TCPEA Midwinter Yearbook

The peer-reviewed proceedings of the TCPEA Midwinter Conference 2018

Wynar v. Douglas: What Constitutes a True Threat and What Schools Can Do About It
Myrna H. Briseno & Elisabeth Krimbill

Teacher Effectiveness: A Case Study on the Impact of Collaboration, Instructional Spread and School Improvement
Jennifer Jones

Endrew F: The Impact of the Supreme Court Decision on Public Schools
Christopher McCaskill & Elisabeth Krimbill

Increasing Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Learning (SEBL) in Student Intervention Models
Landon Turrubiarte & Laura Trujillo-Jenks

Relationship between Third Grade Retention of Male Hispanic English Language Learner Students on State Academic Assessments
Ray Thompson, Hilary Kouhana, & Paul Tapper

Teachers’ Perceptions of Professional Development
Brett Welch & Neil Faulk

Multi-Year Study of Impact of Instructional Delivery on Texas Principal Certification Test Results
Warren G. Ortloff, Laura Trujillo-Jenks, Peggy Malone. & Mei Jiang

Examining Superintendent Turnover Intent: A Quantitative Analysis of the Relationship between Job Satisfaction and Turnover Intent of Public School Superintendents in Texas
Johnny R. O’Connor & Vance Vaughn

The Challenges, Conflicts, and Effective Practices of Rural Texas Superintendents
Chuck Holt & Gregg Weiss

Transformational Leadership
Stephen D. Benigno

Hiring Superintendents: Do School Boards Change Their Desired Preferences for the Next Superintendent Based on the Previous Superintendent’s Performance and Style
Pauline M. Sampson, Walter Peddy, Audrey Young, & Kerry L. Roberts

Capturing the Narrative: Administrators’ Perceptions of Truancy in a Rural Texas School District
Nathan R. Templeton & Susan Harte
Wynar v Douglas: What Constitutes a True Threat and What Schools Can Do About It

Myrna H. Briseno, Northside ISD
Elisabeth Krimbrill, Texas A&M, San Antonio

Abstract
This paper seeks to examine the impact of the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals 2013 decision in Wynar v. Douglas County School District as it impacts the safety and security in our nation’s public schools. This case study analysis will focus on the court’s guidance and the way schools may be reacting to the specific language in the decision.

Introduction
[Referring to a classmate] “no I’m shooting her boobs off/ then paul (hell take a 50rd clip)/ then i reload and take out everybody else on the list/ hmm paul should be last that way i can get more people before they run away..” [Threatening messages from the social media account of Douglas High School Sophomore Landon Wynar who had access to weapons regarding a possible future planned school shooting].

Imagine these social media messages and conversations are occurring off campus from a student who attends your school. Are campus administrators doing enough on a daily basis to protect unsuspecting students and staff from the possibility of a “real threat” that is brewing outside the school grounds?

In this paper, we intend to advise administrators on an important recent case, previous case law, and training recommendations in order to support leaders to make the best decisions possible regarding a threat to the school environment.

Statement of the Problem
In 1969 the U.S. Supreme Court clearly established that students retain constitutional protections while at school in the groundbreaking Tinker v. Des Moines School District. In contrast, the Court ruled that not all speech is protected speech in Bethel School District No. 43 v. Fraser (1986). With the inundation of online communication and social media, the legal system is grappling with a new set of problems including what is protected speech (regardless of the location of the speech or its generation) and what constitutes a true threat. This paper examines the impact of this decision on the practices of public schools and how schools are addressing online threats and harassment.

Methodology
Legal case study analysis is based on an in-depth review of the facts, issue, and holdings. Upon clarification of these key details, the analysis and opinions of the judges/Justices are then applied specifically to the school setting. This paper will examine specifically the impact of this decision on the practices and procedures which are in place to ensure student and employee safety and security.

Case Study Analysis
Facts
The plaintiffs in this case are Landon Wynar, a minor, and Mark Wynar, guardian of Landon Wynar. The defendants are Douglas County School District, Carol Lark, Nancy Bryant,
Marty Swisher, David Pyle, Cynthia Trigg (Board Panel Member), Keith Roman (Board Panel Member), and Sharla Hales (Board Panel Member).

In 2013, Landon Wynar, a sophomore at Douglas High School, was identified to have sent numerous online messages to his classmates after school on his home MySpace account. Some of the messages he sent to his friends indicated that he had access to ammunition and weapons. Landon wrote:

It’s pretty simple/ I have a sweet gun/ my neighbor is giving me 500 rounds/dhs is gay/ I’ve watched these kinds of movies so I know how NOT to go wrong/ I just can’t decide who will be on my hit list/ and that’s totally demented and it scares even myself.

i wish i could kill more people/ but i have to make due with what i got./ 1 semi-auto shot gun w/ sawed off barrel/ 1 pistol

In some of his posts Landon described Hitler as “our hero” and cited Hitler’s birthday on April 20th as an ideal date to carry out a school shooting. Hitler’s birthday is the same date as the Columbine Massacre and within days of the anniversary of the Virginia Tech Massacre. Landon wrote:

I haven’t seceded which 4/20 I will be doing it on/ by next year, i might have a better gun to use such as an MI cabine w/ a 30rd clip…. Or 5 clips….10?

She only reads my messages and sometimes doesn’t even do that./ she’s #1 on 4/20

Landon’s persecution of select groups he felt was similar to Hitler, whose persecution targeted those who did not fit Hitler’s ideal Aryan master race. Some of Hitler’s targeted groups included homosexuals, ethnic minorities, political opponents, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Jews, the disabled, the unemployed, the homeless and gypsies. Landon’s messages stated:

[in response to a statement that he would “kill everyone”] “No, just the blacks/ and mexicans/ halfbreeds/ athiests/ french/ gays/ liberals/ david

Landon’s messages also indicated he was fascinated with the facts surrounding other school shootings. Landon thought about who would be killed and why. Landon said:

and I’ll probably only kill the people i hate? who hate me/ then a few random to get the record”

[Referring to a classmate] “no I’m shooting her boobs off/ then Paul (he’ll take a 50rd clip)/ then i reload and take out everybody else on the list/ hmm Paul should be last that way i can get more people before they run away..

That stupid kid from vetch. He didn’t do shit and got a record. i bet i could get 50+ people/ and not one bullet would be wasted.

Landon’s messages became increasingly violent and disturbing. He added:

ya i thought about ripping someones throat out with one. /wow these r weird thoughts…/ then raping some chicks dead bodies to? No. maybe. Idk.

Landon’s friends began having separate messages (without Landon) and wondering if Landon was becoming serious regarding the school shooting. One stated:
that's [f.] crazy/ he told me he was going to rape [redacted]/ then kill her/ then go on a school shooting/ maybe we should be worried/ Jesus Christ dude!!!/this is some really serious shit!!/wat do we do?/I mean that is some really really sico shit and this is not something to be taking lightly seriously.

A few of the students decided to confide to a football coach at school who they trusted. They wanted to ask the coach how “to deal with him/ like how not to make him tick and go on a rampage.” The students, together with the coach, talked to the school principal about their concerns. Two police deputies then interviewed the boys, reviewed the MySpace message printouts, and called Landon in for questioning.

Landon was asked if he would like his parents to be present for the questioning. Landon did not want his parents present. The administrators asked about the messages of which Landon admitted to writing, but claimed he was joking. After the interview, Landon provided a signed written statement and was then suspended for 10 days.

The school board charged Landon with violating Nev.Rev.Stat.§392.4655 (1)(a) which provided that a student will be deemed a habitual discipline problem if there is written evidence that the student threatened or extorted another pupil, teacher, or school employee. Under Nev.Rev.Stat.§392.466(3), a student who is deemed a habitual discipline problem must be expelled or suspended for at least a semester. Landon was therefore expelled for 90 days.

Landon and his father sued the school district, school administrators, and school district officials and trustees (collectively Douglas County) for their claims of a violation of Landon’s Constitutional rights under 42 U.S.C.§ 1983, as well as for negligence and negligent infliction of emotional distress.

The legal issue before the court was related to the family’s First Amendment claim. Were Landon’s First Amendment freedom of speech rights violated? The court held that when faced with an identifiable threat of school violence, schools may take disciplinary action in response to off-campus speech that meets the requirements of Tinker v. Des Moines Independent County School District (1969).

**Definition of True Threat**

Firstamendmentschool.org states, “some courts have determined that if a reasonable person would foresee that an objective rational recipient of the statement would interpret its language to constitute a serious expression…the message conveys a true threat.”

**Educational Significance**

Schools around the nation are faced with the task of ensuring student and staff safety in an ever increasingly dangerous world. After Columbine, Sandy Hook, and the many other instances of on campus violence or threats of violence, schools are even more on edge as to how to best plan for potential acts of horror and terror while providing an enriching and individualized learning opportunity for all students.

In this Nevada case the student sent a number of troubling instant messages through MySpace to classmates from his home computer. In the messages, he bragged about having a stockpile of weapons, threatened to shoot and “take out” particular students on the anniversary of the Columbine school shooting. He further boasted that his victims would outnumber those in the Virginia Tech shooting. The school took immediate action upon learning of these multiple threats which caused in a significant disruption to the entire campus and community. The parents of the child making the threats did not agree with the disciplinary consequences that were imposed and litigation ensued.
Additional Cases

*Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District*

Understanding the Tinker Test is critical when making decisions on disciplining students regarding free speech claims. The United States Supreme Court ruled in favor of the Tinkers (they wore black armbands to silent protest the Viet Nam War). However, it also did allow individual schools to prohibit students from “protesting” if the “protest” has the chance to “influence a disruptive response” and “impinge on the rights of others.” In applying the “Tinker Test” to *Wynar v. Douglas County*, Landon’s increasingly violent speech and access to weapons convinced his own friends that there was a chance that a school shooting could take place. The students, who were Landon’s friends, voiced their concerns and fears to the school. Their fear, documentation of the messages, and Landon’s access to weapons provided the necessary evidence to the school administrators. Landon’s speech “collided with the rights of others” to feel safe coming to school. If Landon were to make good on his threats, a massive and deadly disruption of the school environment would have been catastrophic.

The Tinker Test is important to remember when making disciplinary decisions because the Court stated that “students do not shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech at the schoolhouse gate.” It is imperative to understand that all cases that were referred to in *Wynar v. Douglas* took place on school grounds or at school functions. *Wynar v. Douglas* is a case in which disciplinary action was assigned on speech occurring off campus, on the internet and after school hours. It is important for administrators to distinguish speech (on and off campus) that threatens, “the safety of the school and its students,” interferes “with the rights of other students,” and makes it “reasonable for school officials to forecast a substantial disruption of school activities.”

Administrators need to be aware that although they may not agree with certain speech, not all disciplinary action that takes place regarding limiting student speech, will have the same outcome as *Wynar v. Douglas County*.

**LaVine v. Blaine School District**

In *LaVine v. Blaine*, The Supreme Court’s discussion noted, “we live in a time when school violence is an unfortunate reality that educators must confront on an all too frequent basis. The recent spate of school shootings have put our nation on edge and have focused attention on what school officials, law enforcement and others can do or could have done to prevent these kinds of tragedies. After Columbine…. questions have been asked about how teachers or administrators could have missed telltale “warning signs,” why something was not done earlier and what should be done to prevent such tragedies from happening again.

James LaVine was a student who asked his English teacher for her opinion on a poem he had written that described harming himself and others at school. LaVine’s mother had previously read the poem and discouraged James from letting his teachers at school read it because someone at school might overreact since several school shooting cases had recently occurred. LaVine enjoyed getting feedback on his writing (this poem was not an assignment) from his English teacher but when she read it, she became concerned for James’ well-being and for the safety of the students in the school. After an investigation that included the cooperation and guidance of the counselor, the vice principal, the Blaine Police Department, Washington State’s Child Protective Services, the Community Mental Health Crisis Hotline, Dr. Charles Dewitt (the psychiatrist on duty for the hotline), Whatcom Sheriff’s Department and the principal, James was emergency expelled.

In applying the Tinker Test school officials must justify their decisions by showing facts which might reasonably have led school authorities to forecast substantial disruption of or material interference with school activities. Tinker does not require school officials to wait until disruption actually occurs before they may act. In fact they have a duty to prevent the occurrence of disturbances (however) forecasting disruption is unmistakably hard to do. Tinker does not require
certainty that disruption will occur, but rather the existence of facts which might reasonably lead school officials to forecast substantial disruption.”

Blaine School district was able to provide these facts regarding the expulsion of James from school:

- James had previously spoken to the school counselor about thoughts of suicide
- James was involved in several domestic violence disputes at home with his father
- James had to leave home to live with his sister temporarily due to the domestic violence disputes
- James had recently broken up with his girlfriend and was reported for stalking her
- James had a disciplinary file for insubordination with a teacher and wearing a shirt to school that said “eat shit and die”

The court stated “the school had a duty to prevent any potential violence on campus to James or to other students” and concluded, “the emergency expelling of James did not violate the First Amendment…”

**Bethel School District v. Fraser**

Bethel School District v. Fraser governs free speech that is considered “vulgar, lewd, obscene, and plainly offensive speech.” In this case, a student gave a speech recommending his friend for candidacy for a class office during a school assembly. The speech was full of sexual innuendos and deemed inappropriate by the administrators. A teacher previewed the text and the student was warned about the possibility of being disciplined. The school and the district took disciplinary actions and the case gave additional guidance to administrators to offensive and inappropriate on campus speech.

**Author’s Reflections on Staff Development**

In *Bethel School District v. Fraser* the teacher suggested to the student that there *might* be consequences for the “vulgar, lewd, obscene, and plainly offensive speech.” During professional development, I recommend that campus leadership meet to discuss how teachers are to advise students that may come to them regarding speech. If students were aware of the severity of their speech, it might help to guide them towards using better judgment when they are deciding what to say.

In *LaVine v. Blaine School District* a teacher was also the first line of defense when it came to speech obtaining self-harm and possible school shooting (harm to others). Involving teachers in gaining a greater understanding of what constitutes a true threat might help to provide support for some students. In a recent article about the school shooting that took place in Italy, Texas, Cassie Shook, a 17 year-old Junior states, “This could have been avoidable…there were so many signs.”

I have attended mandatory staff training on Safety and Security for many years. This past year I felt very impressed by the new guidance being provided. The presenter asked the teachers or front office to start asking parents when they register or obtain a new student if there are any protective or restraining orders which may serve to protect the school. The presenter also recommended that schools need to make sure there are procedures in place, and that staff know to report these to an administrator. Administrators should advise teachers to report any incidents of domestic abuse they become aware of in order to assist with school safety. Teachers also need to recognize that there are cases of dating violence that may impact safety in schools. The presenter also reminded teachers to report any instances of abuse to animals of which they are aware. It was noted from 1988 to 2012, 43% of 23 school shooters had previously committed acts of violence on an animal. The presenter highly recommended the book “*Why Kids Kill, Inside the Minds of*
School Shooters” by Dr. Peter Langman. The officer also highly recommended “The Unthinkable” by Amanda Ripley.

**Student Support and Education**

The presenter also emphasized that students should be supported and trained in the right mindset such as Run, Flight, Fight. Students need to not only have routine drills but to have each drill be slightly different, so students are put in different situations. What happens when shots are fired in passing period versus lunch time? Students need to be given reactions that are appropriate and realistic. He also recommended that students should be educated on the homeland security campaign of “See Something, Say Something.” They need to be aware that the campaign applies everywhere, not just at the airport or at large gatherings.

**Summary**

We need to be more cognizant and aware that we live in Texas where guns are part of a lot of our communities due to rural areas and farmlands. Partnering up with the local police department is a first step in making sure that campuses are identify dangerous spots within our schools. In this current environment it is vital that school leadership teams have the training to create and enforce procedures and policies to best ensure the safety of the students and staff in our schools.

**References**

http://www.firstamendmentschools.org/freedoms/faq.aspx?id=12996
https://scholar.google.com/scholar_case?case=9445956090859117349&hl=en&as_sd=6,44
https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/393/503/case.html
https://www.historyonthenet.com/nazi-germany-minority-groups/
https://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/393/503
https://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/478/675
https://www.texasbar.com/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Schools1&Template=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=23604
Teacher Effectiveness: A Case Study on the Impact of Collaboration, Instructional Spread and School Improvement

Jennifer Jones, The University of Texas-Tyler

Abstract

This paper is a theoretical and empirical analysis of communities of practice and teacher self-assessment of learning to increase student outcomes. This study examined the importance of building teacher efficacy through communities of practice at an elementary campus. Collaborative pedagogical planning and implementation of the principles of practice (POPs) led to school-wide transference of instructional practices and student academic growth. Collaborative planning is indispensable, and leaders must invest in teacher effectiveness by providing opportunities for teachers to share best practices. The study focused on the constructs measuring teacher self-assessment and group assessment of student learning to improve instructional practice. Teachers used short term evaluation of progress plans (STEPP) to self-evaluate and measure the effectiveness of learning. The research focused on four constructs: implementing the principles of practice based on the science of learning, measuring student learning through teacher self-assessment using the short term evaluation of progress plans, and the social transmission of best practices. The results of this research study rely on multiple sources of evidence.

Keywords: teacher effectiveness, teaching practice, collaboration, social transmission, instructional spread, diffusion of innovation, school improvement, collective teacher efficacy, literacy coaching

Introduction

School districts across the nation have launched unprecedented efforts to close the achievement gap and answer the call of federal and state legislative demands for educational reform. “[T]he fundamental purpose of the school is to ensure that all students learn at high levels” (Dufour, Dufour, Eaker, Many, & Mattos, 2016, p. 11). Research is clear that teacher effectiveness plays a vital role in student achievement (CETT, 2011; Marzano, 2000; Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997). Akiba, LeTendre, and Scribner (2007) offer empirical evidence from cross-national analyses on teacher quality for improving national achievement on the importance of investing in teacher effectiveness. In the past decade, there has been a growing interest in collaborative pedagogical planning as a part of the school’s improvement efforts. Darling-Hammond, Wei, and Andree (2010) denote one of the key foundational supports for teacher learning includes “extensive opportunities for ongoing professional learning, embedded in substantial planning and collaboration time at school” (p.1).

As a part of their daily professional practice, teachers acquire new knowledge and understanding of their students, schools, content, and instructional methods (Dewey, 1963; Schön, 1983). John Hattie (2009), following the synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses on the factors that impact student achievement, concluded that the best way to improve schools was through organizing teachers into collaborative teams to clarify what individual students must learn and evaluate progress collaboratively to assess which instructional strategies are successful in student mastery. Although a growing body of research has established the need for collaborative planning, there remains a reluctance from school leaders to embed time in
the school day for collective teacher instructional preparation that influence positive changes in teacher effectiveness and the practice of teaching. Maughan, Teeman, and Wilson (2012), in their report based on their findings on the teaching practice, emphasized the importance of planning and preparation, “[E]ffective planning and preparation provides a structure and context for teachers wishing to implement change, as well as a framework for their reflection and evaluation” (p. 3).

Successful student learning is contingent upon teacher professional growth in knowledge and the refinement of pedagogical competencies. Stronge (2007) found when teachers are trained in appropriate methodologies a correlation to student achievement exists. While, professional development workshops provide educators with the knowledge and skills to improve instruction, too often these trainings fail to provide sustained systematic approaches to solving unique problems of the complex practice of teaching on their campus (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001). Other studies have revealed outcomes of professional development has generally exhibited a weak return on the district’s financial investment (Harris & Sass, 2011; Hill, Beisiegel & Jacob, 2013; Jacob & Lefgren, 2004). Effective teaching necessitates having a deep understanding of content, its structure, and a thorough understanding of the types of teaching methods that develop new ways to help students understand content (National Research Council, 2000). Teachers who are knowledgeable in content and able to transfer this knowledge to their students are effective in reaching all learners, especially those who are at-risk student (Covay Minor, Desimone, Caines, & Hochberg, 2016; Ilmer, Snyder, Erbaugh, & Kurtz, 1997; Lewis & Paik, 2001; Peart & Campbell, 1999; Stronge, 2007).

How do we strengthen teacher efficacy in the context of their practice? How do we measure teacher changes in instructional practice as a result of professional development? Erdmann and Drew (2013) propose designing practice based on emerging brain research on the science of learning, teacher self-assessment, and reflection of the learning process to strengthen teacher effectiveness and student learning outcomes. The primary focus of their efforts to design professional development was not to train teachers on how to teach, but instead help teachers understand how both adults and students learn. Their review of research on cognition and how people learn, including memory retrieval, led them to design professional development for teachers to deepen their understanding of learning. Continued research on learning evolved from their desire to determine if teachers could improve student learning by redesigning instructional practice around the science of learning research. The goal was to have teachers implement changes instructional strategies based on cognitive strategies, measure student outcomes from these changes, and share the successful strategies with colleagues during their daily interactions to create a collective impact. During the process of designing instruction, teachers were trained to create solutions to cognitive learning challenges using the science of learning principles, design principles, and verify the results through the assessment of student outcomes. Following successful implementation of instructional strategies that produced student learning growth, teachers where challenged to share the practice with their colleagues. Desimone (2009) suggests the importance of collaboration as a part of the professional development process as “Teachers experience a vast range of activities and interactions that may increase their knowledge and skills and improve their teaching practice, as well as contribute to their personal, social, and emotional growth as teachers” (p. 182).

The purpose of this inquiry was to examine the importance of building teacher efficacy through communities of practice and assess the impact of these archetypes on outcomes of
student learning at an elementary campus. In addition, this study sought to gain a deeper understanding of the influence collective efficacy has on professional learning community teams in communities of practice. Furthermore, to examine if successful changes in instruction socially transmit or diffuse to other teachers and embed within a campus as a result of these successes. Questions guiding this inquiry were as follows: To what extent does building teacher efficacy through communities of practice improve teacher effectiveness?; What is the influence of collaboration on collective teacher efficacy?; Will systematic changes occur from teacher influence of teachers’ successful changes instructional practice and diffuse through social transmission?; and How does collective teacher efficacy influence student achievement?

Theoretical and empirical frameworks:
The theoretical and empirical frameworks in this study draws upon the theories of Social Cognitive Theory, Communities of Practice Theory, Transformational Learning Theory, and Diffusion of Innovation Theory.

Social Cognitive Theory
A considerable amount of literature has been published on self-efficacy. Self-efficacy emerged from the theoretical framework of social cognitive theory developed by Albert Bandura, Professor Emeritus of Social Science in Psychology at Stanford University in the 1970s. Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) advanced from the research on social learning theoretical frameworks established by Dollard and Miller (1950), and Rotter (1954). SCT evolved during efforts to understand the complex conceptual scheme of human learning, psychosocial behaviors, developmental changes, self-regulatory influences, and through direct experiences (Bandura, 1969; Bandura & Walters, 1963). Bandura describes life pathways as “shaped by the reciprocal interplay between personal factors and diverse influences in ever-changing societies” (2006, p. 1).

SCT analyzes developmental changes across the life span in terms of evolvement and exercise of human agency. Bandura (1977, 1986, 1997) defines perceived personal or self-efficacy as the “beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (p. 3). Four sources of influence on self-efficacy are: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological and affective conditions. Bandura (2006), from an agentic perception, suggests that people are agents whom influence one’s functioning and course of events through “self-organizing, proactive, self-regulating, and self-reflecting” (p. 3). A teacher’s application of pedagogical knowledge is influenced by the teacher’s level of self-efficacy (Watson, 2013).


The strength of families, communities, organizations, social institutions, and even nations lies partly in people’s sense of collective efficacy that they can solve the problems they face and improve their lives through unified efforts (p. 477).
The shared belief of the collective efficacy of a group, within its united efforts to establish and execute courses of action, are required to generate specified levels of achievements (Bandura, 1997). Based on Bandura’s (1977, 1986, 1997) social cognitive theory, Goddard, Hoy, and Hoy (2000) define collective teacher efficacy as “the perceptions of teachers in a school that the efforts of the faculty as a whole will have a positive effect on students” (p. 480). Similarly, Goddard, Hoy, and Hoy (2004) describe benefits of individual and collective efficacy:

Perceived collective efficacy may also be enhanced by observing successful organizations, especially those that attain similar goals in the face of familiar opportunities and constraints. Organizations may also learn from somewhat dissimilar counterparts provided they have attained highly valued outcomes (p. 5).

Tschannen-Moran and Barr (2004) found a positive relationship between collective teacher efficacy and student achievement in their study on fostering student learning. In recent years, researchers have reported evidence of the influence of collective teacher efficacy and the relationship to student achievement (Eells, 2011; Hattie, 2009, 2012, & 2016). A group’s shared belief in its conjoint capability to organize and execute the course of action to produce given levels of attainment (Bandura 1997, p. 477). Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk-Hoy and Hoy (1998) defined teacher efficacy as “teacher’s belief in his or her own capability to organize and execute courses of action required to successfully accomplish a specific teaching task in a particular context” (p. 233).

Communities of Practice Theory

The Communities of Practice Theory, developed by Lave and Wenger (1991), contributes to the idea that members of group engage with each other in their pursuit of a common practice. “Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (p. 1). Teachers learn to improve practice through informal and formal interactions with other teachers. Three characteristics of Communities of Practice include: domain, community, and practice. The domain: A community of practice is not just a connection between people, it has an identity defined by a shared domain of interest. The community: As members pursue interests in their domain, they participate in collaborative activities and discussions, assist each other, and share information. The practice: A community of practice is not simply a community of members with the same interests, they are practitioners. Members develop a “shared repertoire” of resources including experiences, stories, tools, and ways of finding solutions to a common problem. From this framework, teachers build relationships that enable them to learn from each other and develop an effective shared practice pedagogical strategies (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). “Over time, collective learning results in practices that reflect both the pursuit of our enterprises and the attendant social relations” (Wenger 1998, p. 45). Harvests of these successful practices become the property of the community.

Transformative Learning Theory

Teacher self-efficacy parallels to Mezirow’s Transformative Learning Theory. “Transformative learning is process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one’s experience in order to guide future action” (Mezirow, 1996, p. 162). Mezirow (1997) described, within the theory of transformative learning, frames of reference in which “adults have acquired a coherent body of experience—associations, concepts,
values, feelings, conditioned responses—frames of reference that define their life world” and as “the structures of assumptions through which we understand our experiences. They selectively shape and delimit expectations, perceptions, cognition, and feelings” (p. 5). According to Mezirow (2000), adults must make meaning throughout life through and requires critical self-reflection personal and professional beliefs when confronted with dilemmas that challenge those beliefs.

**Social Transmission and Diffusion of Innovation Theory**

The dynamics of transmitting knowledge from one species to another has been investigated for many decades. Heyes (1994), defined social learning as “learning that is influenced by observation of, or interaction with, another animal (typically a conspecific) or its products” (p. 207). Humans are social learners which plays an important role in the transmission of learning among individuals, promoting the acquisition of knowledge and skills. As a social process, learning takes place within the setting of daily actions and experiences (Smith, 2003, 2009) and new approaches are based on knowledge transmission. The term social transmission originated by Galef in 1976, and described “cases of social learning that result in increased homogeneity of behavior of interactants that extends beyond the period of their interaction” (Galef 1988, p. 13).

**Diffusion of Innovation**, although first originated in 1903 by Gabriel Tarde, a French sociologist, as a process of invention; “invention is but a species, is the fruitful interference of repetitions” (p. 382). Tarde described his observations of specific generalizations about diffusion of innovation (DOI) entitled the laws of imitation. In 1962 Everett Rogers developed DOI into theory through his work in communication. DOI has been referred to as the process of the dissemination or transmission of ideas, practice, product, or philosophy. Rogers (2003), defines DOI theory as “the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system” and is “a special type of communication, in that the messages are concerned with new ideas” (p. 5). The principal rudimentary elements in the diffusion of new ideas include: 1) an innovation, 2) communicated through certain channels, 3) over time, and 4) among the members of a social system (p. 11). Rogers proposed five stages of the adoption process in the diffusion of innovation: 1) Knowledge; 2) Persuasion; 3) Decision; 4) Implementation; and 5) Confirmation (p. 37). Each individual may reject an innovation any time throughout and after the adoption process. The premise of DOI theory originated from the need to explain how an idea or product gains momentum and spreads (diffuses) overtime within a specific social system.

**Collective Responsibility**

Lee and Smith (1996) and Newmann and Wehlage (1995) found a significant link between higher levels of collective responsibility and student achievement gains.

“Considering teachers’ collective responsibility for learning, the findings about its effects on adolescents are unequivocal. In schools with high levels of collective responsibility, where these attitudes are also consistent among the faculty, students learn more in all subjects (Lee & Smith, 1996, p. 130).” Collective responsibility is an important correlate of student success. Setting standards for performance related to instruction, pedagogy, and student learning. When considering collective actions for learning, the findings are very consistent: schools with high levels of collective responsibility for learning are those where students learn more in all subjects.

**Reflective and Resultant Dialogue**

Reflective practice in collaboration creates the social interaction that helps to transmit ideas and innovations between the members creating a collective impact of understandings and responsibilities related to students, learning, and pedagogical practice.

Resultant dialogue provides an opportunity for teachers to share their success and learn from their disappointments (Kruse & Louis, 1993). Collaboration in practice and the de-privatization of practice allows teachers to collectively reflect in meaningful ways by sharing and receiving feedback on their teaching practice.

**Collective Teacher Efficacy**

The ongoing study of teaching and learning continues to be at the forefront of school reform. Effective teachers are central to improved student learning and must be prepared to meet the increasing demands of the classroom. Academic success is incumbent upon the quality and effectiveness of teachers. “Effective teachers have extensive content knowledge and possess a bank of appropriate teaching strategies, which they apply to their knowledge of the ways in which students learn” (Stronge, 2007, p. 158). Maughan, Teeman, and Wilson (2012), found that teacher-led monitoring and evaluation leads to positive changes in teaching practice. Self-regulation through monitoring and evaluation by teachers is fundamental to effective change with learner outcomes as the central focus and not just the change process itself.

Purposeful collaboration of teacher teams has consistently revealed associations of quality of instructional and assessment practices and higher levels of student learning (Dufour, Dufour, Eaker, Many, & Mattos, 2016). Kruse & Louis (1993) encouraged the de-privatization of practice among teachers and to share craft in public ways within professional communities. The researchers described the focus of collaborations through “facilitation of organization learning in such ways as to increase the dissemination of new knowledge and to provide forums for the examination of previously held beliefs; and provision of a support structure for teachers as they implement new and challenging pedagogical methodologies” (p. 14). In addition, they describe the positive effects of collaborative work with peers. They suggest collaboration “increases teacher’s sense of affiliation with each other and their sense of mutual support and responsibility for the effectiveness of instruction” (p. 14).

Collaboration and collective teacher efficacy go hand in hand when teachers have an opportunity to provide quality feedback on pedagogical methodologies (Louis & Smith, 1992). Sergiovanni (2004), explained that when cultures work collaboratively, each person has a role that characterizes their commitment and is part of a relationship that is reciprocal and defines mutual obligations. Lee & Smith (1996) found gains in student achievement are significantly higher when the collective responsibility of teachers for the learning performance of students and the instructional performance of teachers is prioritized. Increased personal commitment of professionals to their work and taking ownership for the responsibility of successes or failures of pedagogical practice heightens student learning outcomes.

Collective responsibility for practice suggests that all teachers be held accountable for the academic achievement of students as well as the pedagogical growth and development of all members of the school community. Strong professional school communities encourage collaboration among teachers to develop shared understandings (Kruse, Louis, & Bryk, 1994). When building collaboration, openness to improvement must be supported by the principal in order for teachers to try new strategies and take risks (Kruse, Louis, & Bryk, 1994). Collective responsibility for student learning improves student outcomes and refines teacher pedagogics.
Recent literature underscore the need for assessing change in teacher practice to develop teacher capacity (Biancarosa, Bryk, & Dexter, 2010; Allen, Pianta, Gregory, Mikami, & Lun, 2011; Saunders, Goldenberg, & Gallimore, 2009). At the heart of a learning community is the commitment and focus on the learning of all students (Dufour, Dufour, Eaker, Many, & Mattos, 2016). Communities of practice provide this opportunity for teachers to combine knowledge and improve practice. As collaborators in practice, teachers make it their collective responsibility and commitment to ensure goals are results-driven and each member of the community shares in the duties in the work of student achievement.

Methodology

A qualitative ethnographic research design was used to address the research questions of this case study. The case study approach is found within the paradigm of empirical qualitative research design (Creswell, 2007) and following the grounded theory method of inductive reasoning to develop a generalized theory from empirical observations. Charmaz and Bryant (2008) describe grounded theory as a method of qualitative inquiry in which the theory emerges through the products of that inquiry, “both data collection and analysis inform and shape each other and are conducted in tandem” (p. 374) and method uses induction to systematically develop higher-level propositions that explicate the organization of data. Case studies investigate phenomenon through an in-depth examination and used to explore the multidimensional understandings of complex issues. Yin (2003) defines a case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 3).

Participants

The population of this study consisted of 25 teachers (N=25) from an elementary campus with an enrollment of 641 students and in a suburban district serving over 34,000 students. A selective sampling approach was used for this study. Four grade levels were interviewed Kindergarten, 1st, 3rd, and 4th. This research was initiated in the winter of 2016 after one of the participants attended the science of learning professional development institute How do we compensate for a brain wired to forget? during the spring of provided by Syfr Learning.

Research Design

The case study method places a strong emphasis on theoretical approaches and presents data relative to cause-and-effect relationships. Qualitative methods used in this study included interviews, focus groups, observation, and textual analysis. The study assessed the multilevel relationship between teacher efficacy and collective efficacy by using data collected from elementary teachers in a large suburban school district. The researcher used the participant observer approach to collect data through both social and physical immersion in the case. Using the ethnographic approach, the research and data collection followed various forms of inquiry through experiences, observations, conversations, and textual analysis. Second, the researcher utilized descriptive data allowing for data to take the form of words and observations rather than numbers (Creswell, 2007). A constant comparative method was used (Creswell, 1998), developing a theory as information from data collection is analyzed and compared it to emerging themes and categories from interviews.

Data was collected from core academic elementary teachers and instructional support teachers through interviews during professional learning vertical team meetings,
observational data, student academic data, and a review of teacher and student artifacts. The interviews were conducted informally in a group setting during grade-level professional learning team meetings. Four elementary grade level meetings were observed, video recorded, and transcribed for analysis. The transcriptions were coded using the basic tenets of grounded theory for analysis. Codes were developed and cultivated from the source of what was observed in the data. The resultant findings were substantiated by triangulation with interviews, documents, and field notes. Triangulation is the combination of multiple methods to test for consistency and "to illuminate an inquiry question" (Patton, 2002, p. 248).

**Research Questions:**

Analysis in this study was guided by four questions:

To what extent does building teacher efficacy through communities of practice improve teacher effectiveness?

What is the influence of collaboration on collective teacher efficacy?

Will systematic changes occur from teacher influence of teachers successful changes instructional practice and diffuse through social transmission?

How does collective teacher efficacy influence student achievement?

**Results**

The professional development model researched in this study used the Train the Trainer approach where one to two teachers from a campus become experts in a training and then shares the knowledge learned to others in the organization. Syfr Learning framed the learning into categories: cognition, motivation, and relationships. The professional development trained teachers to explore cognitive learning processes and strategies to help students acquire, remember, and accelerate knowledge. Specifically, teachers learned how to use cognitive strategies and the principles of practice (POPs) to increase learning through repetition, variation, spacing learning over time, observing, simplify and connecting or association, giving the student a sense of progress, accelerating with models, rigor, and creativity. Teachers were challenged to make instructional changes, space learning over a short period of time, evaluate student learning from the change in practice, and share successful principles of practice. Participants learned to:

- Design practice that is repetitive and increasingly complex and/or difficult over time;
- Space learning, both within the class periods, over several days, and even over months;
- As the practice is repeated, it needs to be varied. Variation ensures duration with flexibility;
- The new skill or content should be associated with prior knowledge, multiple senses, and emotions through story, narrative, and surprise; and
- The practice provides the student with a sense of progress.

Teachers followed the STEPP (Erdman & Drew, 2013) a systematic framework to implement and evaluate instruction. The STEPP focuses on the Syfr Learning Principles of Practice (POPs) in cognition, motivation, and collaboration and the learning principles of rigor or stretch, variation in repetition, and simplification through summarization. Learning targets were used as a guide in the problem-based project and the goal relative to the target. Six steps were used to outline and implement design student learning (Erdman & Drew, 2013):
1. State the learning target (standard, topic, unit them or concept) and purpose for selection;
2. Name the instructional principle(s) that will be implemented and evaluated;
3. Describe the measurement or evaluation of data to be conduct. Using a comparison measure to evaluate changes in the rate or depth of learning.
4. Describe the strategy selected and the tactics or activities used to implement the strategy and principle of practice for students to acquire content knowledge.
5. Describe the results using data and anecdotal evidence.

Following the training and implementation of the STEPP, participants were asked to share the successes of the instructional design with other teachers on their campus following the Train of Trainers model. The successful design of learning using the principles of practice in this study was shared by one individual who attended the professional development session. The science of learning professional development initiative was designed on the premise that successful changes in practice and student learning will spread through collaborative interactions through communities of practice. Teachers are viewed as researchers in their own design of instructional practice through the implementation of scientific approaches in learning and measuring the results. From these results, teachers assess progress and make additional changes as needed. When teachers make changes in practice, measure mastery in learning, and discuss the student learning growth with other teachers, instructional spread will occur across the campus and potentially district-wide.

In this study one participant was trained and returned to campus to implement the strategies. During the training, the teacher learned strategies to increase students’ memory recall, accelerate and deepen learning, and apply constraints to stretch learning that require rigor or challenge. When the participant returned to campus following the professional development institute, she followed the STEPP to design and evaluate changes in instructional practices using the learning principles and principles of practice to teach the alphabet, phonic, phonemic awareness, blending and segmenting, and sight words. She self-assessed student learning from changes in practice and began to observe increased student learning outcomes. She used activities that included repetition with variation, association, spaced instruction over time, and created a sense of progress by tracking student growth. She analyzed the impact of these changes to assess the effectiveness of the tactic or activity. As she assessed, she gathered evidence of student learning progress. Observing successful changes in student learning led her to share the learning principles and principles of practice with other teachers on her campus. She began to coach the grade-level teams to design instruction and pursue measurable improvements in learning.

TOT (Original Trainer of Trainers): “In all my years as an Instructional Support Teacher, I haven’t seen the growth I am seeing in a variety of Tier 3 students in reading….Just today, I’ve had several conversations about using the same strategies in Tier 1, 2 and 3. Teachers have asked me to show them how to incorporate them in Tier 2 instruction and two first grade teachers shared success of their Tier 3 students and one kindergarten teacher.”

From her success, the social transmission of the STEPP began to diffuse to other teachers as they utilized the Fast 5 Assessments they created for reading and math to be distributed to students on Fridays to assess the new skill or strategy that had been taught or reviewed. Teachers subsequently recorded the grades and data for instructional purposes for the following week. Afterwards, the teachers had the students graph their scores the following Monday and set goals based on data and feedback from their teacher. The teacher
then addressed and retaught areas in need of remediation based on individual student results during their flex-time. Following remediation, students are retested. The teachers collectively combined the data onto a grade-level document used to drive instructional planning during their grade-level professional learning communities meetings. Closing of the end of the six-week period, the teachers administer the *Fab Ten Assessment* in reading and math. Each week the teachers spiral in the essential skill to check master and long-term memory recall.

**Social Transmission through communities of practice:**

When asked how teachers shared practice and functioned together as a team in their communities of practice, all participants interviewed agreed collective practice facilitated the spread of successful strategies and increased the effectiveness and growth of community. The diffusion of researched-based instructional strategies helped influence interpersonal networks to accelerate the transmission of instructional strategies.

K1: “We learn better and we share faster when it’s from another teacher rather than from somebody downtown telling you what to do.”

K2: “We were looking at one of the fast fives that we did this year and it’s actually a fast five that we did at the very end of last year that we did the second six weeks of this year. They are progressing a lot... I’ve noticed that they hang on to place value very well because they are seeing it every single week on these fast fives.”

K2: “With our conversations, some of our kids are doing a great job with this. Some of them weren’t. ‘What are you doing to where you kids can add more? What are you saying to your kids to where they understand that they need to work on main idea or inferencing?’ It’s given us really good conversations in our team meetings. We’ve also come back the next week after done the fast five and say, ‘wow, my kids really bombed this question. They did really well on this question. What did you do and why are my kids not getting this?’ It helps us break down the problems and see.”

K3: “Also, we have two different teachers: one who makes the math and one who makes the reading. But, we bring it together and say ‘Oh, they aren’t going to get this. Maybe reword it. Last week they would have done it better if we said it this way.’ This doesn’t have to do with the fast five, but we talk about ways the fraction garden. It is on the district summative. We were like, ‘This would have been so much easier if they had paper already drawn with the gardens.’ Make it to where they are going to understand it and not just guessing.”

K2: “It is giving our team really good conversations and having us break down like, ‘What strategy are you teaching them to get this question right?’ It’s a work-in-progress throughout the year.”

The responses demonstrate the dissemination of successful strategies spread from the original trained participant to other teachers on the campus. The reflective conversations initiated continued conversations on additional strategies that spread across grade-levels.

**Teacher Self-Assessment and Collaboration:**

When inquiring about their own self-assessment of teaching and learning and having an opportunity to collaborate in the grade-level professional learning community with their colleagues, all agreed collaboration increased teacher efficacy and collective efficacy.

K2: “Yes, it helps. Some of us are stronger in math and some of us or stronger in reading. I can break down math a lot easier than I can reading. So somebody who might not be able to do that as well, I can say, ‘This is a strategy that I tried to show my kids.’ Even with reading, I’ve been able to pick other teachers brains with different ways they are wording things that help me. This wasn’t with the fast five, but one day
last year I was absent and my class had to be split and they came back and said, ‘Mrs. M had us do this.’ Even that helped me out and I am using that strategy just from hearing what she was doing in her class. She had the kids read the questions before the passage now. That wasn’t what I was doing before in my class. But now I am implementing that. It has helped their reading. They now have a purpose for reading. They are like little detectives and they’ll read something and say, ‘I’ve heard that question before. That’s the answer!’”

K3: This year we’ve done so much better with lesson planning. In the past it was like, “Okay, you do science, you do social studies.” This year we have been meeting twice a week and really go over and throw in ideas, add stuff to our google drives. And now when we get to our lesson plans we know what we are doing.”

K2: Our conversations have made progress even since last year... Now that we’ve taught a little bit together we are able to come this year and plan day by day, subject by subject and it is intentional. We are having those conversations about the lessons of what worked well or teachers will come in with a new idea. I feel like we are flowing a lot better.”

F1: “And it (Fast Five) helps us as a team when we are planning, if on a fast five on one they didn’t do so great, it helps us know that next week we need to refocus on that do some re-teaching and then move forward.”

F2: “It definitely does because like you said, before we had an idea of where they were. But now, we have the data here. We know, maybe we didn’t teach this the right way. Maybe we need to go back if most of our kids didn’t get it. It is going to help us and we can share ideas so that next week we can say we did it. I can say, ‘Good job, team!’ I think it helps us reflect a lot as a team on how we presented it and if we need to go about it a different way.

T1: “We started the year with what is leveling up and what does it look like. How do you level up to show the growth? In each one they have a test, they show what is a goal that they wanted to make, and how did they do. What is a pattern that you see? We started off with what is stamina for making that connection to independent reading. When they finally got the grip of what is stamina and how do you use stamina to listen throughout a whole lesson even if it is 10-12 minutes. Then, how do you build on that so you can take a test for a long time. That is just connection with what is building stamina. And we just have conversations throughout the week like how are you doing, what is your goal. Sometimes they can say that they will make a 100, sometimes they’ll say that they can make an 80. We look at the growth.”

T3: “And it is easier to see that. Like before it was, ‘I think they get it.’ But now you can see it whether they did or they didn’t. You can say, ‘You know, my kids really bombed this subtraction thing. What did you do for kids who struggled?’

T4: “Sharing with each other? We do that in our planning meetings. We do it constantly in the hall. We have a team meeting that we plan on Tuesdays. Then sometimes when we are planning, it will take forever because someone will say how they taught that or someone will ask a question like how the kids did on that. It ends up happening in our conference time, or just like at school yesterday, Mrs. G. and I sat down and talked about problem solving. ‘What are you doing so they know what they are supposed to do?’ We constantly have those conversations. It’s a part of our planning. Our planning takes a long time. We try to have more conversations. From doing it for years, you know what kind of things that they are going to miss so you
share. And we have accidental meetings in people’s rooms one day. Someone else will come in, ‘What are y’all talking about?’ all because someone asked a question. We try to share ideas. We also do all of our planning on google drive, so we have our lessons there. And then we have folders for ELA, math, science, social studies where we upload instead of emailing each other. We have folders that we all share like if you make a PowerPoint, lesson, or assessment.

FO1: “For us (in the past), we were all on a different page. Our relationships weren’t the best. It was our revamping the fast five (and not just some people using it on Fridays) and coming together and coming together to work the assessments so that we were all looking at it seeing what we were doing and gathering it up brought us together as a team...It was not good for us, it was not good for the kids. But, it got us all on board and all on the same page. We had very effective team meetings. Instruction got better because we knew what we were doing. So, it was really good. It really does guide. When we look at our data, when we look at the student’s data, we take it personally. I think that’s what makes you a better teacher.”

FO4: “It’s a more comfortable atmosphere that you don’t feel so stressed about. It takes all of you to do it.”

FO2: “I need someone to motivate me. Last year, I wanted to do it all but none of it got done. Now with Melissa on the team, she has sparked fire under us.”

The responses demonstrate improving student learning is a collective responsibility. Collaborative pedagogical planning was critical factor in the school’s improvement efforts.

**Collective Efficacy and Student Achievement**

When asked about teacher collaboration in their community of practice and its influence student achievement, teachers believed it improved their effectiveness and collective teacher efficacy in improving student outcomes.

K3: “It’s exciting to see them progress and seeing the lightbulbs go off.”

K2: “And they are picking up on it so fast this year. It’s so cool to see. The first weeks of their data folders and their goals that they were setting. They were looking at them Tuesday when they were setting goals, they looked at their first six weeks and they were like, ‘Oh, reading it three times was my strength. That wasn’t a good goal.’ They are noticing their progression and their goals having more substance and being stronger.”

IST: “The thing that I think is the greatest about the (student) data binder it gives the kids a sense of progress.”

F1: “I’ve noticed that they are picking up on vocabulary that usually we wouldn’t emphasize until after Christmas. Like, ‘What words in this word problem tell you that you need to add or subtract?’ Usually we don’t do that until around Christmas time. It was a disaster.”

FO1: “So, I got with those two teachers and asked if there was a way to make it more intentional because there are some standards that we were really struggling with. When the unit is done, you don’t bring them up again. We got the data from third grade heat map so we could see what gets carried over to us and what we can help with also. We identified three specific areas that the kids were struggling with. We took the first three questions on the fast five and made them those three standards. And the last two questions are our unit questions or skill we are covering. We took our assessment, and it wasn’t graded. But, we knew that was going to happen. We created a data binder so the kids could chart their progress. We use that to guide or
instruction. The next week, we create a fast five again. We had the same three standards again, the question was different, but it was still the same standard. The last two were unit questions and continually charted the progress. We fine-tuned it. So we all created a procedure so that we were all doing it continuously. We charted the class data, the teacher would graph the scores. The kid would graph in the data binder. We would bring our data back as a team and compare it and say, ‘Their class is doing really well. How are you teaching it? Show us a new lesson that you do.’ We saw an initial dip, but then soon after, probably 6-7 weeks after doing it our scores went up. For the kids, if you missed a fast five, they let you know. They set goals based on their scores. At first it was like, ‘I didn’t do well, that was hard.’ And we asked them to be a little more specific. For second graders, that was hard. It took a while. But, eventually it got to where they were reviewing the quiz and we were going over it together and they would say, “I made a mistake, I didn’t read this. Or, I have having trouble with my procedure for the math problems.” So, it worked out really well. It was very effective." TOT: “I’m just more deliberate and intentional. I’ve noticed also how important it is for them to see their own growth especially in the ones that struggle. And I think that we’ve implemented a lot more different things because of the ones we know that work.... They make progress faster. They are doing the fast five now that they did at the end of the year last year. So I think just in the year of having that they have grown so much faster than they did last year. Charts of that were shown the other day and we were are in there talking about we wanting to do further assessment, but I wanted them to see that... yeah, they are not where they need to be, but I want you to see how far they’ve gotten and what has happened since they have been in here. They are making progress, we would like for it to be faster, but they are making progress.”

When discussing struggling students, teachers shared the use of the principles of practice in their instructional design to improve learning.

FO2: “We are having them label everything, label the numbers, the story problem, and showing multiple ways of doing it. We have them pick out certain strategies that work and prove their point and not say ‘I do this lattice multiplication because I like the look of it,’ but prove it over and over again.”

FO3: “Math is multiple strategies, showing them one problem multiple different ways.”

FO2: “We give them days using strategies and then they can they can tell you which one they feel comfortable with. They can label it. They may like the lattice, or they feel comfortable doing the area model, or say, ‘I can do the quotient pyramid where I do the quotient on top. I can do a traditional algorithm.’ They can actually name their strategy rather than just showing you what they can do. They can place a label to it now. That’s when you know that they are there.”

Collective efficacy improves teacher effectiveness and plays a vital role in student achievement.

Conclusions

The relationship between theory and empirical data existed within this study. Following Bandura’s (1986) theory of Social Cognitive Theory, teachers mastered experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological and affective conditions. Research supported the hypothesis that when teachers have the opportunity to influence their colleagues and have the autonomy to make instructionally relevant school decisions, collective responsibility increases following Mezirow’s (1996) Transformative
Learning Theory. Learning transmitted socially through reciprocal exchanges of individuals, behaviors, and environment forming a collective teacher efficacy and supporting the premise of Diffusion of Innovation Theory. Findings also support that collective efficacy beliefs provides a necessary framework for teacher efficacy and fosters a commitment to school goals and gains in student achievement. The results of this case study offers evidence of the impact of teacher collaboration on increased teacher efficacy and collective teacher efficacy and student achievement. Teachers are more likely to improve student learning and their self-efficacy and the effectiveness of their colleagues through access to collaborative planning. The study of teacher self-assessment of learning can influence collective efficacy and provide understanding of social transmission of effective instructional design that improve student outcomes.

The analysis of data demonstrate the need for a collaborative focus on pedagogical effectiveness. The findings suggest that teacher collaboration on instructional strategies lead to improvements in teacher effectiveness, the spread of successful instructional strategies, and increased student achievement. Compelling evidence provides implications for educational leaders to build a systematic framework by providing opportunities for collaborative planning to increase teacher effectiveness and heighten school improvement efforts in support of Lave and Wenger’s (1991) Communities of Practice.

Notwithstanding its limitation, this study makes an important contribution toward understanding the effects teacher self-assessment, communities of practice, social transmission and the influence on collective teacher efficacy and student learning outcomes. The interpretation of findings assumes a well-defined causative direction: teachers’ self-assessment of instructional practices, changes in practice from self-assessment, and collaboration through communities of practice effect systematic changes in practice and student learning outcomes.

Educational Importance of the Study:

Despite the extensive research conducted on teacher effectiveness and student achievement, additional research is needed on the effects of collaborative pedagogical planning. This study aimed to contribute to the knowledgebase of how teacher self-assessment of learning and communities of practice effect student achievement by examining the impact of collaboration, teacher learning, and the spread of effective instructional practices. Teachers who self-assess their own teaching, using evidence of student learning to drive and improve instruction, helps all students learn and improves teacher effectiveness. The results of this study suggest that collaborative instructional planning is indispensable and leaders must invest in teacher effectiveness through opportunities for teachers to plan and collaborate.

The results of this case study indicate that the collective teacher efficacy is directly related to increased teacher effectiveness and the academic performance of the students. When teachers self-assess their own instructional practice outcomes and alter instruction from the evaluation of student learning, student achievement increases. Through application of the Principles of Practice (POPs) and Short Term Evaluation of Principle of Practice (STEPP) teachers were able to increase student learning in their classes. The successes in teacher self-assessment of practice and learning outcomes influenced the social transmission of researched-based instructional practices through communities of practice. Teacher self-assessment and the diffusion of successful instructional practices improved individual and collective teacher effectiveness and student achievement.
If teachers are to prepare an ever more diverse group of students for much more challenging work—for framing problems; finding, integrating and synthesizing information; creating new solutions; learning on their own; and working cooperatively—they will need substantially more knowledge and radically different skills than most now have and most schools of education now develop (Darling-Hammond, 1997, p. 154).

This study expands the level of understanding of teacher effectiveness through self-assessment, collaborative teacher relationships, and the spread of successful instructional strategies that lead to increased student learning outcomes. The findings indicate the need for district and campus leaders to recognize the significance of teacher self-assessment and collaboration and allow adequate time for scheduled collaboration and planning to prioritize instruction to improve student learning. Cultivating teaching and learning practices through teacher self-assessment of planning, practice, reflection, dialogue, revision, and collaboration in the work creates of a continuous cycle of improvement in student achievement for all.

Student learning is contingent upon teacher professional growth in knowledge and refinement of pedagogical competencies and supported through communities of practice. In conclusion, heightening teacher effectiveness increases student learning, this study authenticates the need for creating collaborative learning environments. Improving teacher efficacy and communities of practice helps to build a framework for collective teacher efficacy.

References


Abstract

The study of law and our judicial system is vital in the field of educational leadership. Not only are the campus leaders the “legal expert” on their campus, they are also confronted daily with problems that they must solve which require a deep understanding of policy and individual rights. The basic perspective which drives legal research is the desire to understand the why and how laws are made and what are the results of those actions on our society, and specific to this research, on our educational system.

Introduction

All students are entitled to an education, despite gender, race, ethnicity, or disability. Since the 1975 adoption of Education of All Handicapped Children Act (PL-142). This law mandates for students that they be provided a free and appropriate education in the “least restrictive environment.” The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) which became law in 1990 increased the expectations for schools to place students in the most inclusive environment. “All qualified persons with disabilities within the jurisdiction of a school district are entitled to a free appropriate public education” (US Dept of Education, 2010). A free appropriate public education also known as FAPE, is what outlines and specifies the expectations for how public education needs to provide support for students with special needs within the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The idea is that schools will provide accommodations and/or modifications in order to aid students with disabilities to be able to participate, in as close to the same capacity as possible as their peers. The level of appropriateness is to be prescribed through the Individual Education Plan (IEP) of each and every student who qualifies for special education services.

“Special education may include specially designed instruction in classrooms, at home, or in private or public institutions, and may be accompanied by related services such as speech therapy, occupational and physical therapy, psychological counseling, and medical diagnostic services necessary to the child’s education” (US Dept of Education, 2010). This statement within IDEA from the US Department of Education sets the stage for ensuring that students are in their Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). As described there many different settings that may need to be provided depending on a student’s need; they may require in depth services that will cause them to not be able to participate in the general education environment and have them be in the most restrictive environment with only students that have similar special education needs. However, the expectation is that the committee creating the IEP will look closely at the students’ needs and ensure that they are included within the general education setting as much as possible. Creating a plan that allows and helps the student to be with their peers and progress within the general education setting is one of the most important goals of delivering FAPE for students with disabilities.

Ensuring IDEA through the expectation of FAPE and providing services in the least restrictive environment as possible can and does prove to be challenging. Many different people come together to create IEPs and the idea is that the student’s specific needs will be looked at and the most appropriate education will be provided. Sometimes, however there can and have been major disparities between what people believe to be the most appropriate education plan for a student. Such disparities have been brought before the court system many times in such cases as Board of Education v. Rowley, 458 U.S. 176 (1982), where the court saw disparity between the
child’s achievement and the child’s potential. In the end, they ruled that FAPE is to be defined as, “an opportunity to achieve [her] full potential commensurate with the opportunity provided to other children” (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2014). The child in this case was progressing in her education in some ways better than her peers who did not receive any special education services, and yet the court saw that she was still not being given the opportunity to progress at her individual capacity. This and many other cases have impacted education in such a way that it is imperative that each individual student is truly given specific attention to their needs and their needs only.

**Endrew F.: The Impact of the Supreme Court Decision on Public Schools**

In the Supreme Court Case *Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District*, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in a stunning 8-0 decision in favor of what has been described as a higher standard of education for children with disabilities. Parents and their advocates believe this case dramatically expands the rights of special-education students in the United States, not all schools agree with this assessment of the decision.

Endrew is a student who received special education support as he had been diagnosed with autism. His parents enrolled him in the local public schools within where they lived. Teachers reported that to the parents that Endrew had a “sweet disposition”, however he did have some behavioral challenges that were proving to be too difficult to handle within the general education classroom (Howe, 2017). When in class they reported that he would “scream in class, climb over furniture and other students, and occasionally run away from school” (Howe, 2017). Being that teachers have many students they felt like they were concerned for his safety as they couldn’t always keep a close eye of him and know when he was trying to escape school. They were also concerned for his safety and the other students within the classroom. Endrew’s parents were disappointed with how the school was handling him and they believed that he was not making adequate progress within his Individual Education Plan (IEP). In looking at his IEP they felt that the goals were almost a match to the exact same goals and objectives each and every year. In fifth grade the school board gave his parents an IEP that they felt as truly more of the same exact thing and so they pulled him from his public school. His parents chose to place him in a private school and went back to the public school seeking reimbursement for the private school tuition. When the school district refused to pay Endrew’s parents went to the lower courts and they ruled against them. It was then brought to the 10th Circuit and they continued to confirm that an IEP is adequate as long as it is intended to provide “merely more than de minimis” benefits. Meaning as long as an IEP provides a little more than the bare minimum then it’s meeting the expectation of the law (Howe, 2017).

The parents asked for an appeal to the decision made by the 10th Circuit Court and in January of 2017 the Supreme Court took the case. As mentioned previously the decision was unanimous. Judge John Roberts stated the reason for the decision perfectly when he stated: “The goals may differ, but every child should have the chance to meet challenging objectives… When all is said and done, a student offered an educational program providing ‘merely more than de minimis’ progress from year to year can hardly be said to have been offered an education at all” (News-2-You, 2017).

This decision and statement made by Judge Roberts places a much greater accountability on parents and educators. The expectation is on measurable progress requiring deeper levels of understanding and commitment from both parents and educators working together to create more in depth and rigorous IEPs. More time, preparation, planning, and effort will need to take place in order to improve the preparation and creation of IEPs. Educators will need to fill out Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance (PLAAFP) making sure to be very specific on how each student is performing and where their levels are specifically at. This will need to be done in order to create more relevant and measurable goals. Each IEP will need to have
guidance on how to explicitly do progress monitoring (News-2-You, 2017). The impact is great and puts the focus back on ensuring that all students are truly receiving FAPE.

**Methodology**

Traditional legal research relies on sources of law (i.e. Constitutional law, Statutory law, and court decisions (i.e. Common law) as primary sources of information (Russo, 2006). Legal researchers may also rely on secondary sources of information including articles and published commentaries. The standing for this type of legal examination is founded in the principle of *stare decisis*, a Latin phrase meaning to abide by or stand on the decisions (Black’s Law Dictionary Online, 2018). The precedent of *stare decisis* is grounded on “the notion that an authoritative ruling of the highest court in a given jurisdiction is binding on lower courts within its purview” (Russo, 2006, p. 7).

The case study method focuses on a single setting, subject, or particular event (Stake, 1995). Case studies are designed to examine a larger phenomenon through the processes of examining the impact through a smaller, representative sample.

Systematic inquiry into the law can be described as a form of historical-legal research that is neither qualitative nor quantitative. In other words, it is a systemic investigation involving the interpretation and explanation of the law (Russo, 2006, p. 6).

The methodology employed in this research combines the case study method of primary source court documents and an analysis of secondary sources. This paper includes a brief of the case and the court’s decision which is then applied to the school setting as it specifically impacts district and campus practices and procedures.

**Educational Significance and Recommendations**

Legal research, such as what is within this paper, is a vital part of examining the day-to-day practices in schools which are designed to provide FAPE. Significant litigation and legislation over the past few decades have substantially impacted the practices of special education teachers and campus administrators. Future studies are needed in order to continually monitor the impact of special education laws and school practices to ensure compliance with IDEA mandates and planning for an individualized and appropriate educational program for each student receiving services.

As an educator with experience at the campus level as both a special education coordinator for three years and at the central office level for special education during the last 5 years, there is a great impact that I see needed within our schools. There is a needed mindset change that must take place. Our superintendent at Northside Independent School District in San Antonio, Texas continuously sends out the message to all educators and states, “All students are general education students first!” There is a need for educators to see students not as special education students, but rather general education students with a need for special education services. When stating that a student is a ‘special education student’ there is an automatic change in the mentality of expectations for that student. In the end, the question becomes how do we change our mindset to looking at each student as though they are in the same playing field, especially since they are?

In our district for the last eight to ten years we have really been pushing the idea of differentiated instruction. Moving from a classroom where every student receives the same instruction, the same materials, and the same expectations; to a classroom that looks at each and every general education student and assesses what their needs and levels are. Each and every student needs to be brought to their highest level and instruction for each student should match their needs and where they are at. In essence each student needs to be looked at as if they have an IEP or we are creating one for them. When we begin to have this mindset rigor and expectations
will be done to their capacity for each and every student, whether low or high each student will be brought to their next level. When creating a true differentiated instruction environment, the expectations set within the Endrew case will be met because educators will be used to doing the appropriate levels for all students and it will be natural for them to do it for students who receive special education services as well.

How do we get there? Ultimately the tone is set on each and every campus by the Principal of that campus. The culture and mindset of each student needing their education to be personalized must come from the top down. Each IEP written for students with disabilities and every other student as well, must be approached with an “if this, then this” mindset. Remembering back to the days of high school geometry and the need to provide proofs for the mathematical reasoning behind solving problems holds true to how we should approach each and every student. If a student struggles with math calculation and we dig further to see that the issue is specifically related to solving multi-step equations; then we create a goal and/or framework revolving around that struggle specifically. We measure specifically where they are at and then map out how to get them to where they need to be.

In the case of Endrew and the results of that case we know that the IEP cannot stay the same year and year. We have to show adequate progress for each student. That means we can’t wait until the Annual, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) meeting once a year to make changes when we aren’t seeing progress. It means we have to be proactive and meet to make changes the moment we see that a student isn’t progressing like they should. If a student has surpassed the expectations within the IEP, then we must immediately meet to make changes and increase the rigor, not waiting until then next scheduled ARD at its normal annual completion. Every day that an educator has with a student is either capitalized on or unfortunately could be wasted. In the case of Endrew we saw that year after year he was met with the same IEP with the same goals, with very little to no changes. Education leaders and educators alike have to have a mindset that no matter what each and every student is monitored and their education is adapted the moment a need has been arisen and/or fulfilled. We must always be raising the expectation to meet each and every student where they are at, never wasting one day of simply going through the motions of what we know isn’t working or has already been completed.

References


Increasing Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Learning (SEBL) in Student Intervention Models

Landon Turrubiarte, Denton ISD
Laura Trujillo-Jenks, Texas Woman’s University

Statement of the Problem
Organizational and procedural changes are realities schools have dealt with to maintain student progress and accountability to the public (Beycioglu & Kondakci, 2014). While the outcomes of organizational change can rest with the leadership of a school, it is also affected by the specific processes schools use for improvement, such as Response to Intervention (Sansosti & Noltemeyer, 2008). Instead of relying on top-down reform alone to improve student outcomes, stronger relationships and developed skillsets by educators are needed. Although poor academic achievement can contribute to negative effects for a student long term, such as poverty, those who are low functioning in social and emotional skills can have an increase in public health problems (Jones, Greenberg, & Crowley, 2015). Current studies are exploring how social and emotional behaviors affect performance across different areas of the learner in addition to those focused solely on academic achievement (Jones et al., 2015). Denton Independent School District (DISD) is exploring such an inclusive mindset to the revamping of its approach to students who need interventions.

The former intervention label that was used to monitor student progress in DISD was Response to Intervention (RTI). In the 2016-2017 school year, DISD began the process of moving from a Response to Intervention model to a Multi-Tiered System of Supports model. A central reason for the change in models was to better universalize practices in intervention including the screener process and instructional practices. During the initial phase of the process, DISD gathered data in conjunction with Hanover Research, which surveyed educators about the intervention process. The information provided by the survey allowed members involved in the initial phases of the planning process a better understanding of how teachers and administrators used and viewed the current model.

Four central groups/committees were identified to evaluate current practices: leadership, elementary curriculum specialists, secondary curriculum specialists, and a social, emotional, behavioral group. Although academic and behavioral components existed in current practices of Response to Intervention in DISD, they may not have existed in a balanced manner. For example, DISD followed an intervention model that promoted an equitable focus on academics and behavior. However, due to the lack of professional development that was needed to help teachers understand how to ensure a focus on both academics and behavior, the intervention model was not successfully implemented. Therefore, with the move to a Multi-Tiered System of Supports, evaluation of the current systems and process in DISD was necessary to ensure effective integration.
Each committee was charged with not only evaluating current practices, but also gathering evidence of these practices for the purpose of universalizing the practices. The social, emotional, and behavioral committee set out to respond to the following questions, due to their background being in the area that was a needed focus:

1. How would an increased emphasis on behavioral learning with students increase their academic progress?
2. How can we provide increased professional development for staff in the area of social, emotional, and behavioral learning?
3. How can a behavioral universal screener be implemented district wide?

Perspectives

Because this is the first year of collecting data, the current RTI process needs to focus on both academic and behavioral components for each child. Hence, preliminary data has been collected and includes an outline of the initial phases toward the move to increase social, emotional, and behavioral learning across campuses in a more balanced manner. The purpose of researching the effects of increased social, emotional, and behavioral learning will address two areas of focus: a decrease in conduct problems and an increase in academic performance. Because of the varied ways RTI can be implemented, the Hanover research suggests educators tend to focus more on the academic interventions, but may not remember that RTI can also help support the social, emotional, and behavioral side (Response to Intervention Survey Analysis: Prepared for Denton Independent School District, 2017). This is evident through the responses by staff members in the Hanover survey. Therefore, DISD has proceeded to implement an RTI process that includes a greater investment in the social, emotional, and behavioral learning of a student.

In order to accomplish this, universal screening for academic monitoring is a must and is seen as an important first step toward improving the RTI process. For DISD’s purposes, universal screening is defined by a systematic assessment aligned to curriculum and instruction (Ikeda & Neesen, 2003). If a universal screener is strictly used to gather data, but not respond to the data, it is essentially worthless (Ikeda & Neesen, 2003). A universal screen for the social, emotional, and behavioral component has not yet existed in Denton ISD. Different campuses at both the elementary and secondary level are investigating universal screeners during the 2017-2018 school year. The beginning research will be informative for years to come and may turn into a longitudinal study.

The successful integration between cognitive and non-cognitive skills is easiest seen in the academic setting (Jones et al., 2015). Although intellectual ability is a driver for academic achievement, social and emotional skills, such as self-regulation are predictors of academic achievement (Jones et al., 2015; Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2017). This is a major reason why DISD is seeking information, through this study, to find the best way to implement a balanced RTI process.

Methods and Procedures

A basic quantitative method was and will continue to be used to gather and analyze data. The formed committees in spring 2017 Denton ISD used their knowledge
of current practices and data from the Hanover survey to better understand the state of the district. The included number of respondents of Denton ISD staff was 1,279. Respondents were only included if they completed the survey and indicated they were familiar with the Response to Intervention process at their school. The majority (53%) of the respondents were general education classroom teachers. The second largest responding group was special education teachers at 10%, coming from mostly elementary K-5 campuses. This is an ongoing study, therefore, this survey data will be collected annually.

Although many different social, emotional, and behavioral screeners can be used in the academic setting, the piloting campus chose to use the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA). The assessment will be implemented as a pre and post assessment at the beginning and end of year, similarly aligned to suggested implementation methods of the screener. In addition to the screener, social, emotional, and behavioral learning curriculum will be reviewed with students and teachers alike to establish common language and understanding of the goals for the piloting campus.

**Results, Conclusions, and Potential implications**

Over half of the respondents indicated high familiarity in their school’s RTI process; however, familiarity was not consistent across all grade levels. Those involved at elementary campuses were more familiar with the school’s RTI process than at the middle school or high school level. Although familiarity was a central theme in the results, the respondents do not believe guidelines are clear in the process; specifically, documenting student progress. Additionally, based on the Hanover data, respondents are more likely to know how to implement academic rather than behavioral interventions (Response to Intervention Survey Analysis: Prepared for Denton Independent School District, 2017).

Currently, clear documentation guidelines are being established by the curriculum committees for moving students through the RTI process, which includes tiers, in response to the survey results. Further, explanations are now defined at the elementary level for the universal, supplemental, and individual tiers. Moreover, consistency between the use of academic universal screeners is ongoing and will continue to be developed in future years. For example, while an Early Literacy Inventory or Developmental Reading Assessment may be used at the elementary level, a Scholastic Reading Inventory or English I scores may be used at middle and high levels.

In keeping with the need for consistent implementation between curriculum components across all grade levels, the social, emotional, and behavioral committees continue to explore the use of a universal behavioral screener. For this reason, the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment is being piloted at one elementary school in DISD with plans to expand the pilot to secondary campuses. In addition to screener data, curriculum developed by the DISD counseling department will be used to establish clear understandings of social, emotional, and behavioral learning with students and staff members.

**Educational Importance of the Study**

The importance of understanding the impacts and the effects of Response to Intervention (RTI) is needed, so that school leadership can implement proper professional development. Staff members feel least confident understanding the supplemental and individual tiers of behavioral support for students as indicated by the Hanover results (Response to Intervention Survey
A consideration by the social, emotional, and behavioral committee is to incorporate more professional development towards behavioral learning across the district.

References


Relationship between Third Grade Retention of Male Hispanic English Language Learner Students on State Academic Assessments

Hilary Kouhana
Ray Thompson
Paul Tapper
Texas A&M University, Commerce

Statement of Problem
In 1999, the Student Success Initiative (SSI) was implemented by the 76th Texas Legislature. The goal was to provide instructional supports to ensure that students were academically successful in mathematics and reading. In 2009, the 81st Texas Legislature changed portions of this legislation. Rider 42 helped to improve support both in funding and programming for districts in helping to educate all students and ensure that they met or exceeded proficiency in the Texas Education Agency (TEA) English language arts, the English Language Proficiency Standards (ELPS), math, science, social studies tests (TEA, 2014). Until recently, the test used to determine retention rates in Texas was the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). It was replaced in 2012 by the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness, or STAAR (TEA, 2013). Currently, students in grades 5 and 8 who take the STAAR reading and mathematics tests have grade advancement requirements; a student may advance to the next grade level only by passing the tests or having a Grade Placement Committee decide unanimously to place the student at the next grade level. Otherwise, the student is retained at that grade for the next school year. The TEA revealed in 2008 that grade-level retention in the third grade for Hispanic students rose from 1.7% to 3.7%, and for Limited English Proficient students it rose from 2.0% to 5.1% (TEA, 2008).

Jimerson (2001) found that a negative relationship exists between academic achievement and grade retention in school. Supporters feel that retention puts pressure on schools to intervene early to help struggling students (Robelen, 2012). Retention rates in Texas in grades K-5 increased between the years 2003-2004, and retention in grade 3 was up 100% over that time period (TEA, 2005). Early elementary school retention data relative to gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic status for the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) were examined, and findings indicated that Latinos were at greater risk of retention than their peer counterparts. It was also found that retention for girls was greater than for boys (Cannon & Lipscomb, 2011). Retention of low socio-economic children was greater than those students who were from families of higher income (Wu, West & Hughes, 2007).

A similar study designed by Hughes, Chen, Thoemmes, and Kwok (2010) in Texas focused on retention of students at the 1st grade level and performance on the TAKS at the third-grade level. They addressed ethnicity as well as 67 baseline variables to determine whether retention or promotion had a positive impact on student achievement. Hughes et al. (2010) found that retaining students at first grade had a negative impact on third-grade TAKS testing.
Theoretical Framework of Learning

The overarching and driving theory for this research is the socio-cultural theory. Vygotsky’s theoretical framework of socio-cultural theory focuses on the values, beliefs, and customs of a cultural social group, and how those customs are transmitted to future generations (Leichsenring, 2013). In essence, the learner makes sense of the material being learned and creates a new understanding of what is being taught. An interaction occurs between what is being presented and what they already know and believe (Richardson, 2003). Tenenberg (2014) referred to Vygotsky’s idea of human cognition and activity as being mediated by tools. Material objects consist of things such as cars and pencils; they affect the material world. Symbolic objects affect the mental world of the self. These objects are comprised of such things as language, mnemonics, writing, and similar symbolic objects. The process of internalization refers to how symbolic objects are created within a person’s mind. How a person internalizes events in the world depends on the tools they use in learning. This process of internalization, as well as the tools a student uses, is an integral component of the socio-cultural theory.

Lindschitl (1999) posits that learners’ knowledge is actively restructured in individual ways. This knowledge is based on the learners own personal theories, as well as social and cultural contents in which knowledge occurs. Formal instructional experiences help to mitigate understanding. Vygotsky’s concept of socio-cultural theory can be interpreted by his self-discovery theory of learning as stated by Jaramillo (1996): “a child’s intellectual personality and socio-moral knowledge is constructed by students internalizing concepts through self-discovery” (p. 135). Jaramillo goes on to explain that in a complex learning environment, learners gain authentic meaning through social negotiations that shape how learners interpret the world around them. Scrimsher and Tudge (2003) stated that Vygotsky’s theory is supported through a process of discovery in which children internalize knowledge that has unique meaning to them. Everyday concepts evolve through social interactions and common activities in which real and valued communication is fostered between the student and teacher. Leichsenring (2013) stressed that Vygotsky’s socio-cultural theory espouses the importance of children acquiring language skills through the process of dialogue with others in order to learn.

Understanding how children learn in the context of the socio-cultural theory puts the relationship between achievement in school and social class into perspective. Students who come to school with succinct literary practices at home meet with success in their early years of education. Language development is stimulated when parents become active participants in their child’s literary practices (Jimenez, Filipini, & Gerber, 2006). As seen through the eyes of Vygotsky, the theory is reflective of how students learn and adapt to their immediate environment.

Alvermann (2002) supported the idea that culturally-responsive instruction helps students make relevant connections between their homes, school practices, and communities. In this period, researchers discovered that learners construct an understanding of the world through their own personal social and cultural contact and understanding of the world in which they exist. This provided insight into how Hispanic male students learn. The process of acquiring language skills is critical in this process (Alvermann, 2002; Leichsenring, 2013).
Methodology

The present longitudinal descriptive study examined the possible impact of retention on third grade male Hispanic ELL students as they progressed in school and eventually took the state exam in the fifth grade. Specifically, the study focused on the reading skills of retained male Hispanic ELL third graders to determine if significant growth in TAKS reading achievement scale scores occurred in these students over the repeated third and fourth grade in order to pass the state’s fifth-grade reading exam.

The main purpose of the researcher with this quantitative ex post facto longitudinal research was to assess whether male Hispanic ELL students retained in third grade gained the academic reading skills necessary to pass the state’s fifth-grade reading assessment. A secondary purpose was to consider the matriculation rates of male Hispanic ELL students in third to fourth and fifth grades. In ex post facto research “the researcher investigates the cause of, reason for, or relationship among differences in participant groups in terms of a pre-existing condition” (Boudah, 2011, pp. 249-250). Lunenburg and Irby (2008) further state that “ex post facto research compares scores from two or more groups on the same variable” (p. 35). The researcher compares the cause of the differences after the performance has already occurred. The fact that the study takes place over an extended period of time is a requirement of longitudinal studies. In this case, the study ranged from the 2007-08 school year through the 2010-11 school year, a total of 4 years.

A non-experimental method was used because it relies on data collected from existing databases of TAKS reading achievement scale scores ranging over a period of time. Lunenburg and Irby (2008) stated that descriptive studies can include one variable that can be measured across time, and in this study the academic performance on the fifth-grade reading TAKS assessment of male Hispanic ELL students who were previously retained in third grade was included. The data were taken from the same sample group over various points in time. The researcher examined the impact that retention had on subsequent fifth grade TAKS standard assessment scores in reading for this group of students.

Research Questions

These questions guided the researcher in this study:

1. What was the academic performance of male Hispanic ELL students retained in third grade on the repeated third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade TAKS reading assessments starting with the 2007-08 TAKS reading scale score groups?
2. What were the matriculation rates of male Hispanic ELL students retained in third grade to fourth and fifth grade?

Selection of Participants

The participants included in this study were all male Hispanic ELL students identified as having been retained at third grade within the state of Texas at the conclusion of the 2007-08 school year. TAKS reading assessment scale scores data were obtained from student records requested through a Public Information Request from the TEA Office of Research and Analysis. Under the FERPA Act, there were no privacy issues or ethical concerns, because student identities were withheld and replaced by other identifiers. This time period was chosen to allow for sufficient time for the cohort of students to repeat third grade and matriculate to fourth and fifth grade by the 2010-11 school year, the last year that TAKS was given as the state assessment.
Instrumentation

The TAKS was “designed to measure the extent to which a student has learned and is able to apply the defined knowledge and skills at each tested grade level. Every TAKS test is directly aligned to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS)” (TEA, 2010, p. 79). All students in grades 3 through 11 were given various parts of the TAKS as required by law. Beginning in 1996, a grades 3-6 Spanish-version test was provided for Limited English proficient (ELL) students who received academic instruction in Spanish while learning English (TEA, 2010).

Reliability and Validity

The TAKS tests in this study were reliable and valid in that they were standardized assessments given to all students enrolled in grade 3 through 11 in Texas public schools in the spring of each year. Chapter 3 of the 2008-2009 Technical Digest from TEA stated, “the concept of reliability is based on the idea that repeated administrations of the same test should generate consistent results about student performance” (TEA, 2010, p. 54). Validity was substantiated through students’ understanding and knowledge of the TEKS as a result of TAKS assessments.

Scale Scores

Horizontal scale scores. Raw scores for the various tests were converted to scale scores for “direct comparisons of student performance between specific sets of test questions from different test administrations” (TEA, 2010, p. 94). During the years of the study, two different scale scores were reported from TEA for TAKS reading assessments: horizontal scores and vertical scores. Horizontal scale score ranges were established by TEA for all TAKS assessments that placed students in one of three groups based on their scale score. A scale score of less than 2100 indicated Did Not Meet the Standard, 2100-2399 indicated Met Standard, and 2400 and above indicated Commended Performance. These horizontal scale scores were reported for the 2007-08 TAKS administration.

Vertical scale scores. For the concluding year of data collection, 2010-11, horizontal scale scores were not used. Instead, vertical scale scores were reported for English and Spanish TAKS reading and mathematics. The vertical scale for English and Spanish TAKS ranged from approximately 0 to 1000. Using the vertical scale, the scale score needed to meet the standard and achieve commended performance on English and Spanish TAKS reading and mathematics in grade 5 was not the same across grades; instead, the scale scores required to meet the standard and achieve commended performance increased from grade to grade. In 2010-11, the score required for Met Standard was 594-718 for English TAKS reading and 623-717 for Spanish TAKS. A score of 763 or greater was required for Commended Performance for English TAKS and a score of 744 or greater was required for Spanish TAKS (TEA & Pearson, 2011).

Data Collection

English or Spanish TAKS reading scale scores of third grade male Hispanic ELL students that were retained at the conclusion of the 2007-08 school year were obtained through a Public Information Request from the TEA Office of Research and Analysis. Data for each student in the retained cohort consisting of the student’s grade, the test language,
version of the TAKS test, score code and scale score for the TAKS reading assessment were obtained for each subsequent year thereafter, including the 2010-11 year.

The following steps were taken in order to obtain information for this descriptive longitudinal research study:

1. An Application for Review and Research was obtained from TEA to obtain permission to conduct the study. The application was completed and submitted as part of the IRB process at Texas A&M University-Commerce.

2. When both the TEA and the IRB at Texas A&M University-Commerce approved the proposal, the request for English or Spanish TAKS reading scale scores of male Hispanic ELL students that were retained at the conclusion of the 2007-08 school year was sent to TEA.

3. TAKS performance data in reading of male Hispanic ELL students retained in third grade were obtained from TEA and recorded on spreadsheets. Data included the retained cohort student scores for 2007-08 and each subsequent year thereafter, including the 2010-11 year. Data included students’ grade, the test language, version of the TAKS test, score code, and scale score for each TAKS reading assessment.

4. The researcher ensured that students were identified only by masked student numbers and names of districts were not identified.

5. Students who were not continuously enrolled in the cohort throughout the timeframe of the study were eliminated.

Treatment of Data

Students’ scores were placed into one of four groups based on their 2007-08 TAKS reading scale scores. The four groups were: (1) Scale score range of 1800-1899, (2) Scale score range of 1900-1999, (3) Scale score range of 2000-2099, and (4) scale score range of 2100 or above (passing). Only 0.8% received a scale score of less than 1800 across the state (TEA, 2010), so it was not necessary to include a group for students with a score below 1800. Students in group 3 were closest to passing, and were sometimes referred to as “bubble” students because they were just below the proficiency standard (Gill, Lockwood, Martorel, Setodji, & Booker, 2009). Students with scores below 1800 and greater than 2099 were eliminated from the study because there may have been extenuating reasons other than reading difficulties for retention that would not be known from the acquired data.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 was “What is the academic performance of male Hispanic ELL students retained in third grade on the repeated third grade, fourth and fifth grade TAKS reading assessments starting with the 2007-08 TAKS reading scale score groups?” To answer this question, a repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted. The independent variable was the score group described above for the 2007-08 school year. The dependent variable (repeated measure) was the TAKS reading scale score for the 2007-08 (grade 3), 2008-09 (repeated grade 3), 2009-10 (grade 4) and 2010-11 (grade 5) school years. Because there were four groups and a measure repeated four times, Field (2011) suggested that a repeated measures ANOVA was an appropriate analysis to use.

The assumptions of repeated measures ANOVA are 1) independence of the observations, 2) multivariate normality, and 3) sphericity (Stevens, 2009). For these data,
independence can be assumed because data were taken from across the state, with no one teacher, classroom school, or district involved. ANOVA in all forms has been found to be robust to violations of normality, and multivariate normality is “somewhat difficult to characterize” (Stevens, 2009, p. 209). The Shapiro-Wilks, skewness and kurtosis statistics for each year of TAKS scores was calculated to assess the multivariate normality (Field, 2011). Histograms, stem-and-leaf and normal Q-Q plots were also examined. In repeated measures ANOVA, the condition of sphericity assumes that the variances of the differences between data taken from the same participant are equal. In this study, the variances of the differences in scores from year to year for the same participants would be equal.

For large sample sizes, Maxwell and Delany (1990), Stevens (2009), and Field (2011) all recommend using the multivariate approach rather than the univariate, which requires sphericity. Sphericity was assessed using Mauchley’s Test of Sphericity, obtained through the SPSS repeated measures procedure (Field, 2011). The sphericity statistic was reported, however, because of the large sample size, and the multivariate approach was used for this study. Multivariate statistical significance was assessed using Wilks’s lambda. Within-subjects and between-subjects effects were analyzed and reported. Eta-square ($\eta^2$) was used to calculate the effect size. Statistically significant differences among time periods were identified by pairwise comparisons using the Bonferroni confidence interval adjustment (Field, 2011).

**Research Question 2**

Research Question 2 was “What are the matriculation rates of male Hispanic ELL students retained in third grade to fourth and fifth grade?” To answer this question, grade level matriculation of male Hispanic ELL students retained in third grade was tracked through the repeat of third grade, into fourth and, finally, into fifth grades. All students repeated third grade in 2008-09. The possible outcomes at this point included (a) retention in third grade again, (b) matriculation to fourth grade (c) placement in a more restrictive program that was not required to take the traditional English or Spanish TAKS, (d) no longer available in the dataset possibly due to moving to another state, or (e) matriculation to fifth grade. In each of the possible outcomes, frequency and percent of students was computed. Outcomes for the remaining groups of students were reported for the 2009-10 school year.

Of particular interest for this research question was if groups were able to obtain or maintain a passing vertical score of 620 on their fifth grade TAKS reading assessment, signifying that the group, on average, had reached the Met Standard cut score. This assisted in identifying if there was a relationship between retention at third grade and the ability to master grade level material at fifth grade. The researcher analyzed the data to describe the progress of retained students at different academic proficiency levels from the time of their retention. The information was stored on an external drive to be kept in a locked location for 7 years before it will be erased and destroyed.

**Findings**

As the population of male ELL Hispanic students continues to grow, those who enroll in Texas schools is also increasing steadily. Flores, Batalova, and Fix (2012) stated that, as of 2011, Texas had the second largest number of English language learners in the
United States, second only to California. Districts have worked diligently to focus on making sure these students are well prepared for the academic challenges that face them. The findings of this study can help to offer insight into this student population and how districts make sure that those retained in third grade gained the academic reading skills necessary to pass the state’s fifth grade reading assessment and that matriculation rates of male Hispanic ELL students in third to fourth and fifth grades take place.

**Research Question 1.** This question addressed what the academic performance was of male Hispanic ELL students retained in third grade on the repeated third grade, fourth and fifth grade TAKS reading assessments that started with the 2007-08 TAKS reading scale score groups. The NCES (2006) stated that male Hispanic ELL students were found to have the most reading problems and were retained more often. The data revealed that retention of third-grade male Hispanic ELL students who failed to meet adequate performance on their state testing did not seem to hinder their progress to fifth grade, other than repeating the third-grade year.

This notion is similar to Adams and Alexander (2012), who stated that retention in the third grade along with early interventions helped struggling students to improve student achievement. The research of Tomchin and Impara (1992) also supported the notion that retained student enabled them to obtain mastery of the knowledge and showed academic improvement over time. This finding is consistent with Balkcom (2014), who concurred by stating that retained third-grade students in Florida showed academic improvement. Analysis of the data revealed in this study refuted Christenson (2010) and Moser, West, and Hughes (2012). They respectively concluded that there were no observable results for retained TAKS students as compared to those next grade level placed students and that retained students four years down the road, were no closer academically to their fifth-grade peers than they would have been if promoted.

**Research Question 2.** This question focused on the matriculation rates of male Hispanic ELL students retained in third grade to fourth and fifth grade. The data revealed that three years out from the year students repeated the third grade, there was little difference in matriculation outcomes between those that were retained for failing TAKS and those retained for some other reason. Both groups constituted the population of third grade male Hispanic ELL students who were retained starting at the 2007-08 school year of this study. The findings of this study support Hughes et al. (2010), who reported that third-grade retained students had a much higher passing rate in TAKS reading and math than their counterparts who were socially promoted.

**Conclusions**

The following conclusions resulted from the evidence that this study provided regarding retention of third grade male Hispanic ELL students and the impact it had on their fifth-grade state testing, as well as the matriculation rates of these students retained in third grade onto fourth and fifth grade. Previous researchers’ work was expanded upon through the findings of this study addressing retention of male Hispanic ELL students (Adams & Alexander, 2012; Katsiyannis, Zhang, Ryan, & Jones, 2007; Tomchin & Impara, 1992).

This investigation revealed the following:
1. Retention of third grade male Hispanic ELL students who failed to meet adequate performance on their state testing did not seem to hinder their progress to fifth grade, other than repeating the third-grade year.

2. Three years out from the year students repeated the third grade, there was little difference in matriculation outcomes between those that were retained for failing TAKS and those retained for some other reason.

The literature suggests that retention continues to be a highly-debated topic amongst educators. In a time of major federal and state cutbacks in education budgets, it becomes imperative for those leading the charge in education, to take a good look at studies such as this one. Jimerson and Renshaw (2012) stated that using research to establish school policies and making informed decisions about what is in the best interest of the student is imperative. Retaining a student in the same grade can cost schools billions of dollars annually as stated by West (2012). Therefore, all state stakeholders need to assess their specific situation at hand and make decisions based on evidence-based research such as this in order to contribute to the academic success of male Hispanic ELL students.

Significance of the Study

The researcher was concerned with the retention of third grade male Hispanic ELL students, and deciphered what impact retention had on subsequent fifth-grade standardized reading testing. Retention at the third-grade level was a concern for all school districts (TEA, 2013). Students need to be prepared at this grade level to meet the challenges necessary to advance to the next grade level. Unfortunately, not all students come equipped with the knowledge to pass third grade instructional objectives and mandated standardized tests. Little research is available that focuses on whether retaining male Hispanic ELL students at the third-grade level actually benefited them in passing the state reading exam at the fifth-grade level. Findings from this study provide school districts with much needed insights into the relationship between third grade male Hispanic ELL student retention and their success on passing the fifth-grade standardized tests. Such findings can assist school administrators in making crucial decisions regarding retention matters.

References
Christenson, B. (2010, January 1). The effect of grade-level retention on student success as defined by the student success initiative of Texas. ProQuest LLC.


Teachers’ Perceptions of Professional Development

Brett Welch
Neil Faulk
Lamar University

Abstract
Professional development is an integral component for meeting the demands of educational reform. However, teachers have had minimal input into establishing decisions surrounding this phenomena. The purpose of this study was to analyze and interpret public school teachers’ attitudes, perceptions, and self-efficacy in relation to professional development and student achievement.

Statement of the Problem
Professional development for teachers is a complex, multidimensional phenomenon (Desimone, 2009; Friedman & Phillips, 2004; Hardy, 2009; Hargreaves, 2003; McDonald, 2009). There exists no single definition of professional development. Day and Sachs (2004) speculated that professional development is any activity, throughout a teacher’s career, that enriches teaching and learning. Fullan (1991) defined professional development as “the sum total of formal and informal learning experiences throughout one’s career from preservice teacher education to retirement” (p. 326). While the definitions of professional development vary, there is consensus that professional development is essential to educational reform and instructional improvement (Desimone, 2009; Falk, 2001; Fullan, 2007; & Hardy, 2009). However, there is no consensus about the definition or parameters of professional development or how to assess the effectiveness of professional development activities (Desimone, 2009; Friedman & Phillips, 2004) leaving teachers with minimal faith in their learning experiences and minimal participation in state or district mandated professional development experiences (National Center for Education Statistics, 2001). In fact, Beavers (2009) cautioned that adult learners might resist learning if it is not consistent with their own goals, whereas participant collaboration, input, and choice inspire credibility and cooperation. Despite its recognized importance, professional development programs are frequently diffuse, fragmented, and of little use to teachers, and, simultaneously, not supported by rigorous and well-designed research (Guskey & Yoon, 2009; Hill, 2007, 2009; Whitcomb, Borko, & Liston, 2009).

Hill (2009) noted that although there are many and varied formats and content for professional development activities, without a critical analysis of the participants, the overall educational climate and environment, no meaningful change can occur. “The professional development ‘system’ for teachers is, by all accounts, broken” (Hill, 2009, p. 470). Wilson and Berne (1999) questioned the “lack of substantial empirical evidence about what teachers learn (and do not learn) in traditional professional development activities” (p. 174). Ten years later, Guskey and Yoon (2009) offered a similar argument: “The amount of valid and scientific defensible evidence we currently have on the relationship between professional development and improvements in
student learning is exceptionally modest” (p. 499). There is a lack of evidence supporting professional development’s relationship to student achievement. Hargreaves’ (2003) agreed that teacher leadership, teacher attitudes, teacher support, and teacher self-regulation is powerful in their relation to professional development. Additionally, it has been shown that effective teachers have a profound impact on student achievement (Fullan, 2007; Marzano, 2003, Rockoff, 2004). Therefore, a problem exists in the educational community that supports a need for a rigorous study to increase understanding and interpret teachers’ attitudes, perceptions, and self-efficacy in relation to professional development and student achievement. This problem affects teachers and students because of its intense influence on student learning, teacher learning, and educational reform (Hill, Rowan, & Ball, 2005; Marzano, 2003; Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997). Hargreaves (2003) advised that it is imperative to reevaluate the complex work and support of teacher professional development if we are to maintain its highest quality. Many possible factors contribute to the professional development problem. These factors may include: (a) the method for deciding on what professional development opportunities are available and supported by the school district, (b) state regulations, (c) available formats of professional development, and (d) school leadership philosophy and style. This study contributed to the body of knowledge needed to address this problem by using a rigorous grounded theory methodology of constant comparative analysis to interpret teachers’ attitudes and perceptions about professional development experiences. This interpretation can then be used to frame effective professional development experiences that optimally impact continued teacher learning and transfer into the classroom to improve instructional practice and student achievement.

Theoretical Framework

The complexity of learning makes it a multidimensional construct. It is not simply the acquisition of knowledge and skills, but includes social, emotional, and societal components (Illeris, 2009 & Knowles, 1973), including experiences and stages of human development. When teaching adults, it is important to acknowledge and integrate the principles and processes of adult learning theory. Adult learning can be explained as “an organized effort to assist learners who are old enough to be held responsible for their acts to acquire or enhance their understandings, skills, and dispositions” (Mezirow & Associates, 2000, p. 26). Teachers, as adults, necessitate situating teacher learning and professional development within the adult learning paradigm. Knowles introduced andragogy to the United States in the early 1970s. Influenced by humanistic orientation, Knowles conjectured that adult learning was voluntarily motivated and self-directed. Consideration must be given to the life experiences of adults when organizing learning situations. In addition, as age increases individual differences, for example, learning style and pace of learning increase. Originally, the thought was that andragogy and pedagogy are distinctly and uniquely separate (Knowles, 1970). However, after a decade, Knowles (1980) acknowledged that andragogy was conceptual framework that supported adult learning and that pedagogy transitions into andragogy. The idea that adults learn differently than children continues to spark controversy, as well as research.

Methods and Procedures

A qualitative, constructivist grounded theory design was used for this study. This method supports a venue for capturing the true essence of teachers’ professional development
experiences because it allowed the theory to emerge through in depth analysis of the data, rather than forcing preconceived theories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This approach provides a basis for a theory that has fit, has relevance, must work, and is readily modifiable (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Participants included public school teachers from a rural Title I school chosen through voluntary criteria sampling. Fifteen teachers contributed data through audio taped, in depth interviews, and 30 teachers participated in a written survey. Memos were maintained throughout the study. Qualitative validity and reliability were established through peer debriefing, triangulation of data, including interviews, a survey, as well as, memos, an audit trail, and rich, thick description. The analytic frame of this grounded theory study followed Charmaz’s (2006) technique of line by line coding, open coding, axial coding, and theoretical coding. A constant comparative method of data analysis was used to code data into themes, create categories, and finally form conclusions and construct theory.

Results and Potential Implications

This study’s findings provided a practical perspective of what public school teachers in a rural school district think about professional development. Teachers perceived that the purpose of professional development was to provide discovery and renewal, in tandem with practical applicability. Professional development programs can promote transformative learning and revitalization through reflective and critical inquiry framed upon rational discourse and experience (Mezirow, 1997). Teacher learning activities should include a reflective component that disrupts former thinking and instigates an examination of routine expectations to accomplish this objective.

Teacher participants felt the strain of outside forces that diminished self-efficacy and forced compliance with conflicting pedagogical philosophies. Disenfranchising teachers frustrated self-actualization that, in turn, impedes the mission to guide students to their full potential (Hargreaves, 2003). A forced choice between dichotomous definitions of perceived student achievement jeopardizes an optimal learning environment for both teachers and students because of moral conflict and tension. A shared vision, among all stakeholders, must inspire professional development activities, otherwise adult learners may disengage from the process. Sharing ideas and expertise is the foundation for strong professional communities that, in turn, result in improving student learning and development (Hargreaves, 2003). A sustained and open dialogue among all faculty members concerning teachers’ pedagogical philosophies in relation to federal, state, and local mandates can inform understanding and strengthen collegiality and moral support. The perception of not having any control over the opportunities offered motivated the complaints. This is contrary to best practice for adult learning. Knowles’ (1980) theory of adult learning stated that adult learners thrive on self-directed inquiry and imposition of learning diminishes motivation and performance. In addition, professional development positively influences student achievement and is critical to increasing teacher knowledge (Hawley & Valli, 2007; Wilson & Berne, 1999).

Educational Importance of the Study

Results revealed that the perceived purpose of professional development was practical applicability that benefitted student development while supporting teachers’
discovery and renewal. A second finding was that external forces promoted teachers’ feelings of disconnection from professional development decisions and experiences. Finally, while professional development experiences are supposed to support student achievement, teachers were conflicted by the district’s number driven standardized assessment definition of student achievement and their own definition that viewed each individual, unique student’s growth and development as student achievement. Based on the conclusions and implications of this study, the following recommendations are provided:

- Construct a collaborative, school wide definition for perceived student achievement. Since professional development activities are approved, created, and implemented based upon the impact on student achievement, a shared definition for student achievement would provide a united vision and a clear focus for professional development experiences. This conflict can be approached from the perspective of reflection, as well as, open and honest dialogue centering on what best serves the physical, emotional, and cognitive needs of the student. All stakeholders should be a part of this process. The results would be included in the faculty handbook and on the school website.
- Provide all in-district professional learning developers and presenters with information about best practices for adult learners. Include Knowles’ (1980) theory of andragogy and Mezirow’s (1981) critical theory on adult education. This information would be available in a hard copy pamphlet, as well as, on the district’s website.
- All school district administrators should make it a priority to encourage and support teachers’ pursuit of out-of-district learning experiences. A copy of this study, along with an accompanying PowerPoint, will be shared with all district administrators and school board members to support this recommendation.
- With the help of the district webmaster, create a page on the district web site where teachers can share information about upcoming professional conferences, workshops, and webinars. All district faculty members and administrators will receive periodic emails from the district professional development committee encouraging all stakeholders to preview and add to this resource. Information about the web page will also be shared at all countywide educational meetings.
- Use this study to inform the district’s annual professional development plan. A copy of this study, along with an accompanying PowerPoint, will be shared with the local and school professional development committee to support this recommendation.
- Begin an open dialogue among all district stakeholders about effective professional development practices. With the assistance of the district webmaster, a professional development blog can be created that would include timely research-based articles and links to sites about professional development best practice. This would provide an open forum for critical
reflection about pedagogical and andragogical philosophies framed by professional development concepts.

- Those responsible for implementing professional development activities should ensure that there is a practical application component included in all experiences. Clear and readily usable handouts, either hard copy or online, should be required of all activity presenters.
- Review and refine the present annual school professional development evaluation and needs assessment survey. It will be recommended that the local and district professional development committee use Fink’s (2006) *How to Conduct Surveys: A Step-by-Step Guide.*

**References**


doi:10.1353/foc.2007.0004


doi:10.1257/0002828041302244


doi:10.1177/0022487109337280


Abstract
A multi-year review of the TExES Principal (068) test average scaled score and the three domain scores have been reviewed, with a focus on the relationship between student’ success in a Texas university principal preparation program and the type of instructional delivery model used.

Statement of the Problem
The main focus of this research was to understand the relationship between student’ success in a Texas university principal preparation program and the type of instructional delivery model and student scores on the Texas state mandated TExES principal (068) certification exam. This study's purpose was twofold. First, to identify how stable the TExES Principal (068) test average scaled score and the three domain scores, as well as their passing percentages, among three instructional delivery methods were from 2013-2014, 2014-2015, to 2015-2016. The second purpose was to identify any statistically significant difference between program delivery (face-to-face [F2F], blended, online) as compared with student scaled scores on the TExES (068) Principal Test. Therefore, the following research questions were posed:

1. Is there a significant difference in TExES Principal (068) test average scaled score and the three domain scores among three instructional delivery methods (e.g., F2F, blended, or online) from 2013-2014, 2014-2015, to 2015-2016?
   a. Is there a significant difference in TExES Principal (068) test average scaled score and the three domain scores among three instructional delivery methods (e.g., F2F, blended, or online) regardless of yearly change?
   b. Is there a significant difference in TExES Principal (068) test average scaled score and the three domain scores among from 2013-2014, 2014-2015, to 2015-2016 regardless of different instructional delivery methods (e.g., F2F, blended, or online)?

2. Is there a statistically significant difference in the passing percentages of TExES Principal (068) test average scaled scores and the three domain scores among three instructional delivery methods (e.g., F2F, blended, or online) from 2013-2014, 2014-2015, to 2015-2016?
   a. Is there a statistically significant difference in the passing percentages of TExES Principal (068) test average scaled score and the three domain scores
among three instructional delivery methods (e.g., F2F, blended, or online) regardless of yearly change?
b. Is there a statistically significant difference in the passing percentages of TExES Principal (068) test average scaled score and the three domain scores among from 2013-2014, 2014-2015, to 2015-2016 regardless of different instructional delivery methods (e.g., F2F, blended, or online)?

Perspectives

There have been several studies that focus on the capacity of new campus leaders. One such study looked at what superintendents thought their new principals did well and what areas needed more attention. Dunaway, Bird, Flowers, Lyons, and Lee (2010) found that new principals were lacking in the areas of school budgeting, developing a school vision with stakeholders, and working with teachers on summative evaluations and continuing employment. These areas can be found in the Texas Principal Standards and within the Competencies of the TExES Principal (068) exam; therefore, it is imperative that EPPs help students analyze and evaluate these different areas. Additionally, future administrators should be able to communicate the specific points of the areas noted in a manner that is in laymen’s terms. This coincides with Hines’ (2008) study, which found that EPPs and the TExES tests emphasis verbal processing and reasoning; this shows that administration candidates practicing these skills will help them be more successful campus leaders and more successful in passing the TExES Principal (068) exam.

In a study that Boyland, Lehman, and Sriver (2015) conducted, superintendents were surveyed about the performance of new campus principals and their capacity. The main area that many superintendents felt that their principals were lacking was in collaboration, developing leaders in others, and financial management (p. 85). Ensuring that educational administration candidates are given opportunities to work through real-life school leadership experiences is a best practice (Jiang, Patterson, Changler, & Chan, 2009). The Domains on the TExES Principal (068) exam that address these areas could be purposefully focused on within a program, with these topics covered in several courses so that the repetition of information is heard, seen, read, and internalized.

One way that repetition could occur without being redundant is through embedded practicum. In a study conducted by Chandler, Cheung Chan, and Jiang (2013), the embedded practicum experiences were designed to allow candidates more field learning experiences that allowed for reflection of what was learned in class. The actual performing of administrative duties throughout the practicum helped candidates to see a clear connection to theory and practice, and gave them first-hand experience that helped them in passing course assessments. Larson (2016) further posited that including “substantive internship experiences that include mentoring and that provide the students with clinical opportunities to witness and apply the theoretical constructs, which are represented in the curriculum and studied in their preparation programs” would effectively help the students see the connections between what is learned in a classroom and what is expected on a campus (p. 41).

Enhancing the probability of students being successful as leaders of schools and passing the TExES Principal (068) exam has been reviewed in this literature. In order to
better prepare students to take their TExES Principal (068) exam, different types of assessments have been seen as valuable, no matter the delivery method of a course. For example, Assunção Flores, Margarida Veiga Simão, Barrosb, and Pereiraa (2015) found that portfolios and team projects allow for a systematic approach to learning, where collaboration and the integration of different ideas can be shared among students and faculty. Additionally, working with persons that are not a part of a school district, but may have an impact on helping campus leaders should be explored. One recommendation that Burkman, Garrett-Staib, and Laub (2012) aligns with the beliefs of the authors, which is that partnerships with educational region centers could be valuable in preparing principal candidates to successfully pass the TExES Principal (068) exam. No matter the approaches an EPP chooses or the delivery method that is used, EPPs should focus on teaching and learning activities that include opportunities for students to learn course expectations through a variety of activities, which should include real-life leadership learning experiences through F2F, blended, and/or online.

Methods and Procedures
A causal comparative method was used to find out whether the TExES Principal (268) test’s total and domain scores, as well as the passing percentage of the overall and domain sections of the TExES Principal (068) test, were dissimilar across different types of instructional delivery methods from 2013-2014, 2014-2015, to 2015-2016. It should be noted that out of 60 Texas principal preparation institutions presented to the authors by the Texas Education agency during the initial year of this study (2013 – 2014), only 33 institutions presented complete and usable data for this study, and therefore, a decision was made to include only those institutions in this three year study. The data represents: 1) general aggregate test and domain average scaled scores, 2) attempted, passed, and passing percentages on the aggregate test and domain test sections, and 3) general demographic data.

Results, Conclusions, and Potential implications
This study’s purpose was twofold. First, to identify how stable the TExES Principal (068) test average scaled score and the three domain scores, as well as their passing percentages, among three instructional delivery methods were from 2013-2014, 2014-2015, to 2015-2016. The second purpose was to identify any statistically significant difference between program delivery (face-to-face [F2F], blended, online) as compared with student scaled scores on the TExES (068) Principal Test.

Only thirty-three institutional programs of principal preparation were used for the testing periods of 2013-2014 in the initial study because sufficient, usable data was provided by the Texas Education Agency for these institutions. Twenty-seven institutions presented from the initial list of 60 provided incomplete data. Of the total of 33 institutions used, 17 programs (51.5%) were online programs, 8 programs (24.2%) blended programs, and 8 (24.2%) face-to-face programs. The researchers in this multiple year study made the decision to include only the same 33 institutions throughout all three years of the study so a comparison could be made. It should be noted that all 33 usable institutions maintained
the same mode of program delivery options (F2F, blended or online) throughout the three year study period.

Results showed that TExES Principal (068) test mean scaled total score was 244.56 (SD = 5.7) in 2013-2014, 243.83 (SD = 6.56) in 2014-2015, and 243.74 (SD = 5.86) in 2015-2016. A mixed ANOVA was conducted to examine whether there were year and delivery method difference in the TExES Principal (068) test average scaled total score. Results indicated no significance main effect of year, $F(1.96, 56.95) = .901, p = .41$, and no significant main effect of delivery method, $F(2, 29) = .78, p = .468$. There was no significant interaction between year and delivery method, $F(3.93, 56.95) = .165, p = .953$.

A second mixed ANOVA was conducted to examine whether there were year and delivery method difference in the TExES Principal (068) test average scaled domain score of School Leadership. Results indicated no significance main effect of year, $F(1.82, 52.73) = .282, p = .734$, and no significant main effect of delivery method, $F(2, 29) = .567, p = .573$. There was no significant interaction between year and delivery method, $F(3.64, 52.73) = .203, p = .923$.

A third mixed ANOVA was conducted to examine whether there were year and delivery method difference in the TExES Principal (068) test average scaled domain score of Instructional Leadership. Results indicated significance main effect of year, $F(1.98, 57.27) = 9.411, p < .001$, with a large partial $\eta^2 = .245$, but not for delivery method, $F(2, 29) = 1.526, p = .234$. Significant differences were identified between year of 2013-2014 and 2015-2016 (mean difference = 2.019, $p = .001$) and between year of 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 (mean difference = 1.724, $p < .01$) There was no significant interaction between year and delivery method, $F(3.95, 57.27) = .246, p = .909$.

A fourth mixed ANOVA was conducted to examine whether there were year and delivery method difference in the TExES Principal (068) test average scaled domain score of Administrative Leadership. Results indicated no significance main effect of year, $F(1.99, 57.75) = 2.103, p = .131$, and no significant main effect of delivery method, $F(2, 29) = .049, p = .952$. There was no significant interaction between year and delivery method, $F(3.98, 57.75) = .306, p = .872$.

To find out whether there is a significant difference between the years of 2013-2014, 2014-2015, and 2015-2016 across three different types of delivery methods (e.g., F2F, blended, or online), the passing percentage of TExES Principal (068) test average scaled total score and the three domain scores (i.e., school leadership, instructional leadership, and administrative leadership) were also examined. Results showed that TExES Principal (068) test mean passing percentage was 81.9% (SD = 10.5%) in 2013-2014, 72.19% (SD = 14.13%) in 2014-2015, and 60.44% (SD = 15.53%) in 2015-2016. The TExES Principal (068) test total passing percentage for the total score and domain scores by delivery method and year.

A mixed ANOVA was conducted to examine whether there were year and delivery method difference in the passing percentage of TExES Principal (068) test average scaled total score. Results indicated a significant main effect of year, $F(1.19, 33.298) = 29.252, p < .001$, with a large partial $\eta^2 = .511$, but not for delivery method, $F(2, 28) = .17, p = .845$. Significant differences were identified between year of 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 ((mean difference = 8.16, $p < .05$), between 2013-2014 and 2015-2016 (mean difference = 19.76, $p$
A second mixed ANOVA was conducted to examine whether there were year and delivery method difference in the passing percentage of TExES Principal (068) test in the domain of School Leadership. Results indicated significant main effect of year, $F(1.73, 50.01) = 5.29, p < .05$, with a medium partial $\eta^2 = .15$, but not for delivery method, $F(2, 29) = .509, p = .606$. Significant differences were identified between year of 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 (mean difference = 1.54, $p < .05$) and between year of 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 (mean difference = 1.387, $p <.01$). There was no significant interaction between year and delivery method, $F(3.45, 50.01) = .191, p = .923$.

A third mixed ANOVA was conducted to examine whether there were year and delivery method difference in passing percentage of the TExES Principal (068) test in the domain of Instructional Leadership. Results indicated significant main effect of year, $F(1.97, 57.08) = 28.51, p < .001$, with a large partial $\eta^2 = .496$, but not for delivery method, $F(2, 29) = 1.819, p = .18$ Significant differences were identified between year of 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 (mean difference = 1.711, $p < .05$), between 2013-2014 and 2015-2016 (mean difference = 2.12, $p < .001$), and between year of 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 (mean difference = 3.83, $p <.001$). There was no significant interaction between year and delivery method, $F(3.94, 57.08) = .166, p = .953$. A fourth mixed ANOVA was conducted to examine whether there were year and delivery method difference in the passing percentage of TExES Principal (068) test in the domain of Administrative Leadership. Results indicated no significance main effect of year, $F(1.97, 56.99) = 2.073, p = .136$, and no significant main effect of delivery method, $F(2, 29) = .039, p = .962$. There was no significant interaction between year and delivery method, $F(3.93, 56.99) = .335, p = .850$.

**Educational Importance of the Study**

Our three year study provides the first statewide analysis of Texas principal preparation program delivery method and performance on the required TExES Principal (068) exam. Economic factors, increased role expectations and growing accountability for educator programs impact the decisions made regarding individual program delivery models. Our initial work fills a void of research in the area of program design, delivery method and accountability performance. More research is needed in the area of program curricular emphasis to better analyze impact of program delivery method and TExES Principal (068) results. Individual curricular areas supporting the Principal TExES (068) may lend themselves to specific delivery methods. This knowledge can assist principal programs as they strive to meet the need to provide aspiring principals more opportunities for deeper learning coupled with the reality of increased competition and limited resources.
References
Examining Superintendent Turnover Intent: A Quantitative Analysis of the Relationship between Job Satisfaction and Turnover Intent of Public School Superintendents in Texas

Johnny R. O’Connor, Jr., Lamar University
Vance Vaughn, The University of Texas-Tyler

Abstract
This study examined the relationship between a Texas public school superintendent’s job satisfaction and intent to turnover. Data from a random sample consisted of 306 Texas public school superintendents. Data were collected using survey instruments of job satisfaction and turnover intent. Each instrument was based on a 5-point Likert scale. Results concluded that a moderate negative relationship exists between job satisfaction and turnover intent, and that job satisfaction explained 28.8% of a superintendent’s intent to turnover. In addition, when reviewing descriptive analysis, overall, superintendents in Texas appeared to be satisfied with their jobs, which is consistent with other key literature. Over the years, it has become a known fact that the tenure of a school superintendent is three-to-five years. From a strategic perspective, this type of turnover could have long term implications as it relates to the continuity of district goals, visionary leadership, strategic management and planning, synergy, and recruitment and retention of quality personnel at all levels.

Introduction
The Brown Center on Education Policy at Brookings (BCEPB) is a national organization that provides support and publishes research of interest about school superintendents. The BCEPB periodically issues a comprehensive report on American school superintendents and their work experiences, highlighting demographic information such as gender, professional background, experience and salary. In 2010, the results of this study suggested that a superintendent’s job satisfaction was linked to crisis on the job (Chingos and Whitehurst, 2015). In 2015, the BCEPB published an updated study. Results of this study concluded that most superintendents were satisfied with their jobs (Chingos and Whitehurst 2014). Despite this fact, a large majority of superintendents still harbor heavy loads of stress, which can be disabling and impede work performance (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). Stressors are often a result of a variety of factors, and evolve from the many pressures that come with the responsibilities of the job. These pressures may include, conflicts and differences of opinions and philosophies of school board members, or broken and contentious relationships with employees and community members, to name a few. This type of stress can create job dissatisfaction and uneasiness with superintendents as they lead their districts. Despite this dissatisfaction and uneasiness, interestingly, a large majority of superintendents continue to report that if they had to choose a career again, they would choose the superintendency (AASA, 2015).

Notwithstanding, according to retention and turnover studies of superintendents in Texas, Texas superintendents are turning over in districts like a revolving door. Reports show that, on average, superintendents remain in school districts from three-to-five years (Grissom and Anderson, 2012). These findings are comparable to findings reported from a 2007 study by Glass
and Francechini, which stated that, nationwide, 55% of superintendents would be unemployed within five years.

If most superintendents are satisfied with their jobs, the question remains, why is the turnover rate for superintendents in Texas extremely high? It is known from practice as superintendents, and from individual experiences, whether gained or learned, that many superintendents do not remain in districts for extended periods of time. According to Grissom and Anderson (2012), one of the primary reasons why superintendents leave their districts after three to five years is because superintendent and school board relationships deteriorate. This phenomenon is not new. In fact, several studies have sufficiently supported that superintendents leave school districts when their relationships deteriorate with school districts and school boards.

Statement of the Problem

The role of school superintendent has become increasingly complex, and is often viewed as a critical element to the overall well-being of a school district (Thompson, 2014). In fact, school boards invest thousands of dollars and countless hours investigating the qualifications and backgrounds of candidates, in hopes of selecting a high quality pick. Despite this, it has become common knowledge that the average tenure of a school district superintendent is three to five years (TASSP, 2017). This timeframe can prove to be problematic for districts wishing to build a long-term foundation, due to the notion that longevity is often associated with stability, and provides the time necessary to establish the focus required for the implementation of district wide plans (Palladino, Grady, Haar, & Perry, 2007). The limited tenure of a superintendent can have unintended consequences, ultimately impacting district reform (Fullan, 2000), staff morale, operations, community relations, and potentially student achievement (Grissom & Mitani, 2016). This study will seek to examine the relationship between the job satisfaction and turnover intent of Texas school superintendents.

Theoretical Framework

Over the last several decades, the topic of job satisfaction has garnered thousands of research articles and much interest (Quarstein et al., 1992; Spector, 1997; Thompson et al., 1997). In fact, over twenty years ago it was reported that more studies had been completed related to job satisfaction than for any other variable (Spector, 1997). These studies have included the examination of antecedents of job satisfaction, dimensions of job satisfaction, and the relationship between job satisfaction and turnover (Fields, 2002). Irrespective, literature related to this phenomena and school superintendents still remains scarce.

Theories of Job Satisfaction

One of the theories guiding this study is the notion that superintendent job satisfaction is tied to their intent to remain in a school district. Therefore, when a superintendent is not satisfied with his/her job, for any reason, it is possible that he/she will pursue other districts. This inverse relationship has been documented in the literature, whereas job satisfaction has been found to negatively impact employees’ off-job focus, perceived danger, perceived risk, tasks, distractions, and intent to leave (Siegall & McDonald, 1995). Given the size of Texas, this often means moving to another Texas school district.
**Malsow’s Need Hierarchy**

In 1954, Abraham Maslow proposed a theory of needs (Golembiewski, 2001). In this theory, Maslow (1954) argues that in order for a person to be satisfied, five basic needs must be met: (a) physiological needs, (b) safety needs, (c) social needs, (d) esteem needs, and (e) self-actualization needs. Maslow (1954) further indicated that individuals who are genuinely self-actualized accomplish satisfaction by being truly dedicated to a specific duty, form of work, or mission. The researcher further stated that each of these traits serves a higher purpose than that of self-satisfaction, in turn benefiting others or society (Golembiewski, 2001).

**Situational Occurrences Theory**

The Situational Occurrences Theory of Job Satisfaction has been founded by two factors: situational characteristics and situational occurrences. Both are unique in that Situational Characteristics are those aspects of a job that a person evaluates prior to accepting the job. These include pay, promotional opportunities, working conditions, company policies, and supervision. Assuming the importance of these factors to the prospect, these characteristics are often communicated during the interview or published in promotional materials. In short, situational characteristics are somewhat stable or stable aspects of a work environment and situational occurrences are relatively transient. The situational occurrence theory contends that job satisfaction is a function of situational occurrences and situational characteristics and that any given factor can result in job satisfaction or job dissatisfaction (Quarstein et al., 1992).

**Theories of Turnover**

Most theory related to voluntary turnover can be derived from the theories of March and Simon (Mitchell et al., 2001). March and Simon’s theory focuses on the perceived ease and desirability of an employee leaving his/her job. Similarly, Mobley’s (1977) psychological model of turnover suggests that when an employee is dissatisfied with a job, he/she then begins to evaluate alternatives and then quits if the alternative is expected to result in a more satisfying job. Drawing on field theory, Mitchell et al. (2001) proposed that being embedded in an organization and a community will reduce both intent to leave and actual leaving.

**Methodology**

**Research Design**

A quantitative research design was used to examine the relationship between the job satisfaction and turnover intent of Texas school superintendents working in independent school districts. Specifically, for this study, a Pearson correlation analysis and linear regression were conducted. Data were collected using survey measures related to each construct. All measures were rated based on a 5 point likert scale, whereas, 1 – Strongly Disagree, 2 - Disagree, 3 – Neither Agree or Disagree, 4 - Agree, and 5 -Strongly Agree. Measures used in this study were Job Satisfaction by Cammann et al. (1983) and The Superintendent Scale of Turnover Intent by O’Connor (2014). Scales were distributed via electronic mail (email) to participant’s email of record in the Texas Education Agency (TEA) AsKTED system. Over the years, researchers have shown an increased interest in the use of web-based survey instruments (Daley, McDermott, Brown, & Kittleson, 2003; Gall et al., 2003), given the convenience of this platform. All surveys were self administered by participants.

**Population**

A research population is often referred to as the overall group in which a researcher wants to
learn about (McClave, Benson, & Sincich, 2001). In this study, school superintendents in Texas public schools were the target population. Each participant met the following criteria: (a) listed in TEA AskTED database as a Texas public school superintendent of an independent school district during the 2016 – 2017 school year. At the time of this research there was a total populations that met this criteria of N=1027.

**Sampling**

Utilizing the Texas Education Agency (TEA) AsKTED system a random sample of 306 respondents was identified as being public school superintendents of independent school districts in the state of Texas, during the 2016 – 2017 school year. Sampling procedures, based on the total population, determined that a sample of 306 would be well above the recommended sample for a population of 1027 (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). By using random sampling, the researcher can “have much greater confidence that their findings are not due to some special characteristic of the sample but rather are truly representative of the whole population (Swanson & Holton, 2001, p. 71). In this sampling technique, each participant who meets the given criteria has an equal chance of being selected (Cohen & Manion, 1994).

**Instrumentation**

A survey by Cammann et al. (1983) was used to elicit participant responses related to overall job satisfaction. Consisting of three items, this instrument was originally based on a seven-point Likert scale. In this study, responses were rated as 1 – Strongly Disagree, 2 - Disagree, 3 – Neither Agree or Disagree, 4 - Agree, and 5 -Strongly Agree. Previous studies have recorded coefficient alpha values for this instrument ranging from .67-.95.

A Scale of Superintendent Turnover Intent was used in this study. Based on a review of the literature, an initial draft of the instrument was created (O’Connor, 2014). Face Validity and Content Validity were reviewed by a panel consisting of 12 public school superintendents that have held their positions between three to five years. Superintendents who reviewed the instrument represented north, south, east, and west regions of the United States. Revisions were made based on the feedback of the superintendent panel. The final instrument resulted in three items. The instrument was piloted and yielded a coefficient alpha of .74.

**Data Analysis**

Instruments for this study allowed the researchers to collect quantitative data for each variable. Once data collection was complete, the data were imported in to SPSS 24 for coding and analysis. For the purposes of this study, parametric techniques were utilized, namely the Pearson Moment Correlation and Linear Regression. According to Hinkle, Wiersma, and Jurs (2003), the Pearson Product Moment Correlation is a statistical procedure that allows a researcher to determine the relationship between two quantitative variables. Similarly, Linear (Bivariate) regression is a statistical technique that examines the relationship between two variables as well as predicts scores on one variable based upon information regarding the other variable (Hinkle et al., 2003). The research questions formulated for this study were tested at the .05 levels or better.

**Results**

Although previous reliability was established for each instrument, reliability was analyzed based on the population in this study. Reliability for Cammann et al. (1983) instrument of Job Satisfaction was .783, based on the population in this study. In addition, the Scale of
Superintendent Turnover Intent was also reliable at .751. Both levels of reliable are considered to be at a respectable level. Regarding the relationship between job satisfaction and turnover intent of school superintendents of an independent school district in Texas, findings from this study suggested that a moderate statistically significant negative relationship existed between the two variables, r(306) = -.537, p<.001, r² = .288. In other words, as a superintendent’s job satisfaction increases, his/her intent to turnover decreased. Furthermore, job satisfaction accounted for 28.8% of the variance in turnover.

Discussion

Research studies related to the job satisfaction and the turnover intent of school superintendents in Texas are limited. The results of this study suggest that job satisfaction has a significant influence on the turnover intent of a public school superintendent in Texas, working in an independent school district. This finding is consistent with past studies, as well as superintendent studies conducted in other states. As the job of the school superintendent continues to evolve and become more complex in nature, creating environments that are coherent, consistent, and establish a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment will be paramount. Establishing such a framework will require the retention of high quality leadership.

Over the past several decades, public education has experienced a gradual shift from a single focus of student achievement to more multidimensional foci that encompasses both accountability and school improvement (Davies & Davies, 2006; Mehta, 2014). As a result of this shift, the need for a more planned and strategic approach to leadership has become more vital (O’Connor, 2016). According to Marturano and Gosling (2007), organizations need leaders with the ability to effectively collaborate and implement strategies that can respond to complex problems in environments where contexts and needs are continually evolving. Given the complex and ever changing nature of public school systems, this type of deliberate and strategic leadership is necessary in order to position these organizations for maximum goal attainment (Quong & Walker, 2010). Unfortunately, this type of ideology is not always embraced when it comes to top leadership in public school districts, leading to these professionals feeling undervalued and dissatisfied, significantly impeding an individual’s overall productivity and effectiveness (Mottaz, 1985). In fact, superintendents who are satisfied believe in their ability to impact the positive outcomes of all stakeholders (Kassebaum, 2011). This type of commitment and belief is required to build sustainable organizations.

Conclusions

Based on this study, it can be concluded that some superintendents will likely turnover due to dissatisfaction with their job. The inverse relationship between the variables of job satisfaction and turnover has been well documented in the literature (Siegall & McDonald, 1995). This is of importance, especially for public agencies, where retaining quality workers can be a concern (Cho and Lewis, 2012; Pynes, 2009; Selden, 2009). Based on this, the following conclusions were presented:

- Some superintendents turnover due to job dissatisfaction
- The more satisfied a school superintendent is, the less likely he/she will turnover
- School boards should consider the effect of job satisfaction on the retention of the
school superintendent

- Given the relationship between job satisfaction and turnover intent, it is vital that school boards who have determined that they have a quality superintendent, be keen in understanding what specific situations, factors, and circumstances may cause job dissatisfaction with their superintendents.

Implications For Practice

- Boards should consider a component to the superintendent evaluation, that reflects on the superintendent’s opinion about their job satisfaction. This information can provide valuable insight in terms of cultivating a more authentic and trusting job relations. However, this type of reflection may only be productive in a safe environment where there is mutual respect.

- Board presidents, in their informal and formal meetings with superintendents should include candid conversations about superintendent job satisfaction and board expectations. This can cultivate trust, build relationships, in turn yielding positive results on many levels (Thompson, 2014)

- The implications of job satisfaction on the retention of a school superintendent are clear. If a school superintendent departs, broad based disruption throughout the organization can occur (Ray & Marshall, 2005; Waters & Marzano, 2006). In fact, lack of stability in this role can lead to school district’s changing directions every 3 – 5 years, and can be counterproductive to the process of continuous improvement, which is vital to any school district seeking consistency and improvement (Grissom & Mitani, 2016). This is important to consider because most superintendents develop long-range plans that take time to develop (Fullan, 2000).

- Furthermore, based on this research, board members can promote and communicate the potential importance of building work environments that implement programs that promote job satisfaction, strategic job design, and endorse manageable workloads.

Limitations of the Study

- Scope of the study was limited to superintendents of independent school districts in Texas Public Schools

- Study did not investigate specific reasons why superintendent become dissatisfied with their job

- This study was limited to the information acquired from the literature review and survey instruments.

- This study was dependent upon the accurate self-report of respondents regarding their recollections and reactions regarding their job satisfaction and intentions pertaining to their persistence and turnover intention in their current jobs

Recommendations for Future Studies

- Extend the study to investigate school superintendent in other states

- Conduct study using private school superintendents as target participants

- Investigate specific factors known to influence superintendent job satisfaction
• Employ alternative methodologies in studying the variables identified in this study. Although well studied, these variables seem to lack an abundance of qualitative perspectives. A mixed-methods approach to this study may offer a deeper perspective as to why superintendents responded as they did in this study.

• Future studies should seek to further define this study within Texas. For example, data can be collected from various regions (southern, northern, etc.) in Texas. Additionally, researchers should replicate this study between states, as well as nationally. This will assist researchers in drawing additional conclusions and recommendations with regard to a specific demographic of the population.

• A longitudinal study could provide valuable information in understanding the relationship between variables over time. Specifically, related to the population and variables addressed in this study, no longitudinal analysis was identified. Furthermore, the relevance of a longitudinal study can be recognized because major events often affect how individuals feel about a given situation (i.e., economic downturn, natural disasters, reorganization of schools, policy changes, etc.).

References


The Challenges, Conflicts, and Effective Practices of Rural East Texas Superintendents: A Phenomenological Study

Gregg Weiss, Mt. Vernon ISD  
Chuck Holt, Texas A&M University-Commerce

Abstract
The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the lived experiences, challenges, conflicts, and administrative practices of five effective rural East Texas superintendents on the topic of school leadership. The researcher conducted a qualitative study in which five effective rural East Texas superintendents were interviewed to discover factors to effective school leadership. A review of the literature produced seven themes that guided the study: history of public schools in Texas, history of the school superintendent, rural public schools, teaching and learning in rural schools, challenges of the rural school superintendent, standards for school superintendents, and traits of effective school superintendents. Participant interviews focused on the perceptions of challenges faced by rural East Texas superintendents and practices used to manage school districts effectively. The findings supported recommendations regarding the need for rural East Texas superintendents to be versatile, possess good people skills, encourage collaboration, constantly seek improvement, and be financially savvy.

Introduction
School superintendents across the State of Texas face challenges regardless of whether the school setting is suburban, urban, or rural. However, Tobin (2006) argued that rural superintendents experience several distinct differences compared to urban superintendents. For example, superintendents of large urban schools can employ additional administrative staff to delegate educational tasks. Conversely, rural school superintendents often perform multiple roles and responsibilities because of limited financial resources (Lamkin, 2006). According to Laub and O’Connor (2009), “rural school leaders face a variety of challenges, shoulder enormous responsibilities and wear many different hats from instructional leader and resource manager to politician and consensus builder” (p. 152). To lead a rural school district successfully, the superintendent must possess the skill set to deal effectively with a variety of complex issues and challenges associated with the position (Lamkin, 2006). Such challenges include school funding, federal and state mandates, state assessment, declining enrollment, school funding, facilities management, attracting and retaining teachers, and community, and school board relations (Williams, 2010).

Rural school superintendents must possess an arsenal of skills to employ practices that effectively meet the diverse needs of their students, schools, and communities. Callahan (1966) identified the following four conceptualizations of the school superintendency: (a) teacher-scholar, (b) business manager, (c) statesman, and (d) applied social scientist. As the position evolved with societal changes, Kowalski (2005) identified several critical areas to successful rural school leadership, including being an effective communicator, business manager, finance
specialist, politician, and instructional leader. The researcher sought to understand leadership among superintendents in rural East Texas.

Theory and Rationale
School superintendents face a variety of complex and challenging obstacles that require honed leadership skills to manage the schools they serve effectively. This researcher sought to understand the phenomena of the rural superintendents through the capturing of their lived experiences and to inform the broader educational community by identifying challenges that superintendents in small rural East Texas schools face and the practices they use to achieve success. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the lived experiences, challenges, conflicts, and administrative practices of five effective rural East Texas superintendents on the topic of school leadership.

The theoretical lens through which this study was developed was in the tradition of functionalism. The researcher utilized hermeneutic phenomenology as the primary methodology. Researchers have identified a number of challenges that small rural school districts face, including retaining and attracting teachers, facilities, school finances, school board-superintendent relations, community relations, policy mandates, transportation, curriculum, and declining enrollment (Tobin, 2006). Additionally, researchers have identified practices for being an effective school leader (Reeves, 2003). This researcher examined the challenges that small rural East Texas superintendents’ face and the effective practices they use to address those challenges.

Rural schools are often thought of as the heart of small communities; however, these schools face a number of challenges that their urban counterparts do not face (Laub & O’Connor, 2009). These authors noted that “unlike their urban and suburban counterparts, rural school leaders face a variety of challenges, shoulder enormous responsibilities and wear many different hats from instructional leader, resource manager, to politician and consensus builder” (p. 152).

Methodology
The researcher employed a phenomenological research method using five rural East Texas superintendents to provide a rich description their lived experiences. Bogdan and Bilken (2007) defined qualitative research as a method of research that relies on inductive thinking, participants’ perspectives, and natural settings to acquire descriptive data.

The researcher developed semi-structured, open-ended interview questions by reviewing extant literature. Specifically, the researcher designed the interview questions to allow participating superintendents the opportunity to provide their lived experiences of the challenges they face and effective practices they have employed to respond to those challenges. Participants’ responses revealed unique perspectives on leadership in rural East Texas public schools. Analysis of the data from each interview identified common themes, concepts, and categories. The researcher employed various procedures consistent with conducting qualitative research, including conducting and transcribing interviews, identifying emerging themes, and analyzing and coding information. Using a process known as free imaginative variation, the researcher elaborated on the findings and essential meanings and documented these meanings in the field journal. The ancillary purpose of the field journal is to allow the researcher to take good field notes and document the thought process used to arrive at themes. Next, the researcher revisited the raw data descriptions to justify the interpretations of both the essential meanings
and the general structure. The researcher then moved to critical analysis of the data by verifying that concrete detailed descriptions were obtained from all participants, that phenomenological reduction was maintained throughout the analysis, and that essential meanings were discovered and a structure articulated. The structural description allowed the researcher to interpret the data by asking questions, making comparisons, and looking for similarities or differences between interview responses.

**Findings and Discussion**

To uncover rich and thick descriptions of participants lived experiences, the following overarching research questions guided the study:

1. What unique challenges and conflicts do effective rural East Texas superintendents perceive as the most difficult to manage in their school districts?
2. What administrative practices do effective rural East Texas superintendents perceive as the most critical in overcoming the challenges encountered in their school districts?

Five themes and six administrative practices emerged that tied together the themes and the overarching research questions. The themes included being versatile, possessing good people skills, encouraging collaboration, constantly seeking improvement, and being financial savvy. Creswell (2012) suggested that coding allows the researcher to decide what should be collected and to determine when saturation has occurred.

### Table 1

*Themes: One on One Interviews of School Superintendents*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes/Subthemes</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Participant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Versatile</td>
<td>Perform multiple administrator roles.</td>
<td>A, B, C, D, E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good People Skills</td>
<td>Effectively work with all stakeholders.</td>
<td>A, B, C, D, E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage Collaboration</td>
<td>Unite constituents for the greater good.</td>
<td>B, D, E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constantly Seek Improvement</td>
<td>Strive to avoid complacency.</td>
<td>A, B, C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Savvy</td>
<td>Be resourceful and a good steward of money.</td>
<td>A, B, C, D</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2

*Administrative Practices*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finance/Budget</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediation</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Relations</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Capital</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results of this study bring insight into superintendents’ perceptions of the challenges and conflicts that exist along with the practices implemented to serve their rural East Texas school districts effectively. Participants recognized that their roles as rural school superintendents differed greatly compared to large and urban school superintendents.

**Conclusions and Implications for Practice**

In summary, rural school superintendents take on monumental tasks that differ from the work of their urban counterparts. In fact, rural school superintendents become part of their communities and share the same hopes, dreams, and aspirations of developing young leaders who can go confidently into the world and meet challenges head on. So many small schools are not able to sustain themselves and adequately meet standards of financial and academic accountability. As such, it has become a phenomenon when an individual is capable of balancing the multitude of challenges to bring people together with the common cause of making rural schools more effective to enrich the lives of students and communities alike.

Previous studies outside the State of Texas that have focused on a specific geographical location have been conducted on the practices that identify successful rural school leadership (Wilson, 2010). The findings from this study provide information on the lived experiences of identified successful rural East Texas superintendents, which can afford greater clarity and understanding for researchers, state legislative bodies, and school board members. Additionally, results of this study can be used by those who seek to advance in the role of a rural school superintendent in East Texas and improve the practice of current rural school superintendents. The current findings may be useful for researchers and institutions seeking to improve superintendent preparation programs with specific interest in succession planning for schools in rural East Texas.
References
Reeves, C. (2003). *Implementing the no child left behind act: Implications for rural schools and districts*. Naperville, IL: North Central Regional Educational Laboratory.
Abstract
Established theories, mandated assessments and new instructional supervisory techniques are dictating a paradigm shift in the development of the transformational educational environment. To develop a truly transformational campus with a culture that supports collaboration and collegial conversation, school leaders must enhance their relationships with the stakeholders of the schools. Trust through empowerment, a personalized approach to the supervision of instruction and the recognition that emotional intelligence is important when collaborating with stakeholders will help create the sustainable transformational campus. These key concepts along with two important theories which support these strategies will be presented in this manuscript. Keywords: personalization, sustainability, reciprocity, empowerment, authenticity

Introduction
Organizational socialization is the process by which a person secures relevant job skills, acquires functional level of organizational understanding, attains supportive social interactions with coworkers, and generally accepts the established ways of a particular organization (Tormina, 1997). The socialization process is not a formal orientation or a scripted dialogue that will help the new teacher become acclimated to the new social environment (Benigno, 2015). The socialization of the new teacher involves an intricate and selective non-directional series of experiences involving students, parents, teachers, administrators and classified personnel (Benigno, 2015). That being said, the development of a productive and formative relationship between the school leadership and the teacher must begin at the inception of the teacher’s initial contact with the school environment. School administrators, school leaders, lead teachers, counselors, parent facilitators and lead support personnel are critical in developing that culture of trust that will be conducive to building that transformational environment.

Accountability, mandated expectations and the emphasis on data collection and analysis have altered the expectations of the twenty-first century school leadership. Principals are now being required to facilitate and develop instructional promise in their buildings (Benigno, 2017). School leaders are no longer perceived as managers or even instructional leaders. Principals are expected to be transformational strategists who build capacity through leadership, empowerment, and facilitation and theoretically sound administrative practices. “School administration is no longer about school leaders who lead only because they supervise others; it’s about leaders who lead through the lens of coaching, help others acquire for themselves their own set of new essentials” (Kee, Anderson, Dearing, Harris, Shuster, 2010).

If school leaders can identify and implement strategies that develop trust and cohesiveness with fidelity, teachers will develop confidence in the school leadership that will transcend many of the organizational obstructions that can often hinder the paramount relationship that must be developed between the school leadership and the instructional staff.
“Leadership that is willing to realign structures and relationships to achieve genuine and sustainable change” (Elias, Obrien, Weissberg 2006) is required. With the elimination of organizational obstructions and the cultivation of the collegial relationships, the transformational environment can be established. The sense making processes engaged in by individuals and groups of individuals and by groups of groups are continuous and constantly changing as their experience of the organization changes (Jones, G.R. 1983).

**Theoretical Support**

The Leader-Member Exchange Theory “conceptualizes leadership as a process that is centered on the interactions between the leaders and followers” (Northhouse, 2013). Those interactions are the strategic catalysts in the development of a relationship between school leaders and the stakeholders in the schools. A dyadic relationship based on the premise that there is an agreement of reciprocity between the school leader and the stakeholder is developed through a series of interactions and mutual conversations related to like concerns or interests. Teachers and school leaders simply realize that they are on the same page. This dyadic relationship can be negotiated or may evolve or devolve as the role responsibilities of the school leader and of the stakeholder develop through the course of their interactions. The relationship matures through practice. Trust is developed, people want to know that they can count on one another. According to Northhouse (2013), the negotiations involve exchanges in which subordinates do certain activities that go beyond their formal job descriptions. “The ongoing communication, collaboration and cooperation that takes place between the individuals involved in the dyadic relationship experience can evolve into a high degree of mutual trust, respect and an obligation to each other” (Graen and Uhl-Bien 1991). The important factor in this process is the redundancy involved with the communication and collaboration. Ongoing activities and shared decision making strategies must take place on a regular basis about things that matter to everyone. This theory supports the implementation of an individualized strategy that is congruent with most new models of instructional supervision and coincidentally will offer an opportunity for the administration and the teacher to develop a collegial relationship (Benigno, 2017).

The relationship between the school administration and the individual teachers and stakeholders must be nurtured through authentic opportunities for collaboration and collegial interaction. The relationship between the school leader and the teacher/stakeholder will hopefully develop into a professional collaboration that will evolve and blossom into a partnership that will benefit both participants in that relationship and cultivate a transformational culture.

The Path Goal Theory suggests that teachers and stakeholders will be motivated if they think they are capable of performing their work, if they believe their efforts will result in a certain outcome, and if they believe that the payoffs for doing their work are worthwhile (Northhouse, 2013). Key to this premise in the school environment is the ability of the school leader to understand the motivation of the teachers and the stakeholders and be able to accommodate their needs by adapting motivational and supervisory strategies that are specific to the needs of the individual teacher (Benigno, 2017). Developmentally differentiated supervision can empower the administrator to individualize that “path clearing” strategy and help the school leader formulate the most advantageous plan for teacher success. School leaders can open the door for stakeholders to achieve goals that are related to their areas of interest and passion and
these same individuals can reciprocate by responding favorably to future administrative initiatives and suggestions.

Both of these theories support the development of a continuum that reflects the concept of the transformational environment. This continuum involves the implementation of a developmental supervision concept that emphasizes a progressive and formative strategy to enable the school administration to identify and incrementally empower instructional leaders on the campus. These theories support the need for school administrations to cultivate relationships and through that cultivation identify strategic empowerment strategies that will address the specific expertise of the individual teacher leader.

Emotional Intelligence

Walking into a faculty meeting as a new administrator can stimulate internal feelings of apprehension, excitement, anxiety and even fear. Understanding those feelings and developing a self-awareness and the ability to control one’s emotions through an immediate self-reflection and self-analysis can improve the outcome of that experience. “The ability to manage your emotions and remain calm under pressure has a direct link to your performance” (Bradberry, 2016). This continued self-analysis under pressure will develop an emotional mechanism in the school leader that will enhance the leader’s ability to relax under pressure, think under stressful situations and formulate strategies that can lead to an enhanced relationship and even an externally perceived aura of confidence.

As the school leader develops the ability to self-analyze and make strategic decisions under stressful situations, the leader must also develop a sociological and cultural awareness of the environment and the individual emotional differences of the stakeholders in any given situation. According to Northouse, (2013), determining the basic dimensions or characteristics of different cultures is the first step in being able to understand the relationship between them. The development of that sociological and cultural awareness requires that the school leader takes the initiative to prepare and research the norms and the cultural uniqueness of the environment. Additionally, within every institution are individuals who have assumed roles and who have developed specific personality traits to cope with those roles. “Every role has certain normative responsibilities, and these will differ by role. It is the interaction of the institutional and idiographic dimensions within the various roles that results in the observed behavior of individuals in the organization” (Ubben, Hughes, Norris, 2016). As a leader who is responsible for the communication and the facilitation of the school vision, the ability to individualize and differentiate the communication strategies between the administration and these individuals is paramount. This process is an evolving exercise that will also require the leadership to research, observe and interact. The identification of the differences, expertise and deficiencies in these individuals will require administrators to have presence, collaborate, and be strategically observant.

This emotional intelligence can be developed through a concerted effort by the school leadership to engage in authentic conversation and interaction on a regular basis. This endeavor requires the school administration to create opportunities for collegial and academic conversation through informal meetings, discussion sessions, coffee breaks, lunch meetings, after school get-togethers and shared seminars and conferences. Through these authentic opportunities to communicate, stakeholders and school leaders can develop a collegial relationship. That relationship can reveal critical information about the individuals in the building and that
information will enhance the development of that intuitive ability to differentiate communication strategies with stakeholders in the school.

Trust

Trust is one’s willingness to be vulnerable to another based on the confidence that the other is benevolent, honest, open, reliable and competent (Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) maintain that “culture, climate and the existing norms can influence the outcome of any effort to build trust”.

Personalization, authenticity, transparency, reciprocity and sustainability are important concepts that can develop that culture of trust in the organization. As the administration begins to analyze individual stakeholders and develop relationships with those individuals through authentic engagement and interactions, school leaders will also begin to reveal themselves to their constituents. Teachers, stakeholders, parents and students are always watching and listening. One of the greatest obstacles to developing a truly transformational environment is perception or more importantly a negative perception. As school leaders begin to reveal visions, aspirations and messages related to their planning and goal setting, they have to be cognizant of how the recipient is receiving the message and better yet how the messenger is delivering the message.

As a school leader it is important to understand the need for individualized treatment of the stakeholders in the building. Developing a personalized approach to communicating with the faculty is an imperative. Through interactions, observations and conversations with faculty and other personnel, the school leader should be able to identify specific unique characteristics of each individual. Obviously school leaders will not be able to know everyone in the building but the astute leader can learn enough about most individuals to be able to develop a personalized approach with many of the stakeholders. This personalized approach may require only minimal information but simply knowing a stakeholder’s first name can go a long way in creating the relationship and in developing trust. Personalization is one of the stepping stones to that transformational environment that leaders should aspire to develop in the schools.

Authentic conversation, sincere concern and coherent messages are a catalyst in developing that transformational environment. “The capacity to engage in honest and disclosing talk cannot be underestimated in professional learning communities” (Lieberman, Miller 2008). Authenticity and trust are synonymous. Leadership must provide a clear message that is understood by the stakeholders. What are you saying? What do you mean? Where are you going? “It is essential that the administration conveys truthful and coherent messages, provide active disclosure and that the commitments to the instructional staff are maintained with fidelity” (Benigno, 2017).

How believable is the administration in the building? Do they represent the values that they espouse? Do they do what they say and mean what they do? Building trust is a process and transparency is one of the most instrumental tools in that trust building repertoire. Stakeholders want to see what’s coming, they want to have an idea of where the leadership is going. Many of the stakeholders in the building are leaders in the making. They understand where we are collectively trying to go and they want to be part of the process. When the school leadership is not transparent and intentionally withholds information, disguises agendas, continually makes unilateral decisions and is not inclusive with respect to policy, trust is eroded. “Transforming
leaders create trust in their organizations by making their own positions clearly known and then by standing by them” (Northouse, 2013).

“So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 7:12). This quote epitomizes the concept of reciprocity. School leaders are consistently attempting to find strategies that will convince teachers, parents and stakeholders to give back, to be part of the solution and not the problem. The responsibility for reciprocity in the transformational environment rests with the school leadership. Developing an environment that emphasizes the treatment of all individuals in the building with respect encourages reciprocity. Acknowledging accomplishment and effort with authentic accolades encourages reciprocity. A leadership presence at meetings, in the halls, during activities and in support of stakeholder initiatives, encourages reciprocity. Reciprocity is earned, it is deserved and the concept flourishes in environments that motivate and empower and encourage collegial and collaborative relationships.

The last and quite possibly the most influential strategy in developing trust is the ability to develop sustainability. Sustainability is dependent on leadership who are flexible and who are able to view multiple perspectives and embrace new ideas. Leadership that can adapt to changes in the culture, the social forces and the academic environment are sustainable leaders. The sustainable environment embraces diversity and welcomes new ideas and individuals who think outside of the box. The sustainable environment encourages collegiality, collaboration, innovation and redundant efforts to promote that ethic of care, critique and justice. Trust will flourish in this environment and that trust will enhance the development of the transformative instructional community.

Empowerment

“Followers gain a more prominent position in the leadership process because their attributions are instrumental in the evolving transformational process” (Bryman, 1992). As the transformational leaders establish a rapport and a professional and personal relationship with the stakeholder, they also are able to develop “a conceptual knowledge of the instructional expertise and leadership experience” (Benigno, 2017) of the stakeholders in the organization. Through that knowledge stakeholders can be identified, chosen or recruited to assume specific roles within the school environment. The opportunities that may avail themselves to the stakeholders through this process may be tailored to meet the specific needs of the school and also align with the unique expertise of the individual. Empowerment involves more than just providing an opportunity for a stakeholder to participate in the process. Empowerment requires the leader to spend the time, individualize and delegate the assigned or appointed responsibilities. Through this individualization, stakeholders will recognize that the school leadership has acknowledged individuality and has demonstrated a “presence” in the process, “an active engagement in the moment” (Benigno, 2017), a recognition of the specific talents and expertise of the selected stakeholders. Transformational leadership places a strong emphasis on followers’ needs, values, and morals” (Northouse, 2013). Empowerment encourages stakeholders to give back to the organization because they have been selected to symbolically carry the torch and represent the school and the organization in that effort to create that transformational environment.
Conclusion

“Transformative leaders recognize the roles of students, teachers, parents and community stakeholders in making schools current and meaningful” (Elias, O’brien, Weissberg 2006). An authentic, transparent and progressive school leadership team that operates with a vision of inclusiveness and shared governance will create that transformational environment. By developing policies, procedures, opportunities and an environment of trust and empowerment stakeholders will relish the opportunity to reciprocate and participate in making the school a true learning community. By personalizing the relationships between the school leadership and the stakeholders, an individualized approach to identifying and maximizing human potential can be developed and nurtured. Authentic personalization that leads to the development of empowered stakeholders will create that sustainable environment that can transcend many of the difficult and uncertain moments that face the school leadership in the 21st century.

References
Gruenert, Steve and Whitaker, Todd (2015) School Culture Rewired: How to define assess and transform it. ASCD 2015
Lieberman, Ann. Miller, Lynne (2008) Learning communities, the starting point for professional learning is in schools and classrooms. Journal of Staff Development


Hiring Superintendents: Do School Boards Change Their Desired Preferences for the Next Superintendent Based on the Previous Superintendent’s Performance and Style

Pauline M. Sampson, Stephen F. Austin State University
Walter Peddy, Douglass ISD
Audrey Young, Apple Springs ISD
Kerry L. Roberts, Stephen F. Austin State University

Introduction

The number of Texas superintendent searches vary each month showing 35 current open searches during October 2017. This means that there are multiple chances for school boards to hire their next superintendent to lead their district. Further, the turnover rate for superintendents has been stated as ranging between 3-6 years. Hackett (2015) shared that the majority of superintendent turnover is not voluntary. This would imply that the school boards that hired the superintendent are no longer in favor of keeping that same superintendent. There has been some research on the hiring process as well as some on the desired characteristics of superintendents (Honig, 2008; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008; Marzano and Waters, 2009). But there is minimal research on whether school boards change their desired characteristics of their future superintendent from what they desired from the exiting superintendent.

Statement of the Problem

The changes in superintendents lead for a need to determine what the school boards use to make their criteria selection for their next leader of the district and whether that decision changes based on the perceptions of the skills and school boards’ desire from their superintendent when they are searching for a new superintendent. This insight could help school boards and prospective superintendents understand the characteristics desired by school boards.

Perspective(s) or theoretical framework

Fleishman and Harris (1962) defined the components of leadership patterns in the Ohio State University Leadership Studies’ instrument as consideration and structure. Consideration is the relationship between the leader and the other group members. It is the participative inclusion of others in the decision-making process. Structure is defined as behaviors that leaders use to define their roles and the activities of the group. Additionally, the conceptual framework of Julian’s (2005) study of the traits of CEOs was utilized for the distinction of leadership traits versus management traits.

Educational or scientific importance of the study

The primary purpose of this research was to determine if school boards make their decision of desired superintendents’ characteristics based on choosing the opposite characteristics of the exiting superintendent. This study is important because it has the potential to inform school boards as well as superintendents on the reasons for determining desired characteristics for a superintendent when hiring a new superintendent. The hiring of a superintendent continues to be an important role of school boards. Districts have fewer resources to examine research and establish superintendent criteria to obtain quality candidates.
for their open superintendent positions. Additionally, it is not well established that leadership characteristics are well connected with research and not reactions to experience from exiting superintendents’ leadership characteristics whether desired or not. The determination of characteristics for future superintendents is decided by the school board as part of local authority and is not determined by state requirements.

The superintendent of a district impacts all parts of the organization as well as the impact on student learning (Honig, 2008; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008; Marzano & Waters, 2009). Therefore, it is important for school boards to understand their hiring decisions on desired superintendent characteristics. First-hand knowledge from school boards and superintendents in Texas provides current superintendent candidates as well as school boards insights into the preferences of school boards in hiring superintendents.

**Methods and Procedures**

This research explored what school boards want for characteristics and style of their superintendents and then examines if the school boards change their desired characteristics based on the exiting superintendent. The research also investigates the current superintendents’ perception of their characteristics that led to hiring as well as the skills of the exiting superintendents. The findings of this research could be useful to school boards to understand how they identify desired characteristics of the candidates for the superintendent. The research could also be beneficial for superintendent candidates when they choose to apply for positions.

The research questions that guided this study were:

1. Do school boards change their desired characteristics for a superintendent based on different characteristics of exiting superintendent?
2. Do superintendents perceive that they were hired for characteristics different than their predecessor?

The researchers explored whether the format of the research would contribute to a better understanding of the superintendents’ characteristics when hired by school boards. A list of characteristics was chosen from a dissertation conducted by Keven Foy and Holly Putnam in 2016. These characteristics were then sent to school board members asking the participants to rank order the characteristics they used for hiring their current superintendent and the characteristics they used for hiring the immediate predecessor. This same list of characteristics was sent to superintendents for their perceptions of their characteristics that they felt impacted their hiring, as well as their perceptions of the characteristics of their predecessor.

We averaged the rank to determine an order of importance for the characteristics as completed by the school board members for the exiting superintendent and the newly hired superintendent. We then averaged the rank to determine an order of importance for the characteristics completed by the superintendent for themselves and what they considered were important for their predecessor.

**Review of Literature**

The hiring process for superintendents remains limited. Boyland (2013) examined the superintendent candidate pool and identified only two studies that examined this pool from principals (Howley, Pendarvis & Gibbs, 2002; Winter, Rinehart, Keedy & Bjork, 2007). This current study found 13 recent dissertations on hiring of the superintendent on Proquest database.
A major role of school boards is the hiring of the superintendent (Sharp & Walter, 2009). Many school board members feel that this is a major reason they chose to run for the school board (Trujillo, 2013). Orloff (2012) examined the perceptions of superintendents and school board members to determine their perceptions of needed superintendent skills for the hiring of the superintendent. Orloff (2012) concluded that the comparison between the school board’s determination of skills held by the superintendent they hired with the superintendent’s insight into their skills. The results showed similar findings between the school boards and the superintendent.

School board relationship with superintendents showed that the superintendent position is challenging; therefore, some certified candidates choose not to apply for the superintendent position because of concerns with finances, accountability, as well as community and board relations (Kowalski and Brunner, 2011). Current finances within the state have shown declining financial resources and limited school financial formulas. The reduced financial resources along with increased needs of students based on more students from low socioeconomic status require lower levels of dollars to stretch further. Accountability also requires that superintendents make academic improvements for all students within districts with great student needs.

Superintendents new to a district must build relationships with school personnel and community expectations for reform or consistency in current educational programs (Hackett, 2015). The inability to establish the relationships may impact a superintendent’s longevity in a district (Grissom & Anderson, 2012). The lower tenure of superintendents in a district impacts the continuity of reforms as well as turnover of principals and teachers. Further, the replacement of a superintendent is costly to a school district. Oishi (2012) shared that school boards use search firms, state school associations, or conduct the hiring process themselves. The hiring process can cost between $20,000 to $30,000 for mid-size districts. This is an expensive process if needed to be done every six years, which is the average tenure for superintendents.

Cataldo (2011) studied Virginia school boards’ identification of the characteristics of an ideal superintendent. Cataldo’s (2011) study showed that school boards in Virginia identified the top two ideal superintendent characteristics as ethics and values followed by communication skills. Ramano (2017) investigated the relationship between Illinois school board members’ and superintendents’ rankings of the skills for an ideal superintendent candidate. He found that both sets of participants ranked ethics and values as the highest characteristics, followed by strong communication skills.

The primary purpose of this research was to determine if school boards make their decision of desired superintendents’ characteristics based on choosing the opposite characteristics of the exiting superintendent.

Results and conclusions, and potential implications

The results of this study are presented but caution must be used in generalizing the findings as the sample size was low. There were 24 superintendents and 32 school board members who returned the rankings. Additionally, one superintendent stated that none of the current school board members were present when he was hired as he had over 25 years’ experience as superintendent in the district.

School board members ranked their current superintendent’s skills/needs as demonstrated in the following list:
1. Establish and communicate non-negotiables
2. Ability to collaborate & communicate well with others
3. Ability to make systemic changes
4. Ability to create an atmosphere of appreciation of celebrating others*
5. Ability to provide staff supervision to ensure district needs followed*
6. Ability to deal with conflict and challenges
7. Ability to provide staff with support & feedback
8. Ability to monitor & create quality teaching for student learning
9. Ability to manage the district well
10. School finance experience

The school board members ranked their current superintendent highest on the ability to establish and communicate non-negotiables, followed by the ability to collaborate and communicate well with others. The school board members ranked their current superintendent lowest on school finance experience and the ability to manage the district well, followed by the ability to monitor and create quality teaching for student learning.

School board members ranked their previous superintendent’s skills as demonstrated in the following list:
1. Ability to create an atmosphere of appreciation of celebrating others/Ability to monitor & create quality teaching for student learning
2. Ability to provide staff supervision to ensure that adults follow the district’s needs
3. Ability to collaborate & communicate well with others
4. Ability to provide staff with support and feedback
5. Ability to make systemic change
6. Ability to establish & communicate non-negotiables/Ability to manage the district well
7. School finance experience/Ability to deal with conflict and challenges immediately

The school members had several ties in their rankings of previous superintendent. The school board members ranked first the ability to create an atmosphere of appreciation of celebrating others, ability to monitor and create quality teaching for student learning followed by the ability to provide staff supervision to ensure that adults follow the district’s needs. The school board members also ranked two items the lowest. They ranked school finance experience and the ability to deal with conflict and challenges lowest. Their next to lowest item was the ability to establish and communicate non-negotiables and the ability to manage the district well.

The school board did rank order differently on their previous superintendent and current superintendent on some items while staying close on other items. School finance experience was ranked last between the predecessor and current superintendent. Additionally, the ability to manage the district well was ranked low on both. Another similar ranking was the ability to provide staff with support and feedback was in the middle ranking for both. A notable difference in rankings between previous and current superintendent as ranked by the school board was the ability to monitor and create quality teaching for student learning. The school board ranked this high in the previous superintendent and lower in their current superintendent. Another item ranked quite differently was the ability to establish and communicate non-negotiables which was ranked the most important on the current superintendent but was ranked near the lowest on the previous superintendent.

The current superintendents ranked their own skills/traits as demonstrated in the following list:
1. School Finance Experience/Ability to establish and communicate non-negotiables/Ability to manage the district well
2. Ability to provide staff supervision to ensure district needs followed/Ability to make systemic change
3. Ability to collaborate & communicate well with others
4. Ability to monitor and create quality teaching for student learning/Ability to manage the district well
5. Ability to provide staff with support and feedback
6. Ability to create an atmosphere of appreciation of celebrating others/Ability to establish and communicate non-negotiables
7. Ability to manage the district well

The current superintendent ranked their own skills the highest as school finance experience and ability to establish and communicate non-negotiables. However, the item of the ability to establish and communicate non-negotiables also tied with the next to lowest item. The current superintendents ranked the ability to manage the district well the lowest, but this item had a tie and was ranked equally as the highest and in the middle of the rankings.

Current superintendents in a district ranked their perception of their predecessor superintendent’s skills/traits in the following list:

1. Ability to monitor and create quality teaching for student learning/Ability to create an atmosphere of appreciation of celebrating others
2. Ability to provide staff with support and feedback
3. Ability to collaborate & communicate well with others/ability to make systemic changes/Ability to manage the district well
4. Ability to establish and communicate non-negotiables
5. Ability to manage the district well
6. Ability to provide staff supervision to ensure that adults follow the district’s needs/School finance experience/Ability to make systemic changes/Ability to deal with conflict and challenges

The superintendents ranked highest the ability to monitor and create quality teaching for student learning tied with ability to create an atmosphere of appreciation of celebrating others. The current superintendents had a tied ranking in the lowest of four items. The four lowest ranked items were the ability to provide staff supervision to ensure that adults follow the district’s needs, school finance experience, the ability to make systemic changes, and the ability to deal with conflict and challenges. Additionally, one of the items ranked lowest tied with its placement and ranked in the middle of the ranking. This item was the ability to make systemic changes immediately. Another item tied in two ranking’s placement. This item was the ability to manage the district well that was near the bottom of the ranking and in the middle of the rankings.

A comparison between the superintendents’ ranking of their own skills and their perception of their predecessors’ skills/traits showed a difference in school finance experience. The current superintendents ranked their school experience the highest and their predecessor’s school finance the lowest. The current superintendents ranked the ability to monitor and create quality teaching for student learning and the ability to create an atmosphere of appreciation of
celebrating others as the highest for their predecessors while ranking these items more in the middle and lower of the rankings for themselves.

Another way to examine the data was to compare the school board members’ ranking of their current superintendent with the current superintendents’ ranking of themselves. The ranking of item for number one by the school board members for their current superintendent was the ability to establish and communicate non-negotiables. Next the school board members ranked their superintendent for the ability to collaborate and communicate well with others as second. The item of school finance experience was ranked the last. The school board members also ranked their superintendents’ ability to manage the district well and their ability to monitor and create quality teaching for student learning respectively ninth and eight. The current superintendents ranked their school finance experience and their ability establish and communicate non-negotiables as number one. The current superintendents ranked their ability to manage the district tied in different rankings between number one, four, seven, and ten. The current superintendents ranked nine, the item of the ability to establish and communicate non-negotiables. There were many differences between the school board members and the superintendent. The school board members ranked the ability to establish and communicate non-negotiables high while the superintendents ranked it low. The school board members ranked school finance experience last while the superintendents had school finance experience ranked first. The school board members and superintendents ranked the ability for systemic change in the top third of rankings. Also, the ability to provide staff with support and feedback was ranked by school board members and superintendents in the lowest third of rankings.

The items of importance for hiring superintendents may have some differences based on different needs or previous superintendents’ skills and performances. This was seen in items of ability to monitor and create quality teaching for student learning as well as the ability to establish and communicate non-negotiables. However, there were also items that stayed consistent.

References


Capturing the Narrative: Administrators’ Perceptions of Truancy in a Rural East Texas School District

Nathan R. Templeton
Susan Harte
Texas A&M University-Commerce

Abstract
The purpose of this study was to explore rural East Texas administrators’ perceptions of truancy policy and their approaches to implementing truancy prevention measures. The findings of this study offer insight into the perceptions of changes to Texas truancy policy implemented by Texas House Bill 2398 (2015). The researcher conducted a qualitative study using a narrative inquiry design. Narrative inquiry allowed the researcher to focus on participants’ individual accounts of experiences with student truancy. Data were collected for this study through individual semi-structured interviews. Challenges enforcing truancy policy and truancy prevention measures that keep students in school through graduation in rural Texas school districts are identified, which add to the current literature and inform the principalship in rural schools.

Introduction
Truancy affects high school graduation rates, which is a required indicator on statewide accountability systems as mandated by federal accountability standards (Every Student Succeeds Act [ESSA], 2015). To counter this effect, truancy laws and prevention measures have been established to help keep kids in school. Reasons for dropping out vary and may include personal, social, and academic challenges. These challenges can interfere with student accomplishments, academic engagement, school completion, and fulfilling personal responsibilities (e.g., helping to earn family income), which are competing factors for staying in school (Wexler & Pyle, 2012). Despite existing truancy laws, approximately 660,000 students drop out of American public high schools each year (Marcotte, 2013). In response, states, including Texas, have changed truancy laws extending compulsory attendance to age 19 and requiring school districts to develop truancy intervention plans. According to Mongeau (2015), “As states look to prepare students for 21st century jobs, many have extended the upper and lower limits of their compulsory education requirements” (p. 5). Using data from the Texas Education Agency (TEA, 2014), 6.6% of the 328,584 students in the Texas high school class of 2013 dropped out of school. A dropout is defined as a public school student enrolled in Grades 7 through 12 who is not expelled, does not return to a public or other school system the following fall, does not graduate, or does not obtain a GED (TEA, 2011). State graduation rates are determined by the National Governors Association (NGA) Compact Rate which is a “four-year, adjusted cohort graduation rate used to determine the percentage of on-time high school graduates (those receiving diplomas) from a given four-year student cohort” (TEA, 2011, p. 1). The Compact Rate system
uses actual student data as opposed to estimates, and it tracks students in cohort groups beginning in Grade 9 and continuing through graduation.

The State of Texas changed its truancy law with the passing of House Bills 2610 (2015) and 2398 (2015), effective for the 2015–2016 school year. House Bill 2610 changed the requirement from 180 days of required instruction to 75,600 minutes of required instruction annually (or 420 minutes per day). This requirement includes the provision for school districts to add minutes to the calendar year to compensate for instruction time lost because of school closures for inclement weather and other circumstances. House Bill 2398 (2015), also known as the Truancy Reform Bill, increased the compulsory education age in Texas to 19 and decriminalized truancy for students by removing §25.094 (Failure to Attend School) from the TEC. Thus, students are no longer referred to court for criminal prosecution for failure to attend school (Texas Association of School Administrators [TASA], 2015). School districts are also required to implement truancy prevention measures before referring a student to truancy court. Prior to the passage of House Bill 2398 (2015), school districts were required to adopt truancy prevention measures. However, specific truancy prevention measures were not outlined in the TEC, as they are in House Bill 2398. Thus, school administrators in districts across Texas are required to monitor student attendance and implement required truancy prevention measures in a manner that best meets the needs of the students they serve. The goal of truancy prevention measures is to keep students from dropping out of school and must include one or more of the following actions:

- A detailed behavior improvement plan for the student effective for a maximum of 45 days that describes the prohibited or required behavior or the consequences for continued absenteeism
- School-based community service
- Referral to in school or out of school services that address the student’s truancy, such as mentoring, mediation, counseling, or teen court (TSBA, 2015).

If the imposed truancy reform is unsuccessful in preventing further absences and the student is absent for 10 or more days or parts of days during a 6-month period, the school district may refer that student to truancy court for truant conduct. Exceptions to referring a student to truancy court include pregnancies, students in foster care, homeless students, or situations in which the student is the primary income earner. Exceptions may also be granted in cases in which the district successfully applies truancy prevention measures and a referral for truant conduct is not in the best interest of the student.

According to Dynarski et al. (2008), “Dropout prevention interventions almost always include multiple components” (p. 1), and early intervention can help deter students from dropping out (Schoeneberger, 2012). Attendance-monitoring systems are one type of early intervention that can be used to identify students at-risk for dropping out (Newman-Ford, Fitzgibbon, Lloyd, & Thomas, 2008). School districts in the state of Texas use the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) to track student attendance. According to the TEA (n.d.b), “PEIMS encompasses all data requested and received by TEA about public education, including student demographic and academic performance, personnel, financial, and organizational information” (p. 1). Using attendance-monitoring systems, such as PEIMS, allows administrators to monitor student attendance and implement preventive measures to encourage student attendance (Mac Iver & Messel, 2013). Effective monitoring can allow Texas
public school district administrators to respond to truancy by implementing prevention and intervention strategies that most appropriately meet the needs of their students while complying with current truancy laws.

**Statement of the Problem and Purpose**

School administrators in districts across the state of Texas must monitor attendance and implement truancy prevention measures in a matter that best meets the needs of the students they serve. Even though state attendance laws are in place, school districts deal with chronic absenteeism that often results in students dropping out of high school (Marcotte, 2013). According to the TEA (n.d.b.), 30,853 high school students dropped out of public school during the 2014–2015 school year. Compulsory attendance laws in the state of Texas apply “to students who are at least six years old as of September 1 of the applicable school year…and requires a student to attend public school until the student’s nineteenth birthday, unless the student is exempt under §25.086” (TEA, 2015, p. 1). Administrators in school districts across the state of Texas are responsible for addressing truancy concerns in their districts within the parameters of the law regardless of geographic location, demographic makeup of the student population, or district type.

The truancy law implemented under House Bill 2398 (2015) not only decriminalized truancy, it also included procedures for courts to follow when handling truancy cases and required school administrators to become more involved with truancy intervention and prevention prior to referring a case to truancy court (Wood, 2015). School responsibilities regarding truancy are outlined in Appendix A (Office of Court Administration, 2015). Policies are often developed with large school districts in mind (Parsley & Barton, 2015). However, regardless of location, size, or population, public school districts in the state of Texas are responsible for responding to truancy following the guidelines established by House Bill 2398 (2015). Administrators’ responses to student issues, including truancy, vary geographically and demographically (Fishman, 2015), and the extent to which decriminalization of truancy affects student attendance and high school completion in rural districts is unknown. The findings of this research study provide insight into rural East Texas administrators’ perceptions of truancy policy and their approaches to implementing truancy prevention measures. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore rural East Texas administrators’ perceptions of truancy policy and their approaches to implementing truancy prevention measures.

**Theoretical Framework**

**Interventions**

Dropping out of school is often the result of prolonged disengagement beginning as early as elementary school. Because many dropouts have long-term patterns of high absenteeism, interventions should be implemented in elementary and middle school. Mac Iver and Messel (2013) suggested intervening with students identified as having high absences during the middle school years and during the transition from eighth to ninth grade. However, such interventions can be challenging as students transition physically from one campus to another between eighth and ninth grade.

Researchers have conducted studies to determine what can be done to increase student attendance. Dynarski et al. (2008) found that “dropout prevention interventions almost always
include multiple components” (p. 1), and early intervention can help deter students from dropping out (Schoeneberger, 2012). Students often acquire negative attitudes toward school during adolescence; therefore, providing social support appears to be a valuable intervention (White & Kelly, 2010). Freeman and Simonsen (2015) noted, “Despite research highlighting the need to address multiple risk factors and the need for early intervention, the bulk of current empirical research is focused on single-component, individual, or small group interventions delivered at the high school level” (p. 205). Programs that target disengaged students at an early age can improve student attendance and graduation rates (Messacar & Oreopoulos, 2013). Maynard, McCrea, Pigott, and Kelly (2013) conducted a review of the literature to evaluate current truancy interventions and found limited evidence of effective programs. Tanner-Smith and Wilson (2013) also conducted a review of research on dropout prevention and intervention involving students in Grades K-12 who met a predetermined eligibility criterion. The results offered insufficient evidence that dropout prevention intervention programs affected absenteeism. However, the researchers surmised that the largest effect of dropout prevention programs might be on younger students, such as those in middle school, if interventions are put in place before chronic truancy patterns are established. Longitudinal analysis can be used to identify students who become disengaged in school, especially at the start of middle school, which could assist educators in developing interventions to increase graduation rates (Balfanz et al., 2007).

Freeman and Simonsen (2015) conducted a literature review to examine characteristics of dropout prevention programs and common elements of interventions and policy to increase school completion and reduce dropout rates. The researchers found a gap between experimental research on interventions for potential dropouts and common recommendations for dropout prevention. Freeman and Simonsen recommend using multi-tiered frameworks when implementing interventions. Previous research suggests considering the needs of students as individuals as well as groups to examine the effect of the overall school context (Mac Iver & Mac Iver, 2010). Additional research is needed to determine the systems needed to carry this consideration out effectively. Several studies have been conducted on interventions such as attendance monitoring, positive behavior supports, and mentoring to determine their potential influence on student attendance.

Attendance Monitoring

Newman-Ford et al. (2008) conducted a controlled study substantiating an earlier investigation that indicates a correlation between achievement and attendance at the university level. The researchers used a system that monitored attendance electronically, and they examined attendance rates throughout the year. Data were analyzed using SPSS, which revealed that class attendance typically dropped after the fourth week of instruction. One notable finding was “the importance of reliable attendance monitoring systems for the quick identification of persistent absentees, and indicate that action to increase attendance will help to retain students and improve their chances of academic success” (Newman-Ford et al., 2008, p. 715). Mac Iver and Messel (2013) also recommend monitoring and incentive structures to help identify early indicators and intervene with students, especially when they transitioned from middle to high school.
Positive Behavior Supports

School wide positive behavior interventions and support (SW-PBIS) is a structure to improve the educational climate and create safe and effective learning environments. The SW-PBIS system differs from other intervention programs that may be more reactive in focusing on students who are at-risk of dropping out or who have already dropped out. L. K. Johnson (2013) examined how SW-PBIS influenced academic achievement and behaviors of male students in a secure Texas juvenile justice facility using data obtained from the official agency database. Attendance was also examined by computing the number of instructional minutes lost because of discipline issues. Average daily school attendance increased by 21% after 1 year of SW-PBIS implementation. Specifically, average daily school attendance was 77% prior to the implementation of SW-PBIS and 98.2% after implementation. The results indicated improvements in student behavior and engagement in school.

Freeman et al. (2015) used structural equation modeling (SEM) to examine the effects of SW-PBIS on high school dropout rates. The researchers focused on the relationship between implementing a comprehensive SW-PBIS system with fidelity and dropout risk factors and dropout rates. Freeman et al. collected data from 883 high schools in 37 states and found that the use of SW-PBIS with fidelity for longer periods effected attendance rates positively. The improved attendance rates, in turn, resulted in decreased dropout rates.

Kearney and Graczyk (2014) conducted a review of the literature and recommended incorporating SW-PBIS in response to intervention (RtI) programs to prevent student absences and promote attendance. Specific recommendations included using SW-PBIS to establish Tier I schoolwide intervention programs aimed to promote school attendance and improve school climate. Kearney and Graczyk’s recommendation included incorporating safety-oriented strategies, such as bullying and violence prevention programs. The program included health-based, mental health, and social-emotional learning strategies, as well as enhanced parental involvement.

Tyre, Feuerborn, and Pierce (2011) examined the effectiveness of implementing SW-PBIS to reduce chronic tardiness at a Washington state school comprised of tribal students in Grades 7-12 operated by the Bureau of Indian Education. The researchers measured tardiness trends and procedural integrity to determine the effectiveness of the SW-PBIS, which was implemented based on the staff development tool, START on Time by Safe and Civil Schools. A team comprised of administrators and teachers reviewed data on student tardies and developed a schoolwide intervention plan that focused on transition periods between classes. Staff and students received training on the SW-PBIS. Designated active supervision was provided in zones, and teachers were positioned in the hallway near their classroom doors to supervise passing students and to greet students entering their classrooms. Students not in their classrooms after the passing period were escorted by members of the supervising team who recorded tardies and administered the progressive consequences related to the number of tardies accrued. The number of student tardies decreased by 67% during the 17-month implementation period (Tyre et al., 2011).

Truancy Prevention Measures

Student truancy brings several consequences, including risky behaviors such as substance use, poor school performance, and delinquency. Truant students are also more likely to drop out of high school, which can result in lower wage earnings over one’s lifetime (Maynard et al.,
Gentle-Genitty, Karikari, Chen, Wilka, and Kim (2015) aimed to define truancy by synthesizing the literature and interviewing focus groups. The researchers conducted database searches and located 226 articles using the term truancy as the search criteria. They also obtained feedback from an in-person focus group, which was used to draft a definition of truancy. The researchers amended the definition to include additional feedback. The result of their efforts was the following definition of truancy:

Truancy is a non-home schooled student’s act of non-attendance evidenced by missing part or all of the school day without it being authorized by a medical practitioner or sanctioned by parent(s) and/or legitimately excused by school or per state law. (Gentle-Genitty et al., 2015, p. 78)

Truancy is recognized as students not attending school without their parent’s knowledge. Family, social, and school problems can lead to non-attendance. Students who are truant during adolescence place themselves at-risk for becoming involved in criminal behavior, alcohol and drug abuse, domestic problems (e.g., marital problems and violence), lower economic and occupation status, and unstable career paths and potential for unemployment (Sutphen, Ford, & Flaherty, 2010). Research shows general causes for non-school attendance include “avoidance of school related stimuli that provoke negative affectivity, escape from adverse social and/or evaluative situations, pursuit of attention from significant others, and pursuit of tangible rewards outside of school” (Wilkins, 2008, p. 14). Truancy is often a symptom of larger problems such as low economic status, single-parent homes, reliance on public assistance, and unsafe housing (Skola & Williamson, 2012).

Factors that contribute to truancy can be defined by four categories: community, school, family, and individual (Sutphen et al., 2010). Community factors related to truancy primarily involve students’ SES and the neighborhoods in which they live. Students living in neighborhoods with higher unemployment rates, crime, violence, and mobility are more apt to be truant (Sutphen et al., 2010). Family factors include low family SES, single-parent homes, lack of parent involvement in education, parents with disabilities, and mobility rate. School factors include poor school attendance policies, poor student-teacher relationships, lack of school accommodations for students with disabilities, and bullying. Individual student factors include a detachment from school, learning disabilities, a fear of school, and behavior problems in school.

Students who are truant may experience academic difficulties and anxiety or fears related to school attendance. Peers can also influence truant or absenteeism behavior (De Witte & Csillag, 2014), as students may feel isolated because they do not have a sense of community in the school. Additionally, truancy reporting is not consistent across schools. De Witte and Csillag (2014) found that improvements must be made to school truancy reporting systems to signal problems of chronic absenteeism at an early stage. In addition, truancy policies are often not enforced because of cost (Messacar & Oreopoulos, 2013). State lawmakers have established truancy laws to enforce compulsory school attendance, and some states have found success in improving student attendance by implementing truancy prevention measures. School districts can collaborate with juvenile courts by applying to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) for grant funding to implement intervention programs aimed to reduce student truancy (Rogers, 2014).

Haight et al. (2014) surveyed participants to examine a multidisciplinary truancy diversion program. The researchers focused on internal and external problems associated with
absenteeism and academic achievement satisfaction. They evaluated 90 at-risk middle school students from nine at-risk middle schools that participated in truancy diversion programs. Study participants accrued between three and 15 unexcused absences during a single academic year. Based on student and parent self-reporting, Haigh et al. found that academic tutoring was a key difference between graduates and non-graduates of the truancy diversion program.

Shoenfelt and Huddleston (2006) implemented a truancy court diversion program (TCDP) in Kentucky with the aim of positively affecting student attendance. To promote communication between parents and schools, participation in the TCDP was voluntary and served as an alternative to an official court hearing for truant students. Thus, participation could prevent families from having court records. One component of the TCDP was a biweekly meeting with the child, parent, and a representative from the school to help break patterns of truant behavior. The intent of these meetings was to provide motivation for parents and students to attend school. The three stakeholders also committed to participate in the TCDP.

Shoenfelt and Huddleston (2006) collected and analyzed data using statistical comparison. Data for the study included attendance and performance records. Overall, the program was successful in increasing student attendance in school. Additionally, parents recognized a need to improve parenting skills, and they committed to imposing bedtimes and ensuring that their students arrived to school on time. Students also committed to being prepared for school, obeying school rules, and completing homework. School representatives supported parents and children by providing instruction for parents to follow for bedtime and morning routines. These instructions included providing a battery-powered alarm clock to help prevent family members from oversleeping; communicating transportation options, including providing information on school bus routes and schedules; and encouraging participation in the TCDP to avoid filing a case in truancy court.

Five school districts, the juvenile court, community corrections, and private agencies in Ramsey County, Minnesota developed the Truancy Intervention Program (TIP) to identify and intervene with at-risk students. Specifically, TIP was designed to target students in Grades 6 through 9 (unlike other programs that targeted elementary school students). The goal of the program was to avoid court involvement by providing intervention in the beginning stages of truant behaviors (Santelmann Richtman, 2007).

The TIP is a three-step process that involves collaboration among service providers and schools (Santelmann Richtman, 2007). In the first step, students with three or more absences are referred to a meeting held at the school with their parents. An assistant county attorney who informs the student and parents of the Minnesota Compulsory Education Law, provides information on the consequences of poor school attendance, and explains the three-step process of TIP conducts the meeting. If student attendance does not improve, students either are referred to the second step of the program or are sent to court.

The second step of the program involves a School Attendance Review Team (SART) meeting, during which a school counselor or social worker, an assistant county attorney, probation officer, and parents meet to develop an attendance contract for the student. According to Santelmann Richtman (2007), “Referrals to social services agencies, chemical dependency evaluations, urinalysis testing, mental health evaluations, and individual or family counseling are often included as terms of the contract to assist the family in dealing with the underlying causes
of poor attendance” (p. 424). In addition, parents are responsible for ensuring student attendance at school.

The third step of TIP involves filing a formal truancy petition in juvenile court, which usually results in the student being required to complete 6 months of supervised probation and a court order to attend school daily. Other dispositions may include,

The cancellation of driving privileges up to age 18, court-ordered community service work, a fine of up to $100, and placement of the student out of his or her family’s home at a licensed shelter home, foster home, or group home on a temporary basis.

(Santelmann Richtman, 2007, p. 424)

According to Santelmann Richtman (2007), “By enforcing the compulsory education laws, school staff saw an improvement in attendance and graduation rates” (p. 425).

Santelmann Richtman (2007) noted that elements essential to effective interventions include collaboration, accountability, adequate staffing, dedicated staff, flexibility, and early identification. The TIP uses collaboration between the courts, schools, and parents. Monitoring is also implemented to ensure accountability. Similarly, adequate staffing ensures accountability in program monitoring and implementation. Further, all participants are committed to addressing truancy issues and staff are flexible with their approaches and can adapt to each situation. Finally, TIP ensures timely identification and intervention. As evidence of program effectiveness, graduation rates increased from 52% the year the program began in 1996 to 79.24% in 2005 in St. Paul public schools.

Hendricks (2010) evaluated the effectiveness of a truancy court intervention program based in Springfield, Missouri. The study included 185 youth involved in truancy court from four public middle schools between 2004 and 2008. Participant selection included: students considered underachieving but had no identified health concerns, less than 90% attendance, a supportive adult or sponsor in the family, and no chronic suspensions or involvement in the juvenile court offense office. Students completed a school attachment survey before and after attending truancy court. The researcher evaluated survey data and school records on student attendance, discipline, and demographics. Results showed that attendance patterns increased during the semester that students participated in the intervention period but declined after the intervention period. The intervention was most effective with students identified as having severe truancy, as they showed improvements in attendance during the intervention period. Attendance during the intervention period did not change significantly among students with moderate truancy; however, these students demonstrated a marked decline in attendance after the intervention. The data on students with mild truancy showed no change in attendance patterns after the intervention period. These findings indicate that the intervention had the most effect on the attendance of students identified as severe truants (Hendricks, 2010).

Skola and Williamson (2012) examined a truancy intervention program in Atlanta, Georgia that aimed to intervene and work with truant elementary school students and their families. The program was also designed to reduce truancy problems with a secondary aim of reducing illiteracy, teen pregnancy, and the number of students in the juvenile justice system. The program relied on trained volunteers and involved early intervention through counseling and mentoring. Specifically, the program provided resources to families of participating students to help improve attendance using private and public funding sources. Of the children who participated in the truancy intervention program, 80% did not return to the juvenile court system,
the dropout rate in Georgia decreased between 2000 and 2006, and the number of students identified as not in school or not working decreased (Skola & Williamson, 2012). Due to its success, this truancy intervention program, which originated in inner city schools in Atlanta, Georgia, spread to serve students across the state to include rural, suburban, and inner city populations. The Georgia truancy intervention program has also been replicated in Connecticut, Washington DC, and New Britain.

Early Truancy Intervention (ETI) was a joint truancy intervention effort between a large school district in the Southeast and the State Attorney’s Office. The main goals of ETI were to intervene, reduce the number of truant students, and prevent students from being prosecuted in the juvenile justice system (Lawrence et al., 2011). The State Attorney’s Office selected schools based on truancy rates, and administrators and attendance clerks of participating schools were trained in ETI procedures. Once a student accrued five or more absences, a warning letter was sent home to inform parents that written correspondence were required for every absence. After five unexcused absences during a designated period, the parents were requested to attend a child study team meeting to discuss attendance laws. A parent, administrator, attendance clerk, and social worker generally attended the meeting; however, attendance at the meetings varied by participating schools. If the student’s attendance did not improve after attending the first meeting, a second meeting involved a uniformed detective during which the student and parents signed an attendance contract indicating that charges may be filed in court.

Lawrence et al. (2011) examined longitudinal data of 36 elementary schools enrolled in the ETI program over a 6-year period to determine whether the ETI program yielded a significant effect on student truancy. During the first year of the program, 34 participating schools saw a reduced number of truant students. However, long-term results of the study were mixed, as some schools saw reductions in the number of truant students while participating in the program and other schools saw no changes or increases in the number of truant students. Lawrence et al. cited mobility rates of schools and attendance-taking practices as possible contributors to the results (Lawrence et al., 2011).

Truancy Policy and Rural Schools
Even though a large number of the U.S. population resides in rural areas, researchers have focused on urban schools (Edwards & Sullivan, 2014). Rural educators are concerned that policies are often made without considering the concerns of rural schools (Brenner, 2016). Ludlow, Keramidas, and Kossar (2008) noted, “For many years, the attention of policymakers, researchers, professionals, and the public as whole has been focused on the problems and possibilities of urban areas in the United States” (p. 3). According to Johnson et al. (2014), state policy makers often live in urban areas of the state, which makes them more aware of urban problems, but more disconnected from the needs of rural students. This awareness influences policy-making decisions. Much of the research that could influence education policy and practice has been conducted in non-rural settings (Parsley & Barton, 2015). Relationships between educators and rural communities can be strained because of class disparities between teachers and the population (McHenry-Sorber & Schafft, 2015). McHenry-Sorber and Schafft (2015) stated, “Communities further contend with neoliberal education policies that distance the work of rural teachers from their communities, placing the practice of schooling in direct conflict with local values regarding the purpose of schooling” (p. 744).
New policies are often created with large urban schools in mind, but they apply equally to rural schools, which can pose a challenge. Williams and Nierengarten (2011) noted that rural school administrators are faced with the demand of meeting increasing achievement expectations with fewer resources. Fishman (2015) supported this notion: “Large urban districts may have an array of staffers and consultants to focus on compliance reporting and complete lengthy grant applications. Rural administrators often shoulder these burdens themselves, in addition to tackling numerous pressing tasks” (p. 9). Challenges of rural school districts include low property wealth, small student populations, sparse population, geographic isolation, and poor quality infrastructure. Other challenges include students with limited English proficiency, large populations of migrant students, and higher than state average numbers of students with special needs (Cooley & Floyd, 2013).

Critical issues in education for rural schools include inequitable school funding policies, student transience, teacher shortages, and the risk of consolidation or school closure (Ludlow et al., 2008). Rural schools are often challenged to provide specialized services, professional development, and adequate funding (Johnson & Howley, 2015). Pennington, Horn, and Berrong (2009) explored differences between special education services available in urban and rural districts in Kentucky. Thirty-nine teachers with special education certifications responded to a survey of open- and closed-ended questions to collect descriptive information, information on the availability of resources, educational strategies, and teacher perceptions. Of respondents, 20 teachers were from urban areas and 19 were from rural areas. Teachers surveyed reported differences in teacher compensation, budgets, and available services between urban and rural districts. The researchers found that educators from rural areas reported limited access to professional development opportunities because of geographical barriers. However, some participants from rural districts reported viewing smaller districts as being able to provide students with more personal and direct support (Pennington et al., 2009). Additionally, discrepancies existed in the number of special education staff employed by rural and urban districts with larger districts having the ability to employ staff with specialized skills to meet the needs of students with disabilities.

Shamah (2011) conducted a case study of rural high school students. After analyzing the survey and interview data, the researcher found that schools in rural communities played an important role in supporting youth because they were often the center of the community and were able to keep rural students engaged through school activities and relationships with school personnel. Schafft (2016) noted, “The very idea of the school as a community institution suggests that the school and those who work within it are accountable to the community they serve” (p. 145). Rural communities face many challenges, including economic changes; poverty; ethnic diversity; declining infrastructure; and inequitable access to opportunities, information, and programming (Theodori & Theodori, 2015). Rural schools are often characterized by being small and having strong attachments to the community (Johnson & Howley, 2015). According to Rosenberg, Christianson, and Hague Angus (2015), rural schools have characteristics that set them apart from non-rural schools such as having small community sizes, low population densities, and distance from a metropolitan or urban areas, which may influence efforts toward school improvement.

In 2013–2014, 894,086 rural students were enrolled in Texas schools compared to the U.S. median of 141,632 students (Johnson et al., 2014). In recent years, the number of rural
students in Texas has increased by approximately 30,000 students each year, making Texas the only state serving almost one million rural public school students (Johnson et al., 2014). The Every Student Succeeds Act, which replaced No Child Left Behind, adopted locale codes to identify rural schools and determine funding (Brenner, 2016).

Research Method and Design

The researcher used a qualitative approach to conduct this study. In qualitative research, individuals use their voices within the context of their lived experiences to share stories and emphasize their understanding of a phenomenon through lived and told stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Qualitative research is also used to discover patterns of meaning from the individual’s own words and actions to emphasize understanding (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008). Additionally, qualitative research methods can be used to explore meaning and understanding by analyzing data and interpreting emerging themes (Creswell, 2009). The researcher applied a narrative inquiry design to gain an understanding of administrators’ perceptions of truancy policy and their approaches to implementing truancy prevention measures. The researcher selected a narrative approach for this study because it “is the best way of representing and understanding experience” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 18), and this approach focuses on personal lived experiences of participants, often told as stories. Stories “reveal truths about human experience” (Riessman, 2008, p. 10), which provided insight into how truancy is perceived in a rural East Texas public school district. Understanding the experiences of the participants supported the researcher in exploring rural East Texas administrators’ perceptions of truancy policy and their approaches to implementing truancy prevention measures.

Most narratives are based on interviews (Riessman, 2008). Therefore, the researcher conducted individual semi-structured interviews with administrators of an East Texas public school district to explore emerging themes on truancy, effective truancy prevention measures, and changes to truancy laws. Interviewing is one method that narrative researchers use to collect data to create field texts. Field texts are records of the researcher and participant and can include transcripts of interviews and researcher field notes (Clandinin, 2013). Interview questions were designed to draw responses that reflected participants’ individual experiences of responding to truancy. According to Riessman (2008), semi-structured open-ended questions allow participants to share extended narratives and allow the researcher to ask additional follow-up questions. Main questions guided the interview, and follow-up and probing questions were asked to encourage elaboration on statements made by participants. The following research questions guided this qualitative study:

1. What are the perceptions of school administrators in rural East Texas regarding changes to truancy policy in the State of Texas?
2. What do school administrators in rural East Texas find challenging about enforcing truancy policies?
3. What truancy prevention measures do administrators in rural East Texas report as most effective?

Sample Selection

Qualitative researchers focus on purposefully selected participants who can help in understanding the research problem (Creswell, 2009). With purposeful sampling, the researcher chooses specific subjects who are believed to be able to contribute to the development of the
emerging theory (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Given that rural districts make up the majority of
district types in Texas, it was important to gain an understanding of how administrators of a rural
district perceive truancy and implement state-required truancy prevention measures to reduce
dropout rates and ensure student success and school completion. As such, the focus of this study
was a rural public school district located in East Texas.

According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), an acceptable sample size for narrative
inquiry consists of five to eight participants. The researcher invited eight administrators
employed by a rural East Texas public school district to participate because more value is placed
on participant insight when key persons of an organization contribute (Yin, 2012). Selected
participants included both central and campus administrators—superintendent, assistant
superintendent, director of special programs, director of special education, high school principal,
junior high principal, intermediate school principal, and elementary school principal from a rural
school district located in east Texas.

Data Gathering

The researcher conducted individual face-to-face interviews for this narrative inquiry to
gain an understanding of administrators’ perceptions of truancy policy based on their lived
experiences. Interviews can demonstrate how “participants construct reality and think about
situations” (Yin, 2012) instead of simply responding to the researcher’s questions. The
researcher also used a field journal throughout the data gathering process. Field journals are
used to record field texts that help paint a picture of participants’ personal stories (Clandinin &
Connelly, 2000). The field journal was used to record and bracket the researcher’s personal
reflections in addition to observations made during the interviews. Participants were provided
with informed consent forms before data collection began. Informed consent allows participants
to acknowledge the protection of rights (Creswell, 2009). Participation in this study was
voluntary, and participants were able to choose to discontinue participation at any time during
the study without penalty. No compensation was offered for participating in this study.
The researcher contacted administrators individually to schedule face-to-face interviews at
locations convenient for participants. Interviews lasted 45-60 minutes, and the same interview
questionnaire was used for each interview in order to gain insight into participants’ perceptions
of truancy and truancy prevention measures. The researcher conducted interviews until data
saturation was achieved. Data saturation is reached when data from new participants no longer
adds to the body of developing themes that emerged from previously collected data (Creswell,
2015).

The researchers recorded each interview as an individual digital file. Individual digital
files were then transferred to a password-protected laptop computer after which the original
digital file was deleted. Information identifying participants or the school district was excluded
from the final report. Interviews were transcribed within 72 hours of each session by Rev
transcription service and the researcher reviewed transcripts for accuracy. The researcher sent
copies of the transcripts to participants via email to provide them the opportunity to review and
confirm that the intended insights into their perceptions of truancy were conveyed. This process
of consulting study participants to validate findings is called member checking (Saldaña, 2016).
According to Creswell (2013), member checking “involves taking data, analyses, interpretations,
and conclusions back to the participants so that they can judge the accuracy and credibility of the
account” (p. 252). A second meeting was scheduled with each participant as requested to correct
any errors on the transcripts, add additional information, and solicit deeper understanding by the researcher.

Transcripts of the interview data were manually coded line-by-line and analyzed for emerging themes of administrators’ perceptions on truancy policy and their approaches to implementing truancy prevention measures. The researcher used an open-ended approach for the initial coding, which provided the opportunity to reflect on the nuances and content of the data (Saldaña, 2016). The researcher also dialogued with a colleague to validate coding and analysis of emerging themes, and she consulted with participants on the development of emerging themes via member checking (Saldaña, 2016). Initial codes were sorted into appropriate categories, which the researcher used to code the data. Coding involves labeling categories of text data with a term often taken from the participant’s own language (Creswell, 2009). Such codes taken from the participant’s language are called in vivo codes (Saldaña, 2016). The researcher used in vivo codes to identify emerging themes, which were then analyzed and interpreted to gain an understanding of participants’ experiences and perceptions of truancy in a small public rural school district.

**Epoché**

Researchers must approach their studies subjectively with fresh perspectives and by setting aside personal experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008) to convey emerging themes in the data. The goal of the researcher was to limit personal bias and add knowledge to the field of study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). This researcher had experience dealing with truancy as a Texas public school administrator; therefore, she used reflexivity and bracketing. Reflexivity is a process that allows the researcher to reflect on personal biases and preconceptions to ensure the research data is not skewed (Flipp, 2014). Bracketing is often used in qualitative studies and “can refer to the process of setting aside, suspending, or holding in abeyance presuppositions surrounding a specific phenomenon” (Gearing, 2004, p. 1433). The researcher approached bracketing using three steps. She first spoke to other researchers before beginning the data collection to discuss personal biases, past experiences, and past research. During and after this dialog, the researcher wrote notes to bracket preconceptions. The second step included writing notes throughout the data collection process and engaging in continued reflection when biases arose. The third step included writing about the process of bracketing during the research and including what was bracketed in the final report. Using bracketing, the researcher was able to remain self-aware throughout the research process, which allowed her to engage in the research fully. Such engagement may enrich the collection and interpretation of the data (Tufford & Newman, 2010). The researcher acknowledged and set aside personal perceptions on truancy and truancy prevention measures to report participants’ perceptions accurately.

**Summary of Findings**

Research Question 1 was, “What are the perceptions of school administrators in rural East Texas regarding changes to truancy policy in the state of Texas?” This research question focused on identifying administrators’ perceptions of changes to Texas truancy policy. During the interviews, administrators discussed their thoughts on the new policy. Themes that emerged from this question included understanding of the policy, inability to refer students to truancy
court, creates more work for school districts, and effects rural and urban schools differently (see Table 1).

Table 1
Research Question 1: New Truancy Policy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes/Subthemes</th>
<th>Number of Occurrences (n = 8)</th>
<th>Percent of Occurrences (n = 8)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understanding of policy</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inability to refer students to truancy court</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creates more work for school districts</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effects rural and urban schools differently</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Subthemes:*
- Rural schools have less staff 5 63%
- State accountability 3 38%

Research Question 2 was, “What do school administrators in rural East Texas find challenging about enforcing truancy policies?” This question focused on challenges participants found with enforcing truancy policies. Themes included interpretation of truancy policy, procedure is time consuming, no consequences for students, and parent issues (see Table 2).

Table 2
Research Question 2: Challenges of Enforcing Truancy Policy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes/Subthemes</th>
<th>Number of Occurrences (n = 8)</th>
<th>Percent of Occurrences (n = 8)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interpretation of truancy policy</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedure is time consuming</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No consequences for students</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Issues</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Subthemes:*
- Parents do not value education 6 75%
- Ineffective parenting 8 100%

Research Question 3 was, “What truancy prevention measures do administrators in rural East Texas report as most effective?” This question focused on the prevention measures administrators found effective with their students. Themes that emerged included attendance
incentives, student-staff relationships, interventions, rural community relations, and alternative school (see Table 3).

Table 3
Research Question 3: Effective Prevention Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes/Subthemes</th>
<th>Number of Occurrences ($n = 8$)</th>
<th>Percent of Occurrences ($n = 8$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance incentives</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student/staff relationships</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interventions</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural school community relations</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative school</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participating administrators of a rural East Texas school district described their personal experiences dealing with student truancy and their perceptions of truancy policy. All administrators indicated that they understood the truancy policy; however, they also all described an inability to refer students to truancy court since the policy was implemented. All participants felt that one of the challenges in enforcing the truancy policy were discrepancies between the school district and the District Attorney’s office in interpreting the policy. Participants also discussed the truancy prevention measures they found effective in their school district. Participants shared their perceptions of the changes in the truancy policy. All eight participants indicated understanding the new truancy policy and the protocol to follow when dealing with absent students. Participants discussed meeting as administrative teams to discuss the new truancy policy and implementing the policy in their district. The administrative team consisted of the four district administrators and four campus principals—the same administrators who participated in the study. Participant 2 stated that the superintendent, “Appointed me as the district liaison” and he served as the truancy prevention facilitator, a position required with the new policy. Participant 5 commented on discussing the new policy with the administrative team, “We walked through our process, and wanted to make sure we’re still all on the same page.” The campus administrators discussed contacting parents with in a prescribed time line, holding conferences, and implementing preventative measures to keep students from being truant. Even though district and campus administrators reported understanding the new truancy policy, 100% of participants indicated an inability to refer students to truancy court after the implementation of the new policy. The school district had not had a truancy case accepted by the District Attorney’s office since the new policy had been implemented. A general perception shared by administrators was that the school district was limited in enforcing the state truancy policy because of its inability to refer students to truancy court.
The majority of participants perceived that changes in the truancy policy created more work for school districts. Participants 3 and 8 both discussed the feeling of having to “prove” they were following the prescribed process for dealing with truant students. Participant 3 stated, “Schools must jump through the hoops and prove that they are doing things, meetings with parents, etc. to do our due diligent before a court will get involved in it.” Participant 8 stated, “Basically, more burden was placed on the school district…to prove whether…the student is truant and to do everything we can to make the student become familiar with the law, of the requirements and not be truant.”

As administrators of the selected rural East Texas school district, participants perceived that the new truancy policy affected their rural school district differently than it did urban districts. Participant 5 stated, “One of the biggest frustrations that we have is that so much legislation is written with large school districts in mind.” The perception was that rural school districts generally have fewer staff to carry out the duties prescribed by state policies and the fewer number of students in rural districts effects state accountability ratings in rural districts. Participants shared their experiences with challenges in enforcing the new truancy policy. All participants commented on discrepancies in interpreting the policy between the school district and the District Attorney’s office. Administrators felt they followed the steps prescribed by the new policy; however, the District Attorney’s office did not accept cases. Participant 8 shared, “It appears we’re not providing sufficient documentation to show that we’ve done everything on our end that we’re supposed to be.” Participants shared a feeling of not being on the same page as the District Attorney’s office regarding the documentation needed to have a truancy case accepted by the courts. In addition, discrepancies existed between the school district and District Attorney’s office as to what type of absences could be included in the court referral. Participant 1 shared, “It’s my impression that they are not wanting absences that we consider excused.” Additional challenges to enforcing truancy policy included the amount of time it took administrators to follow the process and the idea that students did not face consequences. Participants discussed time taken away from other administrative duties to make contact with parents. Participant 7 shared, “The length of the process requires too many man hours to do it and maintain all the other duties that we have to do on the campus.” He shared that it was especially true in dealing with nonresponsive parents: “It makes it hard because now we have to either try to go to their homes and do a home visit. They don’t return our phone calls, or they don’t even have a phone number that works.” Administrators expressed a belief that courts will no longer hear truancy cases, which leaves school districts to deal with the issues without consequences to students or parents.

Parent issues, such as no value for education and ineffective parenting, posed additional challenges to enforcing truancy policy. Participant 3 shared, “If education is stressed at home, truancy is not a problem.” When parents do not value education, they do not want to deal with their children’s issues that develop at school. Participant 3 commented on uninvolved parents: “They would rather us handle it without getting them involved.” All participants shared challenges with enforcing truancy policy when parents were not supportive. Despite the challenges in enforcing truancy policy, participants reported a number of preventative measures they found effective. All participants reported offering incentives for students to attend school. Incentives included drawings for prizes, class rewards, field trips, and
opportunities for credit recovery. Several administrators commented on changing incentives to keep students interested and motivated to work toward earning them. Six participants identified developing positive relationships between students and staff as a truancy prevention measure. Participant 5 commented, “Not necessarily just the teacher, although that’s obviously your first point of contact and a big point of contact. Whether it’s coaches, or aides, or principals, building relationships is very key.” Two district administrators shared personal experiences related to developing relationships with individual students on their campuses. The high school principal shared that his staff was excited about what they did and that was conveyed to the students.

All participants commented on the importance of implementing interventions early as a means to prevent truancy issues from occurring. Part of that included educating students and parents on the importance of attending school. Participant 5 commented, “Some of it is trying to be as proactive as possible, like reaching out when we do hit a certain number of absences, whether that’s a phone call, or a letter, or both.” District administrators mentioned implementing interventions that accommodated individual student’s needs. Participant 4 shared, “We can make different arrangements so that we can accommodate whatever the problem is that’s keeping that child from getting to school.” Such accommodations included providing transportation, adequate clothing, and admission into the alternative school. Participants also discussed relationships that rural school districts maintain with the community as an effective truancy prevention measure. Several administrators spoke of having ties in the community that helped them better understand their students more personally and track down students and families when needed. Participant 1 shared, “We know a lot of the community, even if I have a kid and I don’t know their parents. We are not far off from knowing them through somebody else.” Having a supportive community also helps the school district provide students with incentives. Participant 1 shared, “The community, they’re very supportive and they can help, I guess you can say. Giving of their time or their facilities.”

Conclusion

While truancy has been decriminalized in Texas, new policies, such as the requirement to implement truancy prevention measures, are often created with large urban schools in mind; however, they equally apply to rural schools, which can pose challenges for schools with fewer resources. Williams and Nierengarten (2011) noted, “Administrators in America’s rural school districts are uniquely challenged to meet increased achievement expectations despite decreasing resources” (p. 15). Fishman (2015) supported this notion: “Large urban districts may have an array of staffers and consultants to focus on compliance reporting and complete lengthy grant applications. Rural administrators often shoulder these burdens themselves, in addition to tackling numerous pressing tasks” (p. 9).

The number of rural students in Texas far exceeds the national median. J. Johnson, Showalter, Klein, and Lester (2014) reported that Texas served more rural public school students than any other state. According to this 2013–2014 report, there were 894,086 rural students in Texas compared to the U.S. median of 141,632 students. The number of rural students in Texas continues to grow. In recent years, the number of rural students in Texas has increased by approximately 30,000 students each year, making Texas the only state serving almost one million rural public school students (Johnson et al., 2014).
Additionally, the majority of school districts in the state of Texas are rural (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). Rural areas are those not identified as urbanized (50,000 or more people) or urban clusters (2,500-50,000 people; U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) uses locale codes to identify urban and rural schools. For funding purposes, districts identified by locale codes 32, 33, 41, 42, and 43 are considered rural (Brenner, 2016). Using locale codes, the majority of Texas school districts (847 out of 1,274; 66%) are identified as rural (Proximity One, n.d.). As such, the researcher aimed to gain insight into administrators’ perceptions of truancy policy and approaches to implementing truancy prevention measures in a rural East Texas public school district through narrative inquiry. Findings from this study offer insight to inform rural public school district administrators in Texas and beyond of approaches to implement truancy prevention measures and ensure student success and high school completion.

References


