Teacher Perceptions on School Culture Aspects*

| School Culture Aspects | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|
| 1. School Leaders Encouraging Teaching About Diverse Cultures | 3.39 | 1.09 |
| 2. Thinking of Experiences with Colleagues of Different Races/Ethnic Backgrounds | 3.70 | 0.93 |
| 3. Honest Conversations About Race | 3.14 | 1.03 |
| 4. Thinking Deeply About Race-Related Topics | 3.03 | 1.13 |
| 5. Comfort Discussing Race Topics with Colleagues | 3.52 | 0.94 |
| 6. Importance of Conversations About Race Even if Uncomfortable | 2.55 | 1.02 |
| 7. Talking About Racial News and Events | 2.84 | 1.07 |
| 8. School Help Staff Speak Out Against Racism | 3.05 | 1.12 |

**Encouragement by School Leaders.** The average score of 3.39 for encouragement by school leaders to teach about diverse cultures indicates a moderate level of perceived support among teachers. However, the standard deviation of 1.09 suggests variability in this perception, indicating that while some educators feel strongly supported, others do not.

**Interpersonal Experiences and Conversations About Race.** Teachers reported generally positive experiences with colleagues of different races and ethnic backgrounds, as evidenced by a mean score of 3.70. This suggests an inclusive environment within staff communities. However, comfort levels in having honest conversations about race (mean = 3.14) and engagement with race-related topics (mean = 3.03) were lower, with standard deviations over 1.00, indicating a notable spread in responses.

**Comfort and Importance of Race-Related Discussions.** The relatively higher comfort level in discussing race topics with colleagues (mean = 3.52) contrasts with the lower perceived importance of having uncomfortable conversations about race (mean = 2.55).

*Discussions on Racial News and Support Against Racism.* Teachers' moderate frequency of discussions about racial news and events (mean = 2.84) alongside moderate support for speaking out against racism (mean = 3.05) underscores a cautious approach to addressing current events and systemic issues within educational settings.

## Findings

Table 2 provides a detailed look at how teachers across various urban middle schools perceive the level of encouragement they receive from school leaders to teach about diverse cultures. The metrics include the mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum scores for each school where data is available.

**Table 2**

*Teacher Perceptions of Encouragement from School Leaders to Teach About Diverse Cultures*

| School | M | SD | Min Score | Max Score |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| School A | 3.63 | 1.02 | 1.0 | 5.0 |
| School B | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| School C | 3.47 | 0.74 | 2.0 | 4.0 |
| School D | 3.29 | 0.76 | 2.0 | 4.0 |
| School E | 3.20 | 1.08 | 1.0 | 5.0 |
| School F | 4.00 | 0.72 | 2.0 | 5.0 |
| School G | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| School H | 2.67 | 1.00 | 2.0 | 4.0 |
| School I | 2.50 | 1.20 | 1.0 | 5.0 |
| School J | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| School K | 3.59 | 1.21 | 1.0 | 5.0 |
| School L | 3.25 | 1.11 | 1.0 | 5.0 |
| School M | 3.80 | 0.84 | 3.0 | 5.0 |
| School N | 3.50 | 0.84 | 3.0 | 5.0 |
| School P | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| School Q | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |

The mean scores across schools range from 2.50 (School I) to 4.00 (School F), indicating a wide spectrum of perceptions regarding leadership encouragement. This suggests varying commitment levels and diversity-focused curricula implementation across these institutions.
Standard deviations range from 0.72 (School F) to 1.21 (School K), highlighting differing levels of consensus among teachers within schools. Lower standard deviations suggest more uniform perceptions among teachers, whereas higher values indicate a broader range of views. The minimum and maximum scores reveal that, within some schools, teacher perceptions of leadership encouragement for teaching about diverse cultures vary widely (e.g., School I's scores range from 1 to 5). Notable highlights include the following: School F stands out with the highest mean score, suggesting it is a model of effective leadership encouragement in diversity education, and School I shows both the lowest mean score and a wide range of perceptions, indicating areas where leadership may need to enhance their support and visibility in promoting cultural diversity.

Table 3 provides a summary of how teachers across various urban middle schools perceive their experiences with colleagues of different races and ethnicities. The metrics include the mean score, standard deviation, minimum score, and maximum score for each school.

**Table 3**

*Teacher Experiences with Colleagues of Different Races and Ethnicities*

| School | M | SD | Min Score | Max Score |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| School A | 3.69 | 0.95 | 1.0 | 5.0 |
| School B | 3.50 | 0.76 | 2.0 | 4.0 |
| School C | 4.07 | 0.59 | 3.0 | 5.0 |
| School D | 3.86 | 0.38 | 3.0 | 4.0 |
| School E | 4.13 | 0.81 | 3.0 | 5.0 |
| School F | 3.83 | 0.56 | 3.0 | 5.0 |
| School G | 3.73 | 0.79 | 2.0 | 5.0 |
| School H | 3.89 | 0.78 | 3.0 | 5.0 |
| School I | 3.72 | 1.13 | 1.0 | 5.0 |
| School J | 2.00 | 1.22 | 1.0 | 4.0 |
| School K | 3.65 | 1.03 | 1.0 | 5.0 |
| School L | 3.38 | 0.97 | 1.0 | 5.0 |
| School M | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| School N | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| School P | 3.45 | 1.04 | 1.0 | 5.0 |
| School Q | 4.25 | 0.71 | 3.0 | 5.0 |

There are positive experiences overall. Most schools reported mean scores above 3.0, suggesting generally positive experiences among teachers interacting with colleagues of different races and ethnicities. Schools C, E, and Q, particularly, show the highest mean scores, indicating a notably inclusive environment. However, there was variability in experiences. The standard deviation values indicate the level of consensus among teachers' experiences within their schools. For example, School D shows a low standard deviation (0.38), suggesting uniform positive experiences among its teachers. Conversely, School I and School K have higher standard deviations, indicating a wider range of experiences and perceptions among staff. Likewise, there were areas of concern. School J stands out with a notably low mean score (2.00) and a relatively high standard deviation, reflecting negative experiences and a lack of consensus among teachers. On the other hand, School Q, with a high mean score (4.25) and a low standard deviation, exemplifies an environment where teachers consistently report positive experiences with diverse colleagues, highlighting it as a model for inclusivity.

Table 4 displays the aggregated responses of teachers regarding their comfort level in having honest conversations about race with their colleagues, categorized by school. Table 4 sheds light on teachers' comfort levels in engaging in honest conversations about race with their colleagues across various urban middle schools. The metrics provided include each school's mean score, standard deviation, minimum score, and maximum score.

**Table 4**

*Teacher Comfort with Honest Conversations About Race*

| School | M | SD | Min Score | Max Score |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| School A | 3.50 | 1.26 | 1.0 | 5.0 |
| School B | 3.13 | 0.64 | 2.0 | 4.0 |
| School C | 3.13 | 0.83 | 1.0 | 4.0 |
| School D | 3.00 | 1.15 | 1.0 | 4.0 |
| School E | 3.00 | 1.15 | 1.0 | 5.0 |
| School F | 3.21 | 0.93 | 2.0 | 5.0 |
| School G | 3.00 | 1.00 | 1.0 | 5.0 |
| School H | 3.11 | 1.05 | 2.0 | 5.0 |
| School I | 3.25 | 1.18 | 1.0 | 5.0 |
| School J | 2.80 | 1.10 | 1.0 | 4.0 |
| School K | 3.16 | 1.21 | 1.0 | 5.0 |
| School L | 2.96 | 0.86 | 1.0 | 4.0 |
| School M | 2.75 | 0.50 | 2.0 | 3.0 |
| School N | 2.83 | 0.75 | 2.0 | 4.0 |
| School P | 3.27 | 1.27 | 1.0 | 5.0 |
| School Q | 3.63 | 0.74 | 3.0 | 5.0 |

Key observations in Table 4 indicate general comfort levels. Mean scores across schools suggest a moderate level of comfort among teachers, with the highest comfort level reported at School Q (mean = 3.63) and the lowest at School M (mean = 2.75). This indicates that while some teachers feel relatively comfortable discussing race, a notable portion of the educator population still does not. Table 4 displays a variability in comfort levels. The standard deviation values reflect the degree of consensus among teacher responses within schools. Schools with lower standard deviations (e.g., School M, School N) show more uniformity in teacher responses.

In contrast, higher standard deviations (e.g., School A, School P) indicate a broader diversity of comfort levels among teachers. Likewise, there was a range of experiences**.** The range between minimum and maximum scores highlights the disparity in individual teacher experiences within schools. For example, School E shows scores ranging from 1 to 5, suggesting that experiences vary widely among its teachers, from feeling very uncomfortable to very comfortable with race conversations.

The data in Table 5 provides insights into how engaged teachers are with race-related topics in their professional development and classroom discussions across various urban middle schools measured by mean scores, standard deviations, minimum scores, and maximum scores.

**Table 5**

*Teacher Engagement with Race-Related Topics*

| School | M | SD | Min Score | Max Score |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| School A | 3.38 | 1.20 | 1.0 | 5.0 |
| School B | 2.43 | 1.13 | 1.0 | 4.0 |
| School C | 2.93 | 0.88 | 1.0 | 4.0 |

| School | M | SD | Min Score | Max Score |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| School D | 2.71 | 0.95 | 1.0 | 4.0 |
| School E | 2.73 | 0.88 | 1.0 | 5.0 |
| School F | 3.38 | 0.77 | 2.0 | 5.0 |
| School G | 3.09 | 1.04 | 2.0 | 5.0 |
| School H | 2.78 | 1.20 | 1.0 | 4.0 |
| School I | 2.83 | 1.25 | 1.0 | 4.0 |
| School J | 2.00 | 0.71 | 1.0 | 3.0 |
| School K | 2.81 | 1.29 | 1.0 | 5.0 |
| School L | 2.92 | 1.10 | 1.0 | 5.0 |
| School M | 3.20 | 0.45 | 3.0 | 4.0 |
| School N | 3.17 | 1.33 | 1.0 | 5.0 |
| School P | 3.36 | 1.03 | 2.0 | 5.0 |
| School Q | 4.75 | 0.71 | 3.0 | 5.0 |

Table 5 provides an overview of overall teacher engagement with race-related topics. Mean scores range from 2.00 (School J) to 4.75 (School Q), indicating a significant variation in teacher engagement with race-related topics across schools. School Q stands out with exceptionally high engagement. Teacher engagement exhibited variability. The standard deviation values, which indicate the spread of responses within each school, vary widely, suggesting differing levels of consensus among teachers about their engagement. Schools with lower standard deviations (e.g., School M) have more uniform responses, whereas higher standard deviations (e.g., School K and School N) indicate a broader range of teacher experiences. Teacher engagement displayed several challenges. The minimum scores show that in several schools (e.g., Schools A, B, C, D, E, and H), at least one teacher reported the lowest possible level of engagement (1.0), highlighting challenges some educators face in engaging with these topics.

Alternatively, Table 5 indicates exemplary practices with School Q. With the highest mean score and a relatively low standard deviation, School Q exemplifies successful strategies for engaging teachers with race-related topics, indicating high engagement and consistency in experiences among its teachers.

The data in Table 6 provides insights into how engaged teachers are with race-related topics in their professional development and classroom discussions across urban middle schools measured by mean scores, standard deviations, minimum scores, and maximum scores.

**Table 6**

*Importance of Conversations About Race Among Teachers*

| School | M | SD | Min Score | Max Score |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| School A | 3.13 | 1.09 | 1.0 | 5.0 |
| School B | 1.57 | 0.79 | 1.0 | 3.0 |
| School C | 2.33 | 1.05 | 1.0 | 4.0 |
| School D | 3.00 | 1.10 | 1.0 | 4.0 |

| School | M | SD | Min Score | Max Score |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| School E | 2.06 | 0.85 | 1.0 | 3.0 |
| School F | 2.75 | 0.85 | 1.0 | 4.0 |
| School G | 2.64 | 0.92 | 2.0 | 5.0 |
| School H | 2.22 | 0.97 | 1.0 | 4.0 |
| School I | 2.83 | 1.04 | 1.0 | 4.0 |
| School J | 2.20 | 0.84 | 1.0 | 3.0 |
| School K | 2.35 | 1.06 | 1.0 | 5.0 |
| School L | 2.38 | 0.92 | 1.0 | 4.0 |
| School M | 2.40 | 0.89 | 1.0 | 3.0 |
| School N | 2.33 | 0.52 | 2.0 | 3.0 |
| School P | 2.82 | 0.87 | 1.0 | 4.0 |
| School Q | 3.88 | 0.83 | 3.0 | 5.0 |

Table 6 displays aggregated scores reflecting teachers' importance of having conversations about race across various urban middle schools, even if these conversations are uncomfortable. Mean scores range significantly across schools, from as low as 1.57 (School B) to as high as 3.88 (School Q), indicating varied perceptions among teachers about the importance of discussing race. School Q's higher mean score suggests a more pronounced recognition of the value of these discussions within its teacher community.

The standard deviation values offer insights into the level of consensus among school teachers. Lower standard deviations, such as those observed at School N, suggest a more uniform view among teachers. In comparison, higher standard deviations, seen in schools like School A and School K, reflect a broader range of opinions regarding the importance of conversations about race. Table 6 indicates challenges in engagement. The minimum scores reveal that in several schools, at least one teacher rated the importance of having conversations about race as low (1.0), highlighting challenges or reluctance to engage with these topics within certain school contexts.

Table 7 displays aggregated scores reflecting how frequently teachers discuss current racial news and events in their classrooms or with colleagues, categorized by school. The metrics include mean scores, standard deviations, and each school's range of scores (minimum to maximum).

**Table 7**

*Frequency of Discussions About Racial News and Events*

| School | M | SD | Min Score | Max Score |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| School A | 3.31 | 1.01 | 1.0 | 5.0 |
| School B | 2.00 | 1.15 | 1.0 | 4.0 |
| School C | 2.73 | 1.16 | 1.0 | 4.0 |
| School D | 2.71 | 0.95 | 1.0 | 4.0 |
| School E | 2.38 | 0.89 | 1.0 | 4.0 |

| School | M | SD | Min Score | Max Score |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| School F | 2.92 | 0.97 | 1.0 | 5.0 |
| School G | 2.64 | 1.03 | 1.0 | 4.0 |
| School H | 2.67 | 1.12 | 1.0 | 4.0 |
| School I | 2.94 | 1.16 | 1.0 | 5.0 |
| School J | 2.40 | 1.34 | 1.0 | 4.0 |
| School K | 2.81 | 1.13 | 1.0 | 5.0 |
| School L | 2.92 | 0.83 | 1.0 | 4.0 |
| School M | 2.60 | 0.89 | 1.0 | 3.0 |
| School N | 2.33 | 0.82 | 1.0 | 3.0 |
| School P | 2.91 | 0.94 | 1.0 | 4.0 |
| School Q | 4.50 | 0.76 | 3.0 | 5.0 |

Table 7 indicates variability in engagement regarding discussions about racial news and events. There's a wide range in the frequency of these discussions across schools, with School Q reporting the highest mean score (4.50), indicating very frequent discussions. In contrast, School B has the lowest mean score (2.00), suggesting these discussions are less frequent or less emphasized. The standard deviation values indicate varying levels of agreement among teachers within schools about the frequency of these discussions. Higher standard deviations (e.g., School J [1.34], School I [1.16]) suggest a wider range of opinions and experiences among teachers. In comparison, lower standard deviations (e.g., School N [0.82], School M [0.89]) indicate more response consistency. The minimum and maximum range of scores highlights the diversity in teacher engagement with racial news and events. Some schools have a wide range (e.g., School Q, School K), indicating that while some teachers frequently engage with these topics, others do not.

Table 8 outlines the level of support teachers perceive they receive from their school in speaking out against racism, indicated by mean scores, standard deviations, and ranges of scores. Table 8 provides a summary of how supported teachers feel by their schools in speaking out against racism, a key factor affecting their willingness to address racial issues openly.

**Table 8**

*Support for Teachers Speaking Out Against Racism*

| School | M | SD | Min Score | Max Score |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| School A | 3.31 | 1.14 | 1.0 | 5.0 |
| School B | 2.71 | 1.11 | 1.0 | 4.0 |
| School C | 2.93 | 1.22 | 1.0 | 5.0 |
| School D | 2.57 | 1.27 | 1.0 | 4.0 |
| School E | 2.87 | 1.30 | 1.0 | 5.0 |
| School F | 3.17 | 0.96 | 1.0 | 5.0 |
| School G | 3.64 | 1.03 | 2.0 | 5.0 |
| School H | 2.67 | 1.22 | 1.0 | 4.0 |

| School | M | SD | Min Score | Max Score |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| School I | 3.11 | 1.18 | 1.0 | 5.0 |
| School J | 3.67 | 0.58 | 3.0 | 4.0 |
| School K | 2.89 | 1.20 | 1.0 | 5.0 |
| School L | 3.00 | 0.90 | 1.0 | 4.0 |
| School M | 3.00 | 0.71 | 2.0 | 4.0 |
| School N | 2.17 | 0.98 | 1.0 | 3.0 |
| School P | 3.36 | 1.29 | 1.0 | 5.0 |
| School Q | 3.88 | 0.83 | 3.0 | 5.0 |

The mean scores in Table 8 suggest varying levels of perceived support across schools, with School Q showing the highest level of support (mean = 3.88) and School N the lowest (mean = 2.17). The standard deviation values highlight the consensus or disparity among teachers' perceptions within schools. For example, School J has a lower standard deviation (0.58), suggesting more uniform perceptions of support among its teachers. In contrast, School P shows a higher standard deviation (1.29), indicating a wide range of feelings about the support received. Table 8 showcases extremes in perceptions: The minimum and maximum scores reveal the breadth of opinions within schools. Some schools, like School G and School Q, have a minimum score higher than 2, suggesting a baseline level of support felt by all respondents. Conversely, schools with a minimum score of 1 (e.g., School A, School B) have at least some teachers feeling a lack of support.

The analysis in Table 9 examines the variations in perceptions of multicultural awareness and inclusivity among teachers from different urban middle schools. The overall scores are derived from averaging teachers' responses to aspects such as encouragement to teach about diverse cultures, experiences with colleagues of different races, comfort in discussing race, engagement with race-related topics, and perceived support for speaking out against racism.

**Table 9**

*Overall Multicultural Awareness and Inclusivity Scores by School*

| School | *M* |
|---|---|
| School A | 3.47 |
| School B | 2.67 |
| School C | 3.14 |
| School D | 3.05 |
| School E | 2.99 |
| School F | 3.34 |
| School G | 3.14 |
| School H | 3.00 |
| School I | 3.08 |
| School J | 2.55 |
| School K | 3.10 |

| School | *M* |
|---|---|
| School L | 3.00 |
| School M | 3.08 |
| School N | 2.88 |
| School P | 3.29 |
| School Q | 4.09 |

Table 9 showcases variability across schools. The overall scores vary significantly across schools, with School Q showing the highest level of multicultural awareness and inclusivity (4.09) and School B the lowest (2.67). This variability suggests differences in how schools approach and prioritize multicultural education and inclusivity within their environments. Schools with higher scores (e.g., School Q [4.09], School F [3.34]) may have more robust policies, practices, and cultures that support multicultural awareness and inclusivity. Conversely, schools with lower scores (e.g., School B, School J) may face challenges in these areas, indicating areas for improvement.

## Discussion

The analysis in Table 1 of the study reveals a complex landscape of teacher perceptions regarding multicultural awareness and inclusivity in school culture. While there are areas of relative strength, such as experiences with colleagues and comfort in discussing race topics, areas also require targeted attention and improvement, particularly in enhancing open dialogue about race and providing consistent support for educators to address racism in professional development and curriculum. The variability in perceptions across different aspects suggests the need for a more unified and proactive approach from school leadership to cultivate an environment where multicultural awareness and inclusivity are encouraged and actively practiced, suggesting that while some schools may actively promote these discussions, others may lack the necessary support or framework to do so effectively. The findings also reflect a cultural or systemic hesitancy to engage in discussions that could be perceived as contentious or uncomfortable despite a general openness among staff.

The analysis in Table 2 reveals a nuanced picture of teacher perceptions regarding the encouragement from school leaders to teach about diverse cultures. Schools such as Urban Middle School A and Urban Middle School E are perceived more positively by their teachers, indicating a potentially more consistent and comprehensive approach to diversity in their curriculum and school culture. In contrast, the wider range of scores and higher standard deviations at schools like Urban Middle School D suggest that not all teachers feel equally supported, pointing to a need for targeted efforts to enhance leadership support and consistency in promoting cultural diversity across all urban middle schools. This could reflect differing personal experiences, awareness levels, or interpretations of school leadership actions. These findings stress the importance of school leadership in actively supporting and promoting an educational environment that values diversity. Addressing the variability in teacher perceptions requires a commitment from school leaders to advocate for and implement inclusive teaching practices and curriculum content that reflects a wide range of cultural perspectives.

The findings in Table 3 emphasize the importance of school culture in shaping teachers' experiences with colleagues of different races and ethnicities. Schools with higher mean scores and lower standard deviations may have more effective policies and practices in place to promote inclusivity and diversity. This suggests significant room for improvement in fostering an inclusive culture within this school. In contrast, schools with lower mean scores or higher standard deviations may need to examine their school culture more closely and implement strategies to improve inclusivity. This analysis underscores that while many urban middle schools create environments conducive to positive interactions among diverse staff, there is variability that warrants attention. Understanding and addressing the factors contributing to these varying experiences can enhance the overall inclusivity of the school culture, benefiting not only the teachers but also the students they serve.

The variation in comfort levels for having honest conversations about race in Table 4 underpins the need for targeted professional development and support systems within schools. Creating a supportive environment that fosters open and honest dialogue about race can contribute significantly to the overall inclusivity of the school culture. The analysis indicates that while there is a foundation of moderate comfort among teachers in discussing race, significant work remains to ensure all educators feel fully supported in these conversations. Enhancing teacher comfort with discussing race not only benefits the educators themselves but also has the potential to positively impact the students they teach, fostering a more inclusive and understanding school environment.

The variability in teacher engagement with race-related topics in Table 5 underlines the need for tailored professional development programs that address teachers' specific challenges and needs in different schools. This suggests a robust integration of race-related topics into professional development and classroom discussions. Schools with lower engagement levels might benefit from targeted support, including training on race and equity, resources to facilitate discussions, and strategies to integrate race-related topics into the curriculum effectively.

This analysis highlights the diverse levels of engagement among teachers with race-related topics in their professional development and classroom discussions. While some schools demonstrate strong engagement, indicating a proactive approach to addressing race and equity, others face challenges that may hinder effective engagement. Addressing these challenges through targeted professional development and support can enhance teachers' ability to engage with these critical topics, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and reflective educational environment.

The findings in Table 6 highlight the necessity for schools to foster an environment where conversations about race and ethnicity are valued and supported. Schools with lower mean scores may need to investigate the factors influencing these perceptions and work towards creating a more conducive atmosphere for open discussions about race. This might include professional development, resources for teachers, and institutional support to ensure these critical conversations can occur in a supportive and constructive manner. Additionally, the variation in scores, particularly in the schools with lower mean scores and higher variability, suggests a need for reflection on school practices related to diversity and inclusivity. It further points to potential areas where schools could improve support for teachers in facilitating conversations about race.

The analysis reveals a broad spectrum of teacher perceptions regarding the importance of conversations about race in their schools. It highlights the need for targeted interventions to enhance the capacity of teachers to engage in these conversations confidently and constructively. By addressing the challenges and leveraging the strengths within each school's context, educational leaders can foster a more inclusive and aware school culture that embraces the importance of discussing race openly and honestly.

The variability in teacher engagement with race-related topics found in Table 7 emphasizes the need for tailored professional development programs that address teachers' specific challenges and needs. Schools with lower engagement levels might benefit from targeted support, including training on race and equity, resources to facilitate discussions, and strategies to integrate race-related topics into the curriculum effectively. Likewise, Table 7 suggests teachers had diverse opinions about racial news and events.

This analysis highlights the diverse levels of engagement among teachers with race-related topics in their professional development and classroom discussions. While some schools demonstrate strong engagement, indicating a proactive approach to addressing race and equity, others face challenges that may hinder effective engagement. Addressing these challenges through targeted professional development and support can enhance teachers' ability to engage with these critical topics, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and reflective educational environment.

The findings in Table 8 emphasize the necessity for schools to foster an environment where conversations about race and ethnicity are valued and supported. Schools with lower mean scores may need to investigate the factors influencing these perceptions and work towards creating a more conducive atmosphere for open discussions about race. This might include professional development, resources for teachers, and institutional support to ensure these critical conversations can occur in a supportive and constructive manner. The findings indicate that teachers' perceptions of support for addressing racism can significantly differ depending on the school.

The analysis reveals a broad spectrum of teacher perceptions regarding the importance of conversations about race in their schools. It highlights the need for targeted interventions to enhance the capacity of teachers to engage in these conversations confidently and constructively. By addressing the challenges and leveraging the strengths within each school's context, educational leaders can foster a more inclusive and aware school culture that embraces the importance of discussing race openly and honestly.

The frequency with which teachers discuss current racial news and events can significantly impact school culture, potentially enhancing students' awareness and understanding of racial issues. Schools in Table 9 with higher frequencies of such discussions may foster a more inclusive and aware environment, while those with lower frequencies may need to explore strategies to encourage more frequent and meaningful engagement with racial topics.

The analysis accentuates the importance of discussing current racial news and events as part of fostering an inclusive and educated school community. It reveals significant variability in how these discussions are integrated into school practices, suggesting opportunities for some schools to enhance their efforts in this area. Encouraging teachers to engage more frequently and deeply with racial topics can contribute to a school culture that is not only more inclusive but also more reflective of the complex world students are being prepared to navigate.

The perceived level of support for speaking out against racism in Table 10 impacts teachers' willingness to address these issues, influencing the school's overall culture regarding racial awareness and inclusivity. Schools with higher mean scores may foster a more open environment where teachers feel empowered to discuss and address racism. In contrast, schools with lower scores may need to explore ways to enhance support, such as through professional development, policy changes, or creating more platforms for dialogue.

Overall, this discussion spotlights the critical role of perceived support in empowering teachers to speak out against racism within their schools. Enhancing this support can encourage a more proactive stance against racism, contributing to a school culture that not only addresses but actively opposes racial injustices. Identifying and addressing the factors that contribute to the variability in perceived support can help schools become safer, more inclusive environments for both students and staff (Banks & Banks, 2019).

## Implications of the Study

The analysis of teacher perceptions and school culture presented in Tables 1 through 10 highlights significant variability in how multicultural education and inclusivity are approached and experienced within urban middle schools. This variability underscores the critical role of educational leadership in shaping an educational environment that values and promotes diversity.

Educational leadership, as discussed by Tooms & Boske (2010), plays a pivotal role in fostering inclusive and diverse school cultures. This is further supported by Santamaría and Santamaría (2015), who emphasize the significance of culturally responsive practices in leadership to counteract educational injustice and promote sustainable change. The positive influence of diverse school leaders, as noted by Rodríguez et al. (2015), on settings serving diverse student populations underscores the importance of leadership in embracing diversity and inclusivity.

The analysis reveals that schools like Urban Middle School A and Urban Middle School E, which are perceived more positively by their teachers, may benefit from the type of leadership that prioritizes diversity and inclusivity, as advocated by Khalifa et al. (2016). These leaders not only foster positive attitudes towards multiculturalism among teachers but also establish a school-wide ethos that values and supports diversity. This aligns with the findings from Table 2, suggesting that leadership practices significantly influence teacher perceptions regarding the encouragement to teach about diverse cultures.

Teacher perceptions of multicultural education and inclusivity, critical to the successful implementation of diversity initiatives within schools, are influenced by a range of factors including personal beliefs, professional development opportunities, and the level of support from school leadership (Abacioglu, et al., 2020; Grant & Asimeng-Boahene, 2006; Nieto, 2004). This complexity is mirrored in the varied engagement levels with race-related topics and the need for targeted professional development programs, as evidenced in the findings from Tables 4, 5, and 7. The diversity of the teacher workforce itself, associated with more positive outcomes (Nevarez, et al., 2019), further emphasizes the need for a diverse teaching staff to enhance perceptions and practices related to multicultural education.

The profound impact of multicultural awareness and inclusivity on school culture, highlighted by Banks & Banks (2019), is evident in the necessity for schools to foster

environments where conversations about race and ethnicity are valued and supported, as indicated in the findings from Tables 6 and 8. The literature suggests that inclusive school cultures are characterized by open dialogue, equitable opportunities, and a curriculum that reflects the diversity of the student body. However, challenges in overcoming resistance and ensuring that multicultural education transcends superficial treatment remain significant, as noted by Sue et al. (2022).

An integral component of fostering an inclusive school environment is preparing school leaders. Effective leadership is pivotal in translating multicultural awareness into practice. Thus, training programs for school administrators should emphasize not only the theoretical understanding of diversity and inclusion but also practical skills in implementing these concepts within their schools. Leadership preparation should include strategies for facilitating open discussions on race, managing diverse classrooms, and integrating inclusivity into the curriculum. Moreover, leaders must be equipped to handle resistance and foster a supportive culture that embraces diversity. This approach ensures that leaders are aware of the importance of these discussions and are prepared to support and advocate for them in their schools actively, leading by example and setting the tone for an open and inclusive educational environment (Grooms, et al., 2024; Baker et al., 2023).

Based on the insights gathered from the discussion, it is recommended that educational leadership programs integrate specific modules that focus on cultural competence and inclusion strategies. These programs should include comprehensive training on understanding and addressing implicit biases, developing effective communication skills for discussing sensitive topics such as race and ethnicity, and implementing equitable practices across all school operations. Additionally, prospective leaders should be taught how to assess their school's culture critically and develop targeted interventions that address identified gaps in multicultural awareness and inclusivity. Workshops and simulation exercises that allow future leaders to practice these skills in real-time scenarios would be particularly beneficial. To ensure these initiatives are sustained, leadership programs should also incorporate methods for ongoing evaluation and adjustment of school policies and practices, empowering leaders to adapt to changing demographics and societal norms.

Finally, the implications of this study extend significantly into policy-making and the broader social and legislative context, underscoring the urgent need for informed decisions that could advance educational equity across diverse educational settings. The findings reveal crucial insights into the varying levels of teacher comfort and engagement with race-related discussions and the perceived support for addressing racism, pointing to a broader systemic issue within educational environments (Waite & Arar, 2020). Policymakers and educational leaders are encouraged to consider these findings as a call to action to develop more nuanced policies that not only encourage but actively support inclusive practices and open dialogues about race and identity within schools. Such policies must navigate the delicate balance between complying with state laws and fostering an educational culture that values diversity and inclusivity. Additionally, by acknowledging the external pressures that schools face due to legislative restrictions, this study provides a compelling argument for advocating at the state or national level for legislation that supports educational practices inclusive of all races and identities. Ultimately, these insights could help pave the way for a more equitable educational system where discussions about race

and inclusivity are not just permissible but are a foundational aspect of the educational experience.

## Conclusion

This study set out to explore the dynamics of multicultural awareness and inclusivity within urban middle schools, focusing on the critical roles of educational leadership and teacher perceptions. Through the analysis of teacher surveys, alongside a comprehensive review of existing literature, the study has illuminated the complex interplay between leadership practices, teacher attitudes towards diversity, and the resultant school culture.

The comprehensive analysis presented across multiple tables reveals significant insights into teacher perceptions of multicultural awareness and inclusivity in school culture. While there are areas of relative strength such as comfort in discussing race topics and positive experiences with colleagues, there is a clear need for improvement in fostering open dialogues about race and providing consistent support for educators in professional development and curriculum integration. The variability in perceptions across different schools indicates a pressing need for a unified and proactive approach from school leadership.

The findings underscore the pivotal role of educational leadership in fostering inclusive and diverse school cultures. Leaders who prioritize and actively promote diversity and inclusivity not only influence teacher perceptions positively but also catalyze the development of a school-wide ethos that values and supports diversity. This leadership approach, characterized by culturally responsive practices, is essential for counteracting educational injustices and promoting sustainable change. The positive influence of diverse school leaders further highlights the necessity of leadership that is reflective of the student population's diversity, as such representation can significantly impact the inclusivity and effectiveness of school settings.

Teacher perceptions of multicultural education and inclusivity emerged as a vital element in the successful implementation of diversity initiatives within schools. These perceptions are influenced by a myriad of factors, including personal beliefs, professional development opportunities, and the level of support from school leadership. The diversity of the teaching workforce itself plays a crucial role, with more diverse staff associated with more positive outcomes in terms of multicultural education practices. It is evident that teachers' willingness to engage in multicultural education and their comfort with discussing race-related issues are significant determinants of their effectiveness in fostering an inclusive classroom environment.

The study also highlighted the profound impact of multicultural awareness and inclusivity on school culture. Schools that effectively integrate multicultural education into their curricula and practices not only improve academic outcomes for students from diverse backgrounds but also promote equity, empathy, and respect among all students. This is in line with the understanding that culture is dynamic, and engaging with it is an ongoing, evolving journey that requires continuous effort, openness, and adaptability from educators.

However, challenges remain. The resistance from various stakeholders within the educational system, stemming from misconceptions about the goals and benefits of multicultural education, biases, or reluctance to confront issues of privilege and systemic inequality, poses a significant barrier to advancing multicultural education. Overcoming this resistance and ensuring

that multicultural education transcends superficial treatment to effect genuine cultural change within schools is imperative.

In conclusion, this study reaffirms the critical importance of educational leadership and teacher perceptions in shaping inclusive and diverse school cultures. It calls for a concerted effort from all stakeholders to embrace transformative leadership and culturally responsive practices. By doing so, schools can become more inclusive environments that celebrate diversity and equip students with the cultural competence and empathy needed to thrive in a multicultural world. The journey towards genuine cultural change in education is ongoing, and this goal can be achieved through persistent and collective efforts.

## References


Abacioglu, C. S., Volman, M., & Fischer, A. H. (2020). Teachers' multicultural attitudes and perspective taking abilities as factors in culturally responsive teaching. *The British Journal of Educational Psychology*, *90*(3), 736–752. DOI: 10.1111/bjep.12328

Adams, M. & Rodriguez, S. (2019). Moving toward: using a social justice curriculum to impact teacher candidates. *Journal for Multicultural Education, 13*(4), 320-337. DOI: 10.1108/jme-06-2019-0046

Aydin, I. S. (2013). Multicultural Education: Definition, Aims and Development. *International Journal of Social Science, 2*(2), 98-110.

Baker, A. M., Livers, S. D., Acosta, M., Willey, C., Strozier, M., & Harbour, K. E. (2023). Beyond Conventional Boundaries: Advancing Equity and Inclusivity in Educational Supervision. *Journal of Educational Supervision, 6* (2). https://doi.org/10.31045/jes.6.2.1

Banks, J. A. (2009). Diversity and citizenship education in multicultural nations. *Multicultural Education Review, 1*(1), 1-28. DOI: 10.1080/23770031.2009.11102861

Banks, J. A., & Banks, C. A. M. (2019). *Multicultural education: issues and perspectives*. 10th ed: John Wiley.

Brion, C. (2022). Impact of teachers' racial diversity on school culture. *International Journal of Educational Reform, 32*(2), 148-168. https://doi.org/10.1177/10567879221142547

Bristol, L. (2015). Leading-for-inclusion: transforming action through teacher talk. International Journal of Inclusive Education, 19(8), 802-820. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2014.971078

Bustamante, R. M., Nelson, J. A., & Onwuegbuzie, A. J. (2009). Assessing Schoolwide Cultural Competence: Implications for School Leadership Preparation. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 45*(5), 793-827. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X09347277

Collins-Ayanlaja, Brookins, W., & Taysum, A. (2018). *Empowering superintendents in the United States to empower societal innovators for equity and renewal in the community. In Turbulence, empowerment and marginalisation in international education governance systems*, 20533. Leeds, UK: Emerald Publishing Limited. doi: 10.1108/978-1-78754-675220181011.

Feingold, J. & Weishart, J. (2023). *How discriminatory censorship laws imperil public education.* Boulder, CO: National Education Policy Center. http://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/censorship

Freire, P. (2018). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Bloomsbury.

Gay, G. (2002). Preparing for culturally responsive teaching. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 53, 106–116. 10.1177/0022487102053002003

Gay, G. (2023). *Educating for Equity and Excellence: Enacting Culturally Responsive Teaching*. Teachers College Press.

Grant, R. A., & Asimeng-Boahene, L. (2006). Culturally responsive pedagogy in citizenship education: Using African proverbs as tools for teaching in urban schools. *Multicultural Perspectives*, *8*(4), 17–24. 10.1207/s15327892mcp0804_4

Grooms, A.A., White, T., Peters, A. L., Childs, Farrell, C., Martinez Jr. E., Resnick, A., Arce Trigatti, P. & Duran S. (2024). Equity as a Crucial Component of Leadership Preparation

and Practice, *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas, 97* (1), 8-15, DOI: 10.1080/00098655.2023.2286373

Khalifa, M. A., Gooden, M. A., & Davis, J. E. (2016). Culturally responsive school leadership: A synthesis of the literature. *Review of Educational Research, 86*(4), 1272–131

Liou, D. D. & Hermanns, C. (2017). Preparing transformative leaders for diversity, immigration, and equitable expectations for school-wide excellence. *International Journal of Educational Management, 31*(5), 661-678. https://doi.org/10.1108/ijem-10 2016-0227

Lopez, A. E. (2016). *Culturally responsive and socially just leadership in diverse contexts.* Springer. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-53339-5

Minkos, M. L., Sassu, K. A., Gregory, J. L., Patwa, S. S., Theodore, L. A., & Femc-Bagwell, M. (2017). Culturally responsive practice and the role of school administrators. *Psychology in the Schools, 54*(10), 1260-1266. https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.22072

Nevarez, C., Jouganatos, S. M., & Wood, J. L. (2019). Benefits of Teacher Diversity: Leading for Transformative Change, *Journal of School Administration Research and Development, 4*(1), 24-34.

Niesche, R., & Keddie, A. (2015). *Leadership, Ethics and Schooling for Social Justice* (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315818399

Nieto, S. M. (2004). *Affirming diversity: The sociopolitical context of multicultural education*. Boston, MA: Pearson Allyn & Bacon.

Portin, B. S., Knapp, M. S., Dareff, S., Feldman, S., Russell, F. A., Samuelson, C. C., & Yeh, T. L. (2009). *Leadership for Learning Improvement in Urban Schools.* The Wallace Foundation.

Ridho, M. & Tumin, T. (2022). Multicultural education: effort in overcoming problems of cultural conflict in indonesia. QALAMUNA: *Jurnal Pendidikan, Sosial, Dan Agama, 14*(1), 49-60. https://doi.org/10.37680/qalamuna.v14i1.1187

Rodríguez, C., Martínez, M. A., & Valle, F. C. (2015). Latino educational leadership across the pipeline. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education, 15*(2), 136-153. https://doi.org/10.1177/1538192715612914

Santamaría, L. J. (2013). Critical change for the greater good. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 50*(3), 347-391. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161x13505287

Shields, C. M. (2010). Transformative leadership: Working for equity in diverse contexts. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 46*(4), 558-589.

Shields, C. M. (2018). *Transformative leadership in education: Equitable and socially just change in an uncertain and complex world*. 2nd ed. Routledge.

Shields, C. M., & Edwards, M. M. (2005). *Dialogue is not just talk: A new ground for educational leadership.* New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.

Sleeter, C. E., & Carmona, J. F. (2016). *Un-Standardizing Curriculum: Multicultural Teaching in the Standards-Based Classroom*. Teachers College Press.

Sue, D. W., Sue, D., Neville, H. A., & Smith, L. (2022). *Counseling the Culturally Diverse* (9th ed.). Wiley.

Tooms A. K., Boske C. (Eds.). (2010). *Bridge leadership: Connecting educational leadership and social justice to improve schools*. Information Age.

Vassallo, B. (2022). Leading the flock: Examining the characteristics of multicultural school leaders in their quest for equitable schooling. *Improving Schools, 25*(1), 22-36. https://doi.org/10.1177/1365480221999133

Waite, D., & Arar, K. (2020). Problematizing the Social in Social Justice Education. In R. Papa, *Handbook on Promoting Social Justice in Education*, (Ed.), (pp. 169–192). Cham: Springer.