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In this issue of the *Southeast Journal on Educational Administration*, the editors have selected our first two concept papers to be published along with traditional articles in which the authors have added to the body of scholarly knowledge for educational leadership. Thank you to all of the peer reviewers who gave of their time to evaluate and provide feedback for the articles for this issue. Let's take a look at the articles available in this issue of SJEA!

Thomas Harvey, Neil Faulk, and Johnny O'Connor studied the differences in the feedback that university field supervisors provided to aspiring leaders enrolled in the internship of a principal preparation program in Texas in *From Compliance to Coaching: Restructuring Field Supervision in Principal Internships*. They found that not all feedback is the same, dividing it into three themes. They conclude that the present requirements for university field supervisors do not ensure quality communication and feedback for the students. Read this article to discover the difference in focusing on compliance and communication that coaches.

Jesika Butler, Lou Sabina, Anna Peters, Rajni Shankar-Brown, Debra Touchton, and Danell Tills present their findings on the impact that purposeful recruitment and retention of quality civics teachers can have on test scores in Florida's middle and high schools, thus on their overall school scores, in *Increasing Civics Scores Through Purposeful Teacher Recruitment and Retention*. The researchers found that the lack of focused recruitment for quality civics teachers negatively impacts student performance on the civics tests. They argue that by targeting the recruitment and hiring of quality civics teachers, schools can influence their end-of-course tests thereby impacting their overall school score enough to matter. Civics teachers need to be viewed as long-term investments receiving the support that teachers of other subjects expect.

William Bergeron, Ellen Hahn, and Angela Adair school the reader on the terms: fringe, distant, and remote rural schools in their article entitled, *Stakeholders' Perceptions of the Differences in Fringe, Distant, and Remote Rural Schools*. The researchers took their study on high-poverty, high-minority schools out of the usual urban and suburban locales and highlight ways leaders in rural schools can effectively nurture teaching and learning. They used a multiple-case-study design to understand why the high-achieving, high-poverty, high-minority, rural high schools they studied increased student achievement where so many other similar schools failed.

Is there a problem at your school that has been a topic for discussion, action, and cost, but still stands unresolved? Christopher LeMieux, Will Rumbaugh, and Shawn Keim in their concept paper entitled, *User-Friendly Root Cause Analysis for Educators: End in Mind* explain how to use RCA as an analytical tool to identify the cause for a priority concern in a district or school. The use of RCA to identify the root problem area with performance variability can be helpful to educators in their responsibility of reducing the variability of instruction and improving student performance.

Principals need support and a network for collaboration. Mercedes Tichenor, Kathy Piechura, Eilene Ahr, Barbara Head, and Elizabeth Heins studied the school principals' sense of isolation its related stress. Then, they explain how they provided a time and place to support principals in the important work that they do. After identifying math as an area that the principals

needed to impact, the university faculty hosted Power Hour and asked a principal who had realized math success in her school to lead the collaboration. Power Hour is described as "a collaboration among university faculty and school leaders to support school principals as instructional leaders" (Tichenor et al., 2023, p. 65). The time spent in Power Hours is mentoring through a strong partnership around a shared need.

The editors of SJEA noticed that this edition identifies challenges to educational leadership preparation providers and the men and women who are leading our schools. This is only a small fraction of the challenges that schools and universities are facing. It is an attempt to highlight some reoccurring, insomnia-inducing issues and one or two underlying issues that need addressing even if we do not think on them often – the need for quality support of principal interns, increasing the school's accountability score, learning gaps, identifying and addressing root causes of problems, and addressing principal isolation. Each of the articles are solution-oriented and should be used to generate discussions among your school teams. We hope that your reading will awaken you to possibilities and an understanding that obstacles are not insurmountable barriers, but opportunities to work through for improvement. As intended by the editorial review board, the *Southeast Journal of Educational Administration* serves to provide a forum for professors, graduates students, and educational leadership students to exchange scholarly ideas and foster practical research.

Sincerely,

Dana M. Griggs   Christopher M. Parfitt
Editors, *Southeast Journal of Educational Administration*

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From Compliance to Coaching: Restructuring Field Supervision in Principal Internships

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Abstract

Authors used qualitative methods to evaluate the feedback and professional coaching that university field supervisors provided to candidates enrolled in the internship of a principal preparation program. As revealed through the data, the depth, relevance, complexity of feedback, coaching statements, and goals provided to the principal candidates by field supervisors varied significantly. Some candidates were given individualized feedback to propel them forward in their careers as educational leaders, while others were simply informed that they had passed the criterion. Using the findings of the study, we identified three themes that framed recommendations to assist principal preparation programs shift the focus of the principal internship from compliance to professional coaching.

   Keywords: principal internship; principal preparation; field supervision; professional coaching

From Compliance to Coaching: Restructuring Field Supervision in Principal Internships

Schools are complex institutions typically staffed with highly educated and committed professionals tasked with preparing students to meet challenging grade-level expectations, state and national performance standards, and prescribed college and career-readiness skill levels. Research is replete with conclusions that find student achievement directly correlated with leadership skills possessed by campus principals. Plainly stated, the principal's leadership skills determine whether a school becomes a bastion for learning or a failed enterprise (Fry et al., 2005). Consequently, principal preparation is of paramount importance. Educator preparation program personnel from across the country have an obligation to provide principal candidates with relevant experiences that will prepare them for the role they are pursuing.

The study shared in this paper contains an analysis of the written feedback and professional coaching provided by field supervisors to principal preparation candidates enrolled in the internship of a large principal preparation program in the State of Texas. This analysis led to research-based recommendations for the improvement of field supervision practices found in principal internships.

Related Literature

The impact of an effective campus principal can be linked to observable campus outcomes. The principal's ability to lead makes a difference in a host of school outcomes. Identified outcomes include aligning instruction, improving student performance and achievement, fostering a positive school climate, facilitating collaborative decision making, and engaging with faculty regarding instructional strategies (Grissom et al., 2021).

Understanding and accepting this dynamic heightens the significance of principal preparation programs (Hess et al., 2005). Kaplan et al. (2015) explained that as the job of the principal became more complex, preparation programs and routes to attain certification as a principal evolved. This evolution was not only in curriculum. Certification attainment included means and methods of instruction, field supervision, and internship activities, including professional coaching received by principal candidates in preparation programs (Faulk et al., 2021).

Many professions require a relevant internship as part of a preparation and training program. In addition to educational professions, internships are standard in business operations, marketing, engineering, and healthcare (The New York Times, 2017). Nationally recognized principal preparation programs incorporate the use of the 2018 National Educational Leadership Preparation (NELP) building-level standards, which require the assessment of seven identified leadership standards and the completion of an engaging and robust internship (National Policy Board for Educational Administration [NPBEA], 2018).

The engaging internship required in the NELP standards is critical to principal preparation because students gain knowledge regarding leadership practices and have a real opportunity to build professional relationships (Figueiredo-Brown et al., 2015). A rigorous internship with expert university-led supervision is essential if aspiring school leaders are to

acquire the knowledge to improve schools and impact student achievement. An important aspect of the internship is the quality and timely feedback that university supervisors and site mentors provide principal candidates (Martin et al., 2021).

Generically, internships are designed to allow practitioner candidates the opportunity to work under the guidance of an expert in the field, gain application-level experience in the specific challenges of the field, and develop the knowledge, skills, and mindsets that are necessary for success in a particular field (Guerrero, 2022). Quality principal internships provide candidates with opportunities to demonstrate, under the mentorship of experienced school leaders and university field supervisors, that they have the skills to lead schools and that they can collaborate with stakeholders to improve student achievement (Fry et al., 2005). Consequently, it is imperative that principal preparation programs offer internship activities that meet state and national standards and prepare future administrators with the knowledge, skills, and mindsets needed to be successful school principals (Nicks et al., 2018).

An extremely critical component and mandated that field experiences within principal internships in Texas be supervised by an educator with a minimum of three years of experience and possess current certification in the class in which supervision is provided (principal role) and formally trained as a field supervisor (19 Tex. Admin. Code, §228.2). The university-hired field supervisors in Texas must observe candidates for a minimum of 135 minutes throughout the internship. The observations must span the entire internship by providing an observation in the first, second, and final third segment of the internship. After each observation, field supervisors are mandated to meet with candidates in individualized post-observation conferences. Candidates receive formal written feedback and professional coaching through individualized, synchronous post-observation conferences (19 Tex. Admin. Code, §228.35).

Augustine-Shaw et al. (2017) explained that building capacity in beginning principals was strengthened and achieved through effective mentoring and professional coaching. Also noted was that principal preparation program instructors had the potential to help reduce the gaps in knowledge, skills, and mindsets of candidates by effectively using coaching and mentoring strategies during the internship.

Individualized professional feedback is considered paramount in improving knowledge and skills of future principals. Principal preparation programs need to encourage professional growth in each candidate by providing effective field supervision during the internship. Conferences described as "cookie cutter" meetings with field supervisors that provide generic uniform feedback devised merely to meet program requirements have been noted as being ineffective in encouraging and fostering individual growth. Providing field supervisors with professional development activities that cover the need for targeted, specific, timely, and individual feedback for candidates increases the probability of a positive impact. The practice of providing the same generic feedback to all principal candidates would be comparable to a physician providing the same dosage and therapy to all patients trying to improve their predicament. This practice borders on professional negligence (Faulk et al., 2021).

Principal interns can only grow as administrators and leaders when given opportunities to lead reality-based, real-world campus leadership activities. Interns who demonstrate a strong

work ethic and establish trust and lines of communication with their supervisors are provided opportunities to lead relevant activities. The fact has been well-documented that authentic experiences are not provided when relationships and communication are absent (Thessin et al., 2018). Activities that place students in leadership roles and address real-world campus issues are perceived positively by students. These experiences increase the professional confidence of prospective school principals. Students perceive growth in their marketable skills, such as building collaborative leadership, developing creativity, and leveraging the strengths of others (Harvey et al., 2021).

Methodology

The candidates in this study were enrolled in a large principal preparation program in Texas. The candidates were all pursuing certification as a principal. One subgroup of students was pursuing a master's degree in educational leadership and certification. The second subgroup of students had earned a master's degree prior to the study and was solely pursuing principal certification. The third subgroup of students was pursuing a master's degree in technology leadership while also pursuing principal certification.

In this study, we analyzed the contents and quality of documentation provided to candidates by field supervisors. The documentation was part of archived data that were secured from course content after the submission and approval from the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The documents were labeled as post-conference reports. These post-conference reports included written feedback, coaching statements, and goals that were developed by field supervisors and shared with candidates via email. The emails were shared with candidates following a review of submitted practicum observations videos and individual one-to-one synchronous post conferences between field supervisors and principal candidates had been conducted.

Data from the post-conference reports were analyzed using qualitative methods from which the authors identified informative themes using the research questions as an organizational guide. Specific content and statements from the field supervisors in the post-conference reports supported the identified themes. The purpose of the data analysis was to determine if we could identify qualitative themes from the feedback provided to the principal candidates by their field supervisors. Ultimately, the themes formed a baseline for improving the performance of field supervisors at the sponsoring university and formed a baseline for the improvement of principal internships and field supervision across the United States.

The research questions used in the study are subsequently listed:
1. What topics or standards did field supervisors focus upon in the post-conference reports sent to candidates in the principal preparation program?
2. Based on an analysis, how individualized was the feedback provided to principal preparation candidates?
3. What type of data did field supervisors use to support student growth?

Results and Findings

We reviewed and analyzed post-observation reports sent to 246 candidates enrolled in a large principal preparation program in the State of Texas. Fourteen field supervisors prepared these observation documents. As revealed in the body of data, all candidates in the study followed uniform professional guidelines for the field experiences that were reviewed. Additionally, it was obvious that field supervisors in the study made use of uniform standards outlined in the field experience guidelines to evaluate candidate performance. However, as revealed in the data the depth, relevance, complexity of feedback, coaching statements, and goals provided to the principal preparation candidates by individual field supervisors varied significantly. While each post-conference report adequately met program and state expectations, qualitative differences were detected.

Analysis of the post-conference reports yielded three major themes regarding the quality of feedback, coaching statements, and goals from field supervisors: (a) Field supervisors focused on compliance with the standards prescribed in the observation guidelines. (b) The most effective feedback was personalized and offered genuine praise and challenges for candidates. (c) Some field supervisors used individualized personal data significantly more than others.

The three themes derived from an analysis of the data were uniquely developed using field supervisor comments from the post-conference reports. Findings from the themes include:

Theme 1: Field Supervisors Focused on Compliance with the Standards Prescribed in the Observation Guidelines.

We found that all field supervisors were focused on compliance with prescribed standards. However, some field supervisors were solely concerned with compliance and offered few individualized comments uniquely assignable to the candidate being observed. For example, samples 1(a)(b)(c) found below almost solely focused on compliance and offered comments that were generic and universal in scope. These comments could be assigned to almost any candidate and any other observation.

Sample 1(a)

Ms. D., it was a pleasure watching your video on the Development of the Master Schedule. I look forward to your upcoming video post conference. *After viewing your assignment, your video met all the necessary components.* You were provided a great deal of information about the process used to develop the master schedule. You did an excellent job summarizing what you learned.

Sample 1(b)

Jaime, thank you for submitting a field experience video. Your leadership activity addressed the development of the master schedule at E. M. Middle School. During the introduction, you shared your professional background, campus staff and student demographics. Your submission complied with the standards outlined in the guidelines.

Sample 1(c)

Thank you for sharing your video with me. I was happy to see you meet all prescribed standards including the minimum length. You established a positive atmosphere which allowed your interviewees to speak freely. Job well done!

Theme 2: The Most Effective Feedback was Personalized and Offered Genuine Praise and Challenges for Candidates.

Current and pertinent research conclusions have noted that quality feedback and coaching have a positive impact on candidate growth as an administrator and upon their administrative mindsets (Faulk et al. 2021). We determined that most, if not all post observation reports contained written feedback statements that could be perceived as adequate in terms of quality. However, authors identified written feedback statements that greatly exceeded being merely adequate. Personalized feedback statements constructed around a growth mindset that provided genuine praise and challenges were considered the most effective and deemed excellent and superior in terms of quality.

Samples 2(a)(b)(c), found below, are prime examples of the superior feedback in that they are extremely personalized and contains praise and challenges that were individualized for a principal candidate.

Sample 2(a)

Franklin, your leadership activity addressed the development of the master schedule at Sample Two Elementary School in Sample Two Independent School District… you identified specific campus challenges, which included poor academic performance of students on state assessments, the high percentage of the students who are economically disadvantaged, and the high percentage of at-risk students. You interviewed the principal… he discussed challenges associated with meeting the needs of all students…. He shared how leaders need to make shared decisions …. He said that decision-making is best when a leader establishes an environment where decisions are based on the campus needs and uses input from different perspectives. Your reflection effectively summarized … collaborative decision-making. I implore you to further research the impact of developing leadership structures that embrace collaborative decision-making. Michael Fullan describes the role of educational leadership as bold change agents dedicated to leading learning.

Sample 2(b)

Doris, I enjoyed reviewing your observation video. Your introduction included a concise demographic profile of your campus. The thorough description of your campus created a frame-of-reference for me to use during the review of your video. Thanks for being transparent concerning issues your campus is facing … As a future administrator, you now understand the process of creating a master schedule that maximizes student learning, optimizes instruction, and allows teacher planning time to ensure collegial collaboration. The reflection section of your activity was extremely insightful. You provided an accurate summary of your interview and gave

ample professional commentary. I am glad you learned a lot from this experience regarding what goes into creating a master schedule. I challenge you to volunteer to assist with the development of next year's master schedule. Job well done!

Sample 2(c)

Savanna, you did a wonderful job planning and organizing your master schedule field experience video at L. L. High School. I appreciate the time and effort exerted before and during the meeting. Your administrator provided real-world feedback pertaining to the design and implementation of the master schedule at your campus. I completely agree with the comment, "match the neediest students with the strongest teachers" ... I was impressed with the level of confidence you exhibited throughout the session. The master schedule is like a puzzle. The challenge you will face as a principal is to put together the best picture possible by maximizing the resources available, adhering to non-negotiables, and maintaining a student-centered mindset. Best wishes in your continued endeavors, and do not hesitate to contact me if there is anything that I can do for you.

Theme 3: Some Field Supervisors Used Individualized Personal Data More than Others.

A close analysis of the post-conference reports clearly revealed that some field supervisors were significantly more personally oriented than others. This finding goes beyond providing individualized feedback. (Authors mused as to why this happens.) Below, one will find an interesting contrast between sample 3(a) when compared with samples 3(b) and (c).

Sample 3(a)

Regina, good job on your Professional Development video exercise. You were able to get great feedback from four different teachers of varying backgrounds regarding their views of effective and ineffective Professional Development.

Sample 3(b)

Jimmy, I enjoyed reviewing your field experience. The data you provided painted a portrait of Sample Three Middle School in Sample Three Independent School District which assisted with my understanding of the challenges your faculty and students face. (Awesome on how all your family graduated from Sample Three.) The reflection section of your activity was insightful. You provided accurate summaries of your interviews and gave ample professional commentary. Good suggestion of posting the campus vision statement in the hallways to promote the articulation of the vision statement. Hopefully, you can help during the upcoming school year to have faculty and students focus on the vision statement. Congratulations! You are on the path to becoming an effective instructional leader.

Sample 3(c)

Matthew, I enjoyed reviewing your observation video. Your introduction included a thorough demographic profile of your campus. I noted that you used exact data. When you

become a principal, I hope you use data to assist with making decisions. I also noted that you met with your mentor in preparing for this video submission. It is always wise to work closely with your mentor. Have you thought about the importance of a professional network as you enter the next chapter of your career? Who will you include in that network? Will you maintain a professional relationship with your mentor? It is apparent that you have a good relationship with him. You did a wonderful job with the interview. You also made good use of follow-up questions. I loved his comment of "student needs before teacher needs". As a future administrator, you now see the importance of creating a master schedule. Congratulations! You will make a wonderful instructional leader.

Discussion

In this study, we concluded that every principal intern received at least minimally adequate feedback from their field supervisor. There was not an instance in which feedback was inadequate or unacceptable. However, there was an observable variance regarding the quality of feedback provided candidates. Simply put, some candidates were given specific and exceptional individualized feedback to propel them forward in their careers as educational leaders, while others were simply informed that they had passed the criterion. Some were coached forward, and some were merely "given a nod of approval."

Mentors of aspiring principals should be highly trained, skilled, and experienced with a proven record of leading improvement in student achievement (Gray et al., 2007). This requirement forms a professional baseline for the qualifications of field supervisors within principal preparation programs. Some states, like Texas, attempt to define this baseline further. As mandated in the Texas Administrative Code, a principal intern must be supervised by an educator with a minimum of three years of experience and current certification in the class in which supervision is provided—that is the principal (19 Tex. Admin. Code, §228.2). (The field supervisors in this study met the state's background requirements.)

Also mandated in the Texas Administrative Code is uniform field supervision training. The mandated uniform training is provided during an eight-hour session that shares best practices with field supervisors from educational preparation programs. The uniform training includes, but is not limited to, topics such as rationale for the training, collecting evidence related to certification standards and practices; inquiry-based approaches to supporting students; and coaching resources/tools (Texas Education Agency, 2017) (All field supervisors in this study completed the mandated training).

Understanding this dynamic, questions arise. With field supervisors in this study having similar backgrounds and training:
1. Why does it appear that some field supervisors have access to personal information from candidates and utilize it to coach their interns?
2. What additional tools or resources, including training, are needed to help highly qualified and successful principals successfully mentor and coach novice aspiring administrators?

3. Can practices and procedures within a principal preparation internship be restructured to enhance the probability of candidates receiving rich, personalized feedback and coaching aimed at enhancing professional growth?

Conclusion

Experience as a campus principal does not inherently correlate to being a strong field supervisor capable of providing quality feedback during the professional coaching of principal candidates. As noted previously, qualitative methods "painted a portrait" of quality feedback and coaching of principal candidates. These methods also provided a portrait of coaching that is merely adequate. Each field supervisor in this study had a background with a minimum of three years of experience as a principal, and current certification as a principal. Yet, some feedback and professional coaching were merely adequate. Possessing the temperament, patience, and thoughtfulness to know how to communicate during professional coaching scenarios requires an additional skill set from that of being a campus principal.

This dynamic is not unique. Many experienced and talented athletes attempted to replicate their success in their sport as coaches. Even some of the most talented superstars have failed at coaching. Examples include Magic Johnson with the L.A. Lakers, Bart Starr with the Green Bay Packers, Wayne Gretzky with the Phoenix Coyotes, and others (Sportzcraazy, 2019*).*

This conclusion begs the question is a requirement, like the one used in Texas, for field supervisors in a principal preparation program to have a minimum of three years of experience and current certification as a principal a valid and logical mandate? Should the university-hired field supervisor be required to have greater experience as a principal? Could an educator with minimal, if any, direct experience as a principal serve as a field supervisor and provide effective professional coaching to principal candidates? Are there other professional indicators or attributes that need to be required prior to being certified or hired as a field supervisor?

Limitations of the Study

This study involved interns enrolled in the principal internship at one university within the State of Texas. Although feedback from multiple field supervisors, residing in multiple states and regions, and data from the evaluations of hundreds of interns, residing in multiple states and regions, were analyzed, the study would have been enhanced if other universities would have been included.

There were also limitations regarding the researchers. All three of the researchers had extensive experience at the public school and university levels regarding educational leadership. However, only one researcher involved had field supervisor credentials and experience that possibly created insights that were more in-depth than two of the researchers.

Recommendations

Field supervisors in the study recognized the importance of their role in the practicum activities of the principal preparation program, as evidenced by the fulfillment of their contextual obligations. They were committed to meeting in one-to-one synchronous conferences with each principal candidate after the submission of video recorded observations, and they monitored compliance standards prescribed in observation guidelines. These guidelines prescribed non-negotiables such as the duration of observation videos, the activities to be completed, and acceptable locations for recording the practicum observation videos. The field supervisors provided written feedback to candidates and documented adherence to these contextual standards.

We recommend that principal preparation programs shift their focus from compliance to coaching by:
1. Providing ongoing and deliberate professional development for field supervisors that stresses the need for providing rich, individualized personal feedback and coaching to candidates.
2. Creating a quality circle of field supervisors who review and share best practices with each other.
3. Developing strong field observation guidelines with rubrics that prioritize and evaluate application-level leadership skills in addition to monitoring contextual compliance standards.
4. Developing a human resources appraisal document that collaboratively assesses the performance of individual field supervisors. This document would provide feedback to the field supervisors. The feedback should prioritize the professional coaching of principal candidates.

We further recommend that future research include a comparative or correlational analysis of principal candidates' perceptions regarding the level of coaching provided to them based on years of experience that their field supervisor had in the principal role. Simply put, does field supervisor experience or length of experience as a principal make a difference in principal candidate perceptions regarding the level of coaching that they received.

Lastly, we recommend that this research topic be extended to universities in different locales. This would address a limitation shared earlier and contribute to the body of research. Furthermore, it would be especially pertinent for researchers to examine the four recommendations that the authors discussed above regarding the shift of principal internships from compliance to coaching. Future studies of this nature should include researchers who possess a field supervision background. This requirement could possibly impact the methods, execution, and reliability of the study and its results and conclusions.

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Increasing Civics Scores Through Purposeful Teacher Recruitment and Retention

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Abstract

The school grades system in Florida rewards performance on various End-of-Course (EOC) exams as part of the overall school grade for a school. Social studies consists of 10% of a school grade at the high school level and 11% of a school grade at the middle school level. By focusing on purposeful, targeted, recruitment of social studies teachers, school systems have the ability greatly to improve their school grades. However, the work does not end there; strong candidates need to be viewed as long-term investments and should receive support in pedagogy, curriculum, assessment, and technology from their school district.

Keywords: civics, assessment, social studies, school grades, middle-level education, curriculum and instruction

Increasing Civics Scores Through Purposeful Teacher Recruitment and Retention

Civics instruction has become a "lightning rod" in U.S. educational reform in the last 3–5 years, and this study examines possibilities of how to increase student performance on the 7th-grade civics end-of-course (EOC) exam. The Governor of Florida, Ron DeSantis, wants Florida to be the national leader in civics education. The Florida Legislature has allotted $106 million towards the *Civics Literacy Excellence Initiative* to meet this goal (Governor's Press Office, 2021). Committees have been formed to address civics education, and at the time of this publication, interviews were taking place to hire leaders to implement the changes in civics throughout the state. These strategies and emphasis on civics and/or government; however, is not unique to Florida. Our intention is to highlight that through purposeful teacher recruitment, professional development, and targeted retention school administrators in all states can use these findings to improve student performance strategically in social studies, specifically civics education. In this study, we examined the emphasis (or lack thereof) of civics instruction in a large Central Florida School District, with the hope of demonstrating the importance of civics to both overall school performance and lifelong citizenship.

Statement of the Problem

As of 2018 (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2018), 28 states required a social studies statewide assessment, with 10 states (Florida being one of them) requiring a civics or U.S. Citizenship exam. Many school districts do not have a dedicated department at the district level, which can lead to challenges with teacher cohesion and curriculum alignment. At this particular district, the other three core subjects are prioritized, with greater resources being allocated to English-language arts (ELA), mathematics, and science. Between 2014 and 2021, social studies (which consists of civics and other subject areas such as U.S. history, world history, and geography) has received the least amount of support from this large Central Florida School District. Table 1 and Table 2 highlight the personnel utilized by the district.

Table 1
District Support for Middle School Curriculum: 2014–2015 to 2018–2019

ELA	Math	Science	Social Studies
6-12 curriculum specialist	6-12 curriculum specialist	6-12 curriculum specialist	6-12 curriculum specialist
3 resource teachers	2 resource teachers	2 resource teachers	1 resource teacher

Table 2
District Support for Middle School Curriculum: 2020–2021

ELA	Math	Science	Social Studies
K-12 coordinator	K-12 coordinator	K-12 coordinator	
6-12 curriculum specialist	6-12 curriculum specialist	6-12 curriculum specialist	6-12 curriculum specialist
5 resource teachers	2 resource teachers	2 resource teachers	1 resource teacher

Even though many districts (including the one discussed in this study) may not provide the same support to social studies as they do for other subject areas, social studies is a critical

component of how school performance is assessed: (a) civics—assessed in 7th grade—counts for 11% of the overall school grade for a middle school; and (b) U.S. history—assessed in 11th grade—counts for 10% of the overall school grade for a high school. Strategic staffing and curriculum training and development becomes that much more critical because **one class** counts at each level (middle and high) for a substantial portion of the school grade. According to David Labaree in his article *Targeting Teachers*, "[t]he mantra of the current school reform movement in the United States is that high-quality teachers produce high achieving students" (Labaree, 2011). Each year, students must complete several assessments for their core curriculum areas: ELA, math, science, and social studies. Some of these assessments are known as EOCs, and contain questions related to the subject-area benchmarks (See Appendix, Table 1A). Also, the scores count for the school once. Re-takes, etc. do not count for the school grade. In addition to impacting the school grade (see Table 3); student scores count as 30% of their overall grade.

Table 3
School Grades Model

English Language Arts (FSA, FSAA)	Mathematics (FSA, FSAA, EOCs)	Science (NGSSS, FSAA, EOCs)	Social Studies (EOCs)	Achievement (0% to 100%)
Achievement (0% to 100%) Learning Gains (0% to 100%) Learning Gains of the Lowest 25% (0% to 100%)	Achievement (0% to 100%) Learning Gains (0% to 100%) Learning Gains of the Lowest 25% (0% to 100%)	Achievement (0% to 100%)	Achievement (0% to 100%)	Middle School (EOCs or Industry Certifications) (0% to 100%)

The civics EOC is administered in one day over 160 minutes. There are 56 to 60 questions on the assessment and some school officials provide students a short "break" after 80 minutes. Each question is delineated into one of four reporting categories: (a) Origins and Purposes of Government, (b) Roles, Rights, and Responsibilities of Citizens, (c) Government Policies and Political Processes, and (d) Organizations and Functions of Government. Within each reporting category, students can obtain a total of 12 possible points. The state provides different versions of the assessment for validity and reliability of results.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

In December 2008, the Florida State Board of Education adopted the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards (NGSSS) for social studies. The 7th-grade Civics and Government strand of these standards is used to develop the civics EOC. The civics EOC measures achievement of Florida students enrolled in civics courses by assessing student progress on benchmarks from the NGSSS that are assigned to civics course descriptions. In preparation for the civics EOC, the Central Florida District used in this study, requires district interim assessments (DIAs) to gauge student preparedness for the civics EOC. These DIAs are issued at the conclusion of each organizing principle (unit) in the civics curriculum map. Each DIA contains 20 questions ranging in complexity from Level 1 to Level 3 according to Webb's Depth

of Knowledge. The assessments are utilized for multiple purposes such as teacher accountability and student progress monitoring. There is importance for teachers to implement DIAs with fidelity so that students can be exposed to the levels of questioning that are on the EOC. As shown in Table 4, the target ranges for the percentage of points by cognitive complexity level on each civics EOC assessment.

Table 4
Percentage of Points by Cognitive Complexity Level for Civics EOC Assessment

Course	Low	Moderate	High
Civics	15% - 25%	45% - 65%	15% - 25%

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to assess how one Central Florida School District specifically hires and employs individuals to teach civics in middle schools.

Two specific research questions guided this study:
1. What effect does targeted recruitment of quality 7th-grade civics teachers have on student achievement on the Florida civics EOC assessment?
2. What does the district do to ensure that the teachers that are hired to teach civics…?
   a. understand the civics curriculum,
   b. understand the impact that civics has on the school grade.

Research Question #1 attempts to use the specific interview questions with teachers to define consistent characteristics that make a "quality civics teacher." Teachers will be recruited for an interview based on whether they have taught or are currently teaching civics at one of four schools in a Central Florida District during the years of 2014–2015 to 2018–2019. In addition to interview data, an examination of school grades, civics EOC, and DIA data will be included. The data utilized for this study were aggregated from the Florida State Department of Education and the Central Florida District where Schools A, B, C, and D are located.

Research Question #2 attempts to assess the existence of purposeful recruitment strategies for high-quality civics teachers in the Central Florida District where public middle schools A, B, C, and D are located. This research question will be addressed by interviewing district human resource contact(s) and school principals at Schools A, B, C, and D. District and administrative participants will be selected based on human resource or educational leadership experience during the 2014–2015 to 2018–2019 school years at Schools A, B, C, or D. Based on responses to specific interview questions and the extent to which purposeful recruitment strategies specific to civics exist in this Central Florida District—through this research question, we will aim to make recommendations for the district and schools on recruiting and retaining high-quality civics teachers.

Table 5

Key Terms Section

Key Term	Definition
Civics Education	In the State of Florida—most schools offer the course of civics in middle school, most often in 7th grade. Passing civics is a high school promotion requirement.
District Interim Assessment (DIA)	DIAs are used as progress monitoring in the district featured in this research. These assessments are written using a secure item bank from the state and undergo annual review based on validity and reliability.
End-of-Course Assessments (EOC)	End-of-Course Assessments in the State of Florida are 30% of student's final course grade. Florida requires two EOCs in social studies—civics and high school U.S. History.
Middle School	In Florida, typically grades 6–8.
School Grades	Calculated based on standardized test results and released at the beginning of each new school year.
Webb's Depth of Knowledge (DOK)	The cognitive classification system implemented by Florida Department of Education is based upon Dr. Norman L. Webb's Depth of Knowledge (DOK) levels. Test items on the EOC are disaggregated into categories—low complexity, moderate complexity, and high complexity. See Table 4 for percentage breakdown on the EOC.

Literature Review

The importance of social studies is often overlooked as a core subject (Campbell et al., 2012; Fitchett, Heafner, & Lambert, 2014; Fitchett, Heafner, & VanFossen, 2014; Slaughter, 2008). This statement is the foundation of *Making Civics Count: Citizenship Education for a New Generation* by Campbell et al. (2012). They call for a reformation of civics education in America—stating that in a time *of No Child Left Behind* (now *Every Student Succeeds Act*), ELA and math are given precedence over civic education. In many cases, social studies and social sciences do not receive priority until Advanced Placement classes or college courses (Curry et al., 2015; Curry et al., 2016). In 2011, Florida mandated instruction and assessment for civics in middle school, grades 6–8. Despite this requirement, many districts have not adjusted their district-level staffing to support this mandate.

While social studies may be frequently overlooked, individual schools and administrative leadership must take responsibility and initiative for high-quality civics education in which there is evidence that teachers are strong in both content knowledge and pedagogy. Since 2011, mandated instruction and assessment at the Florida state level has made civics a one-year course for students in 6th through 8th grade. Florida is one of many states that has made civic literacy a constitutional commitment and requires assessment of secondary public-school children for proficiency in civics. The American public is likewise committed to civic education, frequently ranking the preparation of students for responsible citizenship as the most important purpose of public schools (Crabtree, 2005; Glaser, 1985; Rose & Gallup, 2000; Waghid, 2009). The Education Commission of the States, the Center for Civic Education, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, and the National Council for the Social Studies are advocating for greater comprehensive civic education (Levine, 2003). Among the latter, a

highlight is the database of the National Conference of State Legislatures that tracks the progress of legislation affecting civic education in different state legislatures and the U.S. Congress. There have also been measures taken to offer incentives for high-quality instruction with the value-added model. According to this method, the efficacy of teachers is calculated by the increase in test scores that students demonstrate after a year in their classroom (Casabianca et al., 2015; Grossman et al., 2014; Labaree, 2011). The value-added model receives validation when the data collected towards professional evaluation supports that teacher quality can lead to positive differences in student achievement.

At both the state and federal levels, opportunities exist to address the recognition that social studies receive; however, implementation of high-quality instruction is at the discretion of local school districts. In their joint study on the effectiveness of civic education, Gainous and Martens (2012) explored instructional strategies that, despite differences in each classroom, can build democratic capacity in students. These instructional strategies included an open classroom climate that encourages expression and debate, frequency of social studies instruction, and instructional/curricular breadth. In a follow-up study, Gainous and Martens (2013) identify four broad teaching approaches: traditional teaching, active learning, video teaching, and maintenance of an open class-room climate. On a wider scale, there is relatively minimal research about teacher selection available. Peterson (2002) stated:

> no single school-district activity beyond the daily educating of students is more important than the hiring of talented, accomplished, and effective teachers. Efforts at reforming schools, closing racial achievement gaps, increasing academic performance, and building curriculum all rely on teachers who can grasp the issues and help develop solutions. (p. vi)

Recent political tensions and the increasing amount of partisan instruction in many states has forced Florida to take steps to ensure bipartisan instruction. On June 10, 2021, Florida's State Board of Education approved an amendment to Rule 6A-… of the Florida Administrative Code, Required Instruction Planning and Reporting:

> *(3) As provided in Section 1003.42(2), F.S., members of instructional staff in public schools must teach the required instruction topics efficiently and faithfully, using materials that meet the highest standards of professionalism and historical accuracy.*
> > *(a) Efficient and faithful teaching of the required topics must be consistent with the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards…*
> > *(b) Instruction on the required topics must be factual and objective, and may not suppress or distort significant historical events, such as the Holocaust, slavery, the Civil War and Reconstruction, the civil rights movement and the contributions of women, African American and Hispanic people to our country, as already provided in Section 1003.42(2), F.S.*
> > > *Examples of theories that distort historical events and are inconsistent with State Board approved standards include the denial or minimization of the Holocaust, and the teaching of Critical Race Theory, meaning the theory that racism is not merely the product of prejudice, but that racism is embedded in American society and its legal systems in order to uphold the supremacy of white persons.*

> *Instruction may not utilize material from the 1619 Project and may not define American history as something other than the creation of a new nation based largely on universal principles stated in the Declaration of Independence.*
> *Instruction must include the U.S. Constitution, the Bill of Rights and subsequent amendments.*
> ***(c)** Efficient and faithful teaching further means that any discussion is appropriate for the age and maturity level of the students, and teachers serve as facilitators for student discussion and do not share their personal views or attempt to indoctrinate or persuade students to a particular point of view that is inconsistent with the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards…*

This unprecedented action by Florida's State Board of Education stems from contentious debate concerning what students are learning in public school K-12 classrooms. The state's Education Commissioner, Richard Corcoran, says teachers should teach facts without "indoctrination" and is proposing a new rule with new standards for K-12 social studies curriculum—the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards. Interpretation of the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards implemented in social studies curriculum will now forbid discussion of critical race theory as defined in § 1003.42(2), F.S. Many would argue that social studies should be a provocative subject; Alberto Carvalho, former superintendent of Miami-Dade County Public Schools stated, "I think there's value in understanding the equity and the pressures, the struggles and the sacrifices that have been made in this country, then and now, all of that is part of history" (As cited in Odzer, 2021). While Florida teachers are now limited to what can be taught, Carvalho added, "I don't know what the genesis is for this rule, what I can tell you is teachers in Miami-Dade, and board policy in Miami-Dade, protects against any type of biased teaching of any subject" (As cited in Odzer, 2021).

As indicated in changes made to § 1003.42(2) of the Florida Statutes, educators must teach the standards and benchmarks efficiently and faithfully. However, there is a question regarding the responsibility of teachers to tackle the subjects of diversity and inclusion during this time of civil unrest. In her article on *Preparing for Culturally Responsive Teaching*, Geneva Gay (2001), states that it is difficult to hold teachers accountable for culturally responsive teaching (CRT) when they have not been adequately prepared. According to Gay (2001), "teacher preparation programs must be as culturally responsive to ethnic diversity as K-12 classroom instruction" (p. 9). The focus on multicultural instructional strategies is closely related to providing bipartisan resources—specifically regarding scaffolding curriculum to include multicultural content. CRT reinforces the importance of bipartisan instruction and implementing cultural scaffolding through cooperative group learning arrangements and peer coaching. The presence of CRT strategies in instruction should be a factor for calculating student achievement. Gay (2001) pointed out that by identifying ways to make the curriculum culturally relevant and implementing cultural scaffolding, educators can teach students how to use "their own cultures and experiences to expand their intellectual horizons and academic achievement" (p. 4).

Methodology

In this research, we used a mixed-methods approach to identify how a Central Florida District where four schools in the district (A, B, C, and D) are located can increase civics scores through purposeful teacher recruitment and retention. Qualitative interviews guided the study in which descriptive data provided from the Central Florida District informed the interview responses. In this study, we also utilized school grade data, civics EOC data, and civics DIA data from 2014–2015 to 2018–2019 provided by the Florida State Department of Education and the Central Florida School District. Participants were recruited from four different schools within the district and their interviews provided data to the researcher. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather data from district personnel, school administrators, and civics teachers. Teacher participants were selected based on current or past employment at either School A, B, C, or D during the 2014–2015 to 2018–2019 school years. All interviews followed a semi-structured method in which the researcher asked follow-up questions to participants when relevant.

Setting

This research was conducted in a large county school district in Central Florida—using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative data were derived from 7th-grade civics EOC results, civics DIA, and school grades from three middle schools and one K–8 school during the 2014–2015 to 2018–2019 school years. The qualitative data were collected through interviews with the district coordinator of recruitment and retention, district curriculum specialist and resource teacher, school administrators, and current or former civics teachers. The coordinator of recruitment and retention was selected for one primary reason: to make recommendations on the recruitment and retention of quality civics teachers. District and administrative participants were selected based on human resource or educational leadership experience during the 2014–2015 to 2018–2019 school years. Teacher participants were selected based on current or past employment at one of four specific schools during the 2014–2015 to 2018–2019 school years. All four schools were at one point, or have consistently been, a Title I school during the 2014–2015 to 2018–2019 school years.

Justification of Methodology

A mixed-methods approach used in this study allowed both fixed data sets and lived experiences to inform the research and provide a more detailed and holistic picture than through a singular approach (Mertler, 2019). The mix of quantitative and qualitative data collected allows the researcher to gain insight into more than just lived experiences or factual past data. While this study could have been examined using quantitative or qualitative as the methodology alone, the mixed-methods approach best fits the research questions and can answer those questions more precisely than a singular approach.

Participants

Participants ($n = 10$) were chosen to be interviewed for this study; demographics and teaching experience for the participants are indicated in Table 6.

Table 6

Demographics of Participants

School	Position	Ethnicity	Gender	Years of Experience
School A	Former Civics Teacher	Asian	Female	9.5
School B	Middle School Principal	Hispanic	Male	24
School B	Civics Teacher	White	Female	36
School C	Middle School Assistant Principal	White	Male	12
School C	Former Civics Teacher	White	Male	5
School D	Middle School Principal	White	Female	32
School D	Seventh Grade Assistant Principal	White	Female	33
District	Coordinator of Recruitment and Retention	White	Female	17
District	6-12 Specialist of Social Studies and Advanced Programs	White	Male	33
District	Secondary Social Studies Resource Teacher	White	Female	17

Pseudonyms were used for both interview subjects and school names to provide anonymity. Two civics teachers were contacted at School A for an interview and given the option of in-person or virtual. One teacher never responded to the interview requests, the other, "Mrs. Indian Hawthorne" was open to being interviewed but ended up leaving School A in October 2021 for an instructional position at a high school within the same District. In November 2021, Mrs. Indian Hawthorne was interviewed by e-mail; she has nine and half years of teaching experience, seven of which were at School A. During her time at School A, she taught a mix of world and U.S. history—the last four years were spent teaching civics. Mrs. Indian Hawthorne is a female of West Indian (Asian) heritage.

The current Principal and a longtime civics teacher at School B were interviewed. The Principal of School B, "Mr. Withlacoochee," is in his second year as principal at School B, having previously been principal (three years), assistant principal (10 years), and teacher (nine years). The interview was conducted via Microsoft Teams in August 2021—Mr. Withlacoochee is a Hispanic male. The civics teacher, "Mrs. Paynes Prairie" completed an in-person interview in July 2021, she has taught social studies at School B for over 20 years—10 of which have been exclusively civics instruction. Mrs. Paynes Prairie is a white female in her 36th year of teaching.

A former civics teacher at School C was interviewed via Microsoft Teams in July 2021; "Mr. Sandy Beaches" still teaches at School C, but in a different department than social studies. Mr. Sandy Beaches is a white male who has taught at School C for five years—two and half of which were in social studies. In addition to Mr. Sandy Beaches, one of the assistant principals, "Mr. Seminole" was interviewed in-person in July 2021. Mr. Seminole was a civics teacher for six years at School C prior to becoming an assistant principal in 2016–2017. Mr. Seminole is a white male and is in his fourth year as assistant principal at School C; it is his sixth year as an administrator.

The principal, "Mrs. Key Lime," at School D was interviewed along with the 7th-grade assistant principal, "Mrs. Meringue." An in-person interview was conducted in July 2021. Mrs. Key Lime is a white female and has been at this school for 10 years; this is her 24th year as an

administrator, prior to which she was a teacher for eight years. Mrs. Meringue is a white female and has been in her position for three years prior to her appointment she was the administrative teacher on assignment (dean) at School D for the 2018–2019 school year, a new teacher mentor for seven years, and a teacher for 22 years. The three civics teachers from School D who taught civics for the years examined in this study were not available for interview—two are now at different schools in positions that do not have rosters, one declined the interview, the other is the researcher of this study—the third teacher retired in Fall 2018 and was not available for interview. All three of these former civics teachers are white females.

Three employees were interviewed from the district office: the coordinator of recruitment and retention, the 6-12 curriculum specialist of social studies and advanced programs, and the secondary social studies resource teacher. "Mrs. Tomoka," is the coordinator of recruitment and retention for this Central Florida District. Prior to her transition to the district office in Fall 2016, Mrs. Tomoka had taught since 2003 as a civics teacher in the district and is a former District Teacher of the Year—she is a white female. "Mr. Golf Course," is the 6–12 curriculum specialist of social studies and advanced programs. He has been in that position for seven years, prior to which he spent over 20 years in a range of positions from teacher, drop-out prevention, administrator, and private tutor. "Mrs. St. Johns," is the secondary social studies resource teacher—her primary responsibility is to support the 14 middle schools in this district. Mrs. St. Johns is a white female who has been in this position for five years—she taught high school social studies for 12 years (nine years in high school; three years at middle school) prior to moving to the district office.

Limitations of the Research Study

In this large Central Florida School District, there are 14 public middle schools, however, these four were chosen because of the quantitative data sets and qualitative potential for each school. Specifically, these four schools were selected due to similar data for student and/or teacher demographics and high turnover, which impacts data, but all four schools' range in performance. The first limitation of this research is that there are many variables that can potentially impact student achievement, as well as the quality of instruction that students receive. The intention may always be to provide the best instruction to students, however, outside variables that cannot be prevented may turn out to be a factor in this research. There is a positive to this limitation, as we aimed to define what makes a "quality civics teacher." This definition must withstand the daily challenges that face the education profession, and this study is a potential opening to create that definition.

The second limitation of this study is turnover in district leadership, school administration, and teachers, which can be considered a consistent challenge to any educational research. Participants always have the option to opt out of a research study, but turnover "forces the hand" of the researcher to omit data collected from the individual should the participant leave before the completion of the study. One of the four schools has had the same principal during 2014–2015 to 2018–2019 when quantitative data were collected. Only one of the civics teachers interviewed was employed by the same school for the five years on which this study focuses. The lead researcher of this study also has insider research bias—this is a limitation based on

personal experiences from working in this district; though, efforts were made to bracket experiences and allow the voices of the participants to be.

The third limitation of this study is the scope of impact. This district assesses students twice in social studies—once in 7th grade with the civics EOC and again in 11th grade with the U.S. history EOC. Both social studies EOC assessments are factored into the school grade with a weight of 11% (See appendix, Table 1A). The civics EOC counts for 11% of the school grade in middle school, and the U.S. history EOC counts for 10% of the school grade in high school. Based on researcher observations and experiences, when hiring civics teachers in this Central Florida District, there is often a failure to communicate the importance of the civics EOC on the school grade to the new hire. If the three research questions can be answered from the data in a positive light and sustainable recommendations can be made—then the impact of this study will offer validity to the hypothesis that district-wide purposeful teacher recruitment and retention will increase civics scores.

Results

Research Question 1

What effect does targeted recruitment of quality 7th-grade civics teachers have on student achievement on the Florida Civics EOC Assessment?

Qualitative interviews with district and administrative employees indicted that no targeted recruitment, specifically for civics, existed in this school district (n=10). Six out of 10 interviewed participants indicated the trend that when hiring for civics positions; the district is only looking for 6-12 social science accreditation or certification. Furthermore, Mr. Golf Course, the 6-12 specialist of social studies and advanced programs, added that "different degrees qualify you to teach social studies—it is broad and difficult to find somebody who specializes in one—it doesn't necessarily mean that they're the best quality candidate to teach Civics." At the district level, broad hiring requirements act as a solution for the growing teacher shortage. Like many districts, this district hires teachers who are "certified on paper," but being qualified to teach from a legal aspect does not necessarily mean that they are the best candidate. Mrs. Tomoka, the coordinator of recruitment and retention, acknowledged there is a lot of professional learning and support that needs to happen in those classrooms to support a teacher who does not understand the curriculum. District personnel indicated that finding a quality candidate is all incumbent upon the hiring administrator; asking the right questions, such as "are you familiar with the curriculum or specific standards? Are you familiar with the end-of-course exam and item specifications?" If the school-based hiring committee can ask the right questions, the quality of the candidate will be clear.

These broad hiring standards were not seen as a hindrance by any of the four school-based administrators interviewed. In fact, a trend among their responses was that content could be learned through academic/peer coaching, professional development, and time; what all four of school-based administrators were looking for in a potential candidate, was someone who has classroom management. Mrs. Meringue, the assistant principal at School D, shared that during the interview, they were looking for a, "well-rounded teacher regardless of the subject matter that

they're going to choose. Someone who can build relationships with students and the philosophy matches the school." Mr. Withlacoochee, the principal at School B added, "if they (the teacher) don't already have a clear understanding of the content, how passionate are they about making that content, their own, and making it come to life for the kids?" The qualitative data indicated that all interviewees (*n*=10) acknowledge the impact of a quality teacher on student performance, but due to no targeted recruitment practices, the school looks for the best qualified individual, which is not the same thing as a quality teacher.

As indicated through the qualitative data, the lack of targeted recruitment of quality civics teachers negatively impacts student performance on the civics EOC and DIA. This negative impact can be seen by comparing district data to state data. From Spring 2015 through Spring 2021, the Central Florida District in this study had only once scored above the state average. In Spring 2021, there were only three out of 14 public schools within this district that showed an increase in civics EOC achievement scores: two of them were not examined in this study; the third was School C with an increase of seven points—the highest improvement in the district. Civics EOC data trends stay consistent from Spring 2015, with minor increases or decreases each year, until Spring 2021. Both the State of Florida and the Central Florida District decreased in the number of proficient students who passed the civics EOC. The State of Florida decreased from a 71% to a 64% achievement rating, and the Central Florida District decreased from 68% to 61% in passing scores.

Because this county hires qualified personnel over quality personnel—the gaps in teacher understanding of the civics curriculum are filled by professional development, which currently comes in the form of one social studies district support person, Mrs. St. Johns, for all 14 middle schools. There is an academic coach specifically for social studies at one middle school (out of 14 total) in this county—there are two middle school social studies intervention teachers; one of them works at School C specifically in the role of civics intervention; the second intervention teacher is at a school on the other side of the county and is not included in this study. The primary role of the social studies intervention teacher at School C is to provide civics support. The support that each school receives is based on its civics EOC scores and district evaluation. This district uses a three-tiered system in which a Tier 3.0 school, such as School A, B, or C, which will receive greater support and district focus than a Tier 2.0 school, such as School D. The district resource teacher, Mrs. St. Johns, provides curriculum resources, lesson plans, professional learning communities support, data analysis, various professional learning opportunities, and classroom assistance where it is needed. The tier system is determined by school performance on the Florida Standards Assessment and EOC assessments. As indicated in Table 8, red indicates that the data for that category is far below proficiency; yellow indicates that the data for that category is approaching proficiency, but in need of improvement; green indicates that the data for that category is proficient (See Appendix C).

While reviewing the data sets below (Tables 7–9), it is crucial to keep in mind that each year represents a different cohort of 7th-grade civics students. The 2020 school year is not included due to the COVID-19 pandemic; schools in the district closed and went to online instruction for Quarter 4. All state and district assessments were canceled. Green indicates an increase in score from the previous year. Red indicates a decrease in score from the previous year. Black indicates minimal or no change in score from previous year. Is also important to note

that the Test Development Center for the Florida Department of Education creates the civics EOC, which, since its induction in Spring 2011, the questions on it have never been shared with teachers. The EOC analysis in Table 10 is provided by Mrs. St. Johns, the district secondary social studies resource teacher.

Table 7

Grades 4–12, Civics EOC, % at Level 3 or Above

Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Statewide	65%	67%	69%	71%	71%		64%
# Tested	195,669	197,966	200,980	199,288	213,183		200,618
District	62%	66%	70%	66%	68%		61%
# Tested	4,489	4,586	4,640	4,581	4,726		4,521

*Results from Spring EOC from Florida Department of Education.

Table 8

All Grades, Civics EOC, % at Level 3 or Above

Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
School A	37%	41%	69%	58%	60%		52%
# Tested	266	274	195	234	290		249
School B	63%	63%	70%	65%	74%		54%
# Tested	336	323	309	335	341		301
School C	31%	46%	50%	50%	48%		55%
# Tested	107	108	108	91	109		108
School D	65%	73%	70%	64%	69%		59%
# Tested	430	410	436	412	379		422

Table 9

Comparing 2019 to 2021 Civics EOC Data

School	2018-2019	2020-2021	Increase/Decrease	Rank out of 14 2019	Rank out of 14 2021
School A	60%	52%	- 8%	10	13
School B	74%	54%	- 20%	5	10
School C	48%	55%	+ 7%	13	9
School D	69%	59%	- 10%	7	6

Table 10

Mrs. St. Johns Analysis of 2021 Results by School

School	Analysis	Next Steps	Notes	Recommendation
School A	- DIA scores throughout the year show above a 60% proficiency rate on six out of the eight assessments.	Survey incoming 8th graders and Civics teachers to ask why they believed scores were	- One veteran teacher of Civics. - Other teacher has not been in Civics for more than 2 years.	Place as a Tier 2 school for Civics. - Visit PLC in person or virtually at least twice a month.

	- Why are these scores not translating to the EOC? - Has stayed amongst the mid-bottom of rankings.	lower on the EOC than on the DIAs.	- Did teach student assessment strategies this year, which should have helped with the EOC.	- PL on higher-level questioning/tasks and student engagement. - Needs 2 "best practices" days each semester to plan with district resource teacher.
School B	- Largest drop in EOC scores. (-20%) - During classroom visits, the use of PowerPoints and worksheets were evident. - Dropped 4 spots in rankings. - Resource teacher worked with PLC on pacing, analysis and higher-level tasks as well as giving ideas for student collaboration. Unknown if any suggestions were utilized.	- Continue working with PLC. - Continue walkthroughs with administration. - Continue classroom visits.	- Did two walk throughs with the principal, however, did not see principal during any of the PLC meetings (two of the AP's attended). - Gave presentation on higher-level questioning.	Place as Tier 3 school for Civics. - Visit in person or virtually 1X/week. - Professional Learning on higher-level questioning/tasks and student engagement. - Need two days each semester for data and lesson planning with district personnel. - Resource teacher needs to work with 2/3 Civics teachers on lesson planning, pacing, and assessments.
School C	- Increased 7% (only one of 3 schools to do so.) - Social Studies Intervention teacher has done a wonderful job emphasizing Civics and getting others to understand what is needed to teach it.	- Continue working with the intervention teacher and the Civics PLC.	- Was not asked to walk-though last year when district visited school. - Worked with PLCs on unpacking the standard and thinking about how to push students to higher levels. - Intervention teacher attended	Place as Tier 2 school for Civics. - Visit in person or virtually once a month or more if needed/requested. - Work with teachers and Civics intervention teacher on "wrap-ups" and "follow-throughs" after an activity/task. - Admin. has used intervention teacher

			the "Higher-Level Questioning in Daily Instruction", and "Student Engagement" Volusia LEARNS sessions.	for roles outside of the classroom, which needs to end. - Need 2 days (1/semester) for lesson planning with district personnel.
School D	- Decreased 10%. - Remains in middle of rankings. - Several teacher changes occurred in the last couple of years, which has had an impact on student learning.	- Continue working with PLC with common lesson planning.	- Tried to work with PLC but they did not lesson plan together. Did do data analysis with them however.	Place as Tier 2.5 school for Civics. - Visit at least once a month. - PL needed on student engagement, collaboration, and voice. - PLC needs two "best practices" days during the year.

The DIA data for the 2015 through 2017 school years (Table 13) were not available from the district office, due to departmental reorganization. DIAs are used for progress-monitoring and an indicator of EOC performance. These assessments are created by a committee using a secure item bank from the State of Florida. These assessments can be previewed prior to administration, and are assessed by the district for reliability, accountability, and validity. As a result of the reliability process, the questions do change from year to year based on teacher feedback and item analysis. Questions may be changed and/or moved based on benchmark placement in the district curriculum map.

Table 11
Grade 7, Average of Civics District Interim Assessments, % Satisfactory

Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
School A				49%	64%	74%	62%
School B				48%	53%	52%	35%
School C				30%	46%	63%	48%
School D				63%	56%	60%	49%

Research Question 2

What does the district do to ensure that the teachers that are hired to teach civics… (a) Understand the civics curriculum, and (b) Understand the impact that civics has on the school grade?

Qualitative interviews with district and administrative employees (*n*=10) indicted one major trend regarding the hiring of civics teachers: knowledge base is critical, particularly for civics, because of the state EOC that is geared towards middle school civics curriculum. However, as outlined under the findings for Research Question 1, administrative participants (*n*=4) indicated a more holistic approach when hiring teachers, showing more concern for the willingness of the teacher to work with all different levels of students, rather than focusing on incoming content expertise or an understanding of the impact that the civics EOC has in the school grade. This "one-size-fits-all" approach is counterproductive according to the current and former civics teachers (*n*=5) interviewed, four of whom indicated that a basic knowledge of governmental systems was necessary to really make it as a civics teacher and expressed that the new (K-12) Civics and Government standards would require even greater content related expertise. Knowledge of the curriculum and understanding of its impact were not mentioned in the three main characteristics that three out of four administrators were seeking in a potential civics hire: (a) are they passionate about the subject, (b) is data focused, (c) will thrive on a teaching a high-stakes course with competitive periodic assessments. Only Mr. Withlacoochee, principal at School B, mentioned content expertise as being a high impact factor—this was held in equal measure with relationship building and passion for teaching. Mr. Seminole, the assistant principal at School C, stated that he looks for the same characteristics when hiring a core teacher—"someone that's willing to collaborate, try new material, and really respond to data points."

All 10 participants indicated that there is a definite relation between student achievement and the quality of teacher. Mrs. Tomoka stated that there are pre-qualifiers to this correlation between quality and impact: quality is defined

> as somebody who is certified and has the content level background and understands the curriculum standards and the end-of-course exam for the state. So, as far as relating to student achievement, if you don't understand the standards, if you don't understand what the students need to master to take and pass this specific course exam, then I mean you're not really going to have a great impact on student achievement.

Only two teachers, both of whom are no longer in the classroom, were able to provide a detailed description of the impact that the civics EOC has on the school grade. The other three teachers, one of whom still teaches civics, stated that they know civics mattered, but could not provide any details on how the school grade is calculated.

As indicated in the qualitative data, when hiring Civics teachers, there was not intentional hiring of civics teachers at the four schools examined in this study. In fact, this district as a whole, tends to overlook the importance of all secondary social studies courses—seeing as the only tested subjects are 7th-grade civics and 11th-grade U.S. history. Because 6th-grade world history and 8th-grade U.S. history are not tested by the district or state—many teachers believe that social studies does not receive the same treatment as ELA, math, and science. Of the teachers interviewed, the longtime civics teacher at School B, Mrs. Paynes Prairie, stated that in her 36 years as a social studies teacher, she believes that there is an administrative tendency to overlook the impact of civics:

> administration wants these other little things to be done (Mental Health Lessons, Anti-Bullying Curriculum, administering School Climate Survey, Behavior Assemblies)… you

constantly kind of throw them at social studies and go - you guys don't really get tested. You can't look at us that way anymore. We make an impact." Administration often delegates district and state compliance tasks that are non-curriculum, to social studies and defends the loss of instructional time as—these are related to good citizenship, that falls under social studies.

As indicated previously in Table 3, in the State of Florida, a middle school's grade may include up to nine components. There are four achievement components, as well as components for learning gains, learning gains of the lowest 25% of students, and middle school acceleration. Each component is worth up to 100 points in the overall calculation.

Four Achievement Components – The four achievement components are 6-8 ELA, 6-8 mathematics, 8th-grade science, and 7th-grade social studies (civics). These components include student performance on statewide standardized assessments, including the comprehensive assessments and EOC assessments. The components measure the percentage of full-year enrolled students (FTE) who achieved a passing score.

Four Learning Gains Components – These components are learning gains in 6-8 ELA and 6-8 mathematics, as well as learning gains for the lowest performing 25% of students in ELA and mathematics. These components include student performance on statewide standardized assessments, including the comprehensive assessments and EOC assessments for the current year and the prior-prior year. The components measure the percentage of full-year enrolled students who achieved a learning gain from the prior-prior year to the current year.

Middle School Acceleration – This component is based on the percentage of eligible students who passed a high school level EOC assessment (Algebra I or Geometry) or industry certification.

School Grades Calculation – For schools that opt-in, the points earned for each component are added together and divided by the total number of available points to determine the percentage of points earned.

School Grading Percentages – A = 62% of points or greater; B = 54% to 61% of points; C = 41% to 53% of points; D = 32% to 40% of points; F = 31% of points or less

Discussion

When reviewing the qualitative and quantitative data collected during this study, the overlapping trend that connects both research questions together, is that this district will need to focus a greater amount of its resources towards civics instruction. There are no district-wide targeted recruitment and retention strategies currently in place for civics teachers. No consistent expectations are in place for administrators to ensure that civics teachers understand the curriculum and impact of the EOC on the school grade. The secondary social studies office takes steps to build and archive quality civics resources for teachers that are accessible through a variety of platforms: Canvas, Microsoft Teams, SharePoint, etc… However, there are few

opportunities for professional learning regarding the appropriate implementation of these resources—this leads to inconsistent teacher follow-through and an ongoing struggle with curriculum pacing. As civics teachers across the state prepare for the implementation of revised civics standards, which go into effect in 2023–2024, this district will need to have a marketing plan in place to encourage current civics teachers to take part in the Florida Civics Seal of Excellence. This professional licensure endorsement will most likely take form as a self-paced course, which contains features of accountability—such as proof of implementation and built-in assessments. There also needs to be a focus on recruiting teachers who have the necessary qualifications to specifically teach civics; this will mostly fall on the shoulders of administrators to ask the right questions on content knowledge, impact of EOC on school grade, and the importance of being bipartisan as a civics teacher.

Implications

Research implications of this study are suggestive that the findings are important for district practice, state policy, and further research. Research implications are based on the conclusions that have been drawn from results; the first implication pertains to district practice regarding the lack of a targeted recruitment and retention plan regarding seventh-grade civics teachers. Due to revisions in Florida state policy which makes high-quality civics instruction a priority in all 67 school districts, the school board featured in this study will need to adjust its recruitment and retention practices if they plan to see high student achievement on the Civics EOC during the 2023–2024 school year, when revised Civics standards go into effect. The second implication is on state policy—Florida Legislature has allotted $106 million, over a two-year period, towards the Florida Civics Literacy Initiative, which seeks to make Florida a national leader in civics instruction. The four goals of this Civics Initiative offer a multitude of implications at the local, state, national, and international levels:

- Create the Florida Civics Seal of Excellence—a professional licensure endorsement with $3,000 bonus for civics teachers.
- Establish regional civics coaches to provide additional training, professional development, and classroom support.
- Bolster curriculum and expedite implementation of standards.
- Launch pilot programs for public service incubators to develop partnerships between secondary schools and government institutions.

As Florida strives to be number one in the nation for civic literacy and education; it will open opportunities for research outside of recruitment and retention of civics teachers in a single school district. other local school district across the state will need to be more purposeful in recognizing civics as a priority and allot resources to support civics interaction and students' achievement. As states across the nation watch this initiative unfold in Florida, there will be an opportunity for them to implement a similar strategy in their schools to educate civic-minded students who will one day inherit the responsibility of continuing the American Republic.

Recommendations

We recognize that variables cannot always be isolated in education. Student achievement is interdependent on quantitative and qualitative factors at each school. The recommendations of

this study regarding purposeful recruitment and retention of quality civics teachers are based on the qualitative and quantitative findings from school data and participant data. This study recommends two secondary recruitment strategies: (a) *High Impact Staffing* and (b) *Analysis & Systems Planning*. When considering high-impact staffing, targeting teacher performance using student data to identify high-impact teachers as district mentors is needed. Through analysis and systems planning, the focus is productivity at the school level by incorporating the practice of vertical integration of standards and intervention specialists as school-based experts. While the State of Florida is hiring 20 regional civics literacy coaches to help rollout the revised K-12 Civics and Government standards (see Appendix, Table 1A); the district needs to have a plan in place for ensuring success for the 2023–2024 school year when these standards replace the former K-12 civics standards. This proactive plan comes in the form of four recommended secondary retention strategies: (a) *Comprehensive New Teacher Induction*, (b) *Meaningful Professional Learning*, (c*) Subject Specific Instructional "Institutes,"* and (d) *Effective Professional Learning Communities*.

Each K-12 subject requires a specific set of skills that may not always be addressed by the broad subject area exams for certification. Increased student achievement can be achieved with targeted staffing practices when quantitative data and systemic planning are combined to invest in high quality educators in these areas: (a) pedagogy, (b) curriculum, (c) assessment, and (d) technology. This framework considers that effective staffing does not always take place in a vacuum. Teachers have an overwhelming task set before them; this struggle to be successful in the classroom is made even more difficult when staffing decisions are made out of desperation rather than deliberate thought. By viewing numerical data and human narrative one can analyze school strengths and needs, then determine what staffing needs to be implemented so that specific positions have the greatest positive impact on student learning. A district could take a holistic view of recruitment and retention by identifying which category a subject area falls into: (a) structural—"Magic Bullet Subject"—one subject area has high impact on a school grade, (b) functional—"Collaborate and Listen"—cyclical content areas that benefit from vertical integration and intervention specialists.

If a school adopts the targeted hiring practices outlined above, their work is not done. A high-quality teacher has content knowledge and strong pedagogy; the odds of hiring this just right combination are slim due to the variance in preparedness, or availability, or collegiate educational programs. Once a strong candidate is recruited, they need to be retained as a long-term investment. Leadership at the school and district level should allot funding to the four main areas that impact teacher efficacy: (a) pedagogy, (b) curriculum, (c) assessment, and (d) technology. Beyond having the characteristics of a quality teacher, districts should consistently prioritize Comprehensive New Teacher Induction, Effective Professional Learning Communities, Meaningful Professional Learning, and Subject Specific Instructional "Institutes"—all of which are indispensable for building sustainable capacity and increasing student achievement.

When speaking with Mrs. St. Johns, the secondary social studies resource teacher, who in her position, works the closest with civics teachers in this district, she outlined recommendations, which from her perspective, would improve civics scores across the district. First, there needs to be two additional resource teachers in the district social studies curriculum office to support all 14 public schools and district online teachers. The district has refused to hire additional staff for

the curriculum office at this time. Social studies was not included in current superintendents three-year "District Strategic Plan" that began in 2019, however increasing scores in ELA, mathematics, and science was included. The social studies department also receives the smallest budget for anything extra like conferences, trainings, professional learning, etc…

Additionally, there needs to be at least one social studies coach or intervention teacher at each middle school. Currently, there are two in the district. One serves the students at School C and the other at a middle school not featured in this study. Their roles have not been defined by the county, so they rely upon the school administrators for their duties, which have not been consistent. At School C, the intervention teacher can be found in classrooms each period of the day; whereas, at the other middle school, the intervention teacher rarely leaves the office except to be used as a substitute. Greater defined roles and expectations need to be provided to the two of them from the district level. As a last suggestion, Mrs. St. Johns would like to have additional civics days at each school so that she can work one-on-one with teachers to analyze their students' needs, lesson plan, and analyze data for future intervention strategies if needed. Last year and this year have seen a shortage of substitutes so even though she has asked principals, they have not been willing to give the teachers that day due to the substitute shortage.

In K-12 education, a teacher shortage and growing disenchantment were exacerbated by COVID-19. If anything, the challenges of the 2019–2021 school years have highlighted the need for state and district leadership to adopt realistic and sustainable recruitment and retention frameworks for K-12 education that promote student achievement through bipartisan instruction and foster highly qualified educators. One may focus on the "thankless" task as an educator, but one should never lose sight of why one must teach with integrity and have high expectations— students are the mirror by which success is measured.

Further Research

The data in this study offered a mere snapshot of the impact of civics education in Florida. Future directions for further studies may include:
- A duplicate study examining the recruitment and retention of high-quality 11th-grade U.S. History teachers in this district. This study could also be a comparison of civics staffing (middle school) to U.S. history staffing (high school), or a comparison to other districts in Florida or other states.
- A follow-up study with the same schools after the 2023–2024 implementation of the revised Civics and Government Standards.

A study examining the reliability of DIAs in this district as reliable predictors of student achievement on the civics EOC.

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Appendices

Table 1A
Seventh-Grade Civics Benchmarks Assessed by Civics EOC

Strand SS.7.C SS = Social Studies; 7 = Grade 7; C = Civics		Standard SS.7.C.1 Four total standard reporting categories	Benchmark SS.7.C.1.1 Thirty-six total benchmarks.
Civics End-of-Course Assessment Blueprint (Spring 2011 – Spring 2022) Date Adopted or Last Revised: 02/2014			
1. Origins and Purposes of Law and Government			
SS.7.C.1.1	Recognize how Enlightenment ideas including Montesquieu`s view of separation of power & John Locke`s theories related to natural law & how Locke`s social contract influenced the Founding Fathers.		
SS.7.C.1.2	Trace the impact that the Magna Carta, English Bill of Rights, Mayflower Compact, and Thomas Paine`s "Common Sense" had on colonists` views of government.		
SS.7.C.1.3	Describe how English policies & responses to colonial concerns led to the writing of the Declaration of Independence.		
SS.7.C.1.4	Analyze the ideas (natural rights, role of government) and complaints set forth in the Declaration of Independence.		
SS.7.C.1.5	Identify how the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation led to the writing of the Constitution.		
SS.7.C.1.6	Interpret the intentions of the Preamble of the Constitution.		
SS.7.C.1.7	Describe how the Constitution limits the powers of government through separation of powers and checks and balances.		
SS.7.C.1.8	Explain the viewpoints of the Federalists and Anti-Federalists regarding the ratification of the Constitution and inclusion of a bill of rights.		
SS.7.C.1.9	Define the rule of law and recognize its influence on the development of the American legal, political, and governmental systems.		
SS.7.C.3.10	Identify sources and types (civil, criminal, constitutional, and military) of law.		
2. Roles, Rights, and Responsibilities of Citizens			
SS.7.C.2.1	Define the term "citizen" and identify legal means of becoming a United States citizen.		
SS.7.C.2.2	Evaluate the obligations citizens have to obey laws, pay taxes, defend the nation, and serve on juries.		
SS.7.C.2.4	Evaluate rights contained in the Bill of Rights and other amendments in the Constitution.		
SS.7.C.2.5	Distinguish how the Constitution safeguards and limits individual rights.		
SS.7.C.3.6	Evaluate Constitutional rights and their impact on individuals and society.		

SS.7.C.3.7	Analyze the impact of the 13th, 14th, 15th, 19th, 24th, and 26th amendments on participation of minority groups in the American political process.
SS.7.C.3.12	Analyze the significance and outcomes of landmark Supreme Court cases including, but not limited to, Marbury v. Madison, Plessy v. Ferguson, Brown v. the Board of Education, Gideon v. Wainwright, Miranda v. Arizona, in re Gault, Tinker v. Des Moines, Hazelwood v. Kuhlmeier, United States v. Nixon, and Bush v. Gore.
3. Government Policies and Political Processes	
SS.7.C.2.8	Identify America`s current political parties and illustrate their ideas about government.
SS.7.C.2.9	Evaluate candidates for political office by analyzing their qualifications, experience, issue-based platforms, debates, and political ads.
SS.7.C.2.10	Examine the impact of media, individuals, and interest groups on monitoring and influencing government.
SS.7.C.2.11	Analyze media and political communications (bias, symbolism, propaganda).
SS.7.C.2.12	Develop a plan to resolve a state or local problem by researching public policy alternatives, identifying appropriate government agencies to address the issue, and determining a course of action.
SS.7.C.2.13	Examine multiple perspectives on public and current issues.
SS.7.C.4.1	Differentiate concepts related to United States domestic and foreign policy.
SS.7.C.4.2	Recognize government and citizen participation in international organizations.
SS.7.C.4.3	Describe examples of how the United States has dealt with international conflicts.
4. Organization and Function of Government	
SS.7.C.3.1	Compare different forms of government (direct democracy, representative democracy, socialism, communism, monarchy, oligarchy, autocracy).
SS.7.C.3.2	Compare parliamentary, federal, confederal, and unitary systems of government.
SS.7.C.3.3	Illustrate the structure and function (three branches of government established in Articles I, II, and III with corresponding powers) of government in the United States as established in the Constitution.
SS.7.C.3.4	Identify the relationship and division of powers between the federal government and state governments.
SS.7.C.3.5	Explain the Constitutional amendment process.
SS.7.C.3.8	Analyze the structure, functions, and processes of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches.
SS.7.C.3.9	Illustrate the law-making process at the local, state, and federal levels.
SS.7.C.3.11	Diagram the levels, functions, and powers of courts at the state and federal levels.
SS.7.C.3.13	Compare the constitutions of the United States and Florida.
SS.7.C.3.14	Differentiate between local, state, and federal governments` obligations and services.

Appendix B
District Middle School Tiers and Data 2020-2021

School	ELA	ELA Learning Gains	ELA Lowest 25% Learning Gains	Math	Math Learning Gains	Math Lowest 25% Learning Gains	Science	Civics	Acceleration	Total Points	Percent of Points	School Grade	Points away from letter grade drop	Points needed for letter grade increase	Tier
School A	31	36	26	28	38	42	37	57	65	360	40	D	81	9	3
School B	43	42	32	38	27	26	50	57	58	373	41	C	85	113	3
School C	34	42	35	28	35	26	44	57	71	372	41	C	84	114	3
School D	47	45	30	46	34	30	52	62	71	417	46	C	129	69	2.5

*Tier 3 Schools = Weekly Visits   Tier 2 Schools = Bi-Weekly Visits   Tier 1 Schools = Monthly/As Needed

New School Grade Scale

- A = 62 percent of total applicable points or higher
- B = 54 to 61 percent of total applicable points
- C = 41 to 53 percent of total applicable points
- D = 32 to 40 percent of total applicable points
- F = 31 percent of total applicable points or less

Appendix C

Interview Questions for Teachers Which Address Research Question #1

1. How did your college education/degree prepare you for teaching Civics? Did you go to school to become a teacher, or is this a second career?
2. How did you come to teach Civics and were you certified in Social Science 6-12 when hired?
3. How long have you been teaching Civics, and have you been teaching Civics continuously at the same school?
4. How many preps have you had while teaching Civics and what does PLC look like?
5. When you plan instruction for Civics – what resources do you use?
6. Explain the impact of Civics on the grade of your school?
7. How do you ensure that your instruction is bipartisan?
8. If you were asked for input or are present when hiring/recruiting a new Civics teacher, what characteristics would you look for in a quality candidate? Furthermore, how would you define "quality" when regarding a Civics teacher?

Appendix D

Interview Questions for Human Resources and School Principals

1. When hiring/recruiting a new Civics teacher, what characteristics would you look for in a quality candidate? Furthermore, how would you define "quality" when regarding a Civics teacher?
2. What effect does targeted recruitment of quality seventh grade Civics teachers have on student achievement on the Florida Civics end of course assessment?
3. What does the district/school do to ensure that the teachers that are hired to teach Civics…? (1) understand the Civics Curriculum, (2) understand the impact that Civics has on the School Grade.

Stakeholders' Perceptions of the Differences in Fringe, Distant, and Remote Rural Schools

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Abstract

In this article, we present the differences in the perceptions of the key stakeholders in the three different types of rural high schools in Alabama: rural fringe, rural distant, and rural remote. Identification of research-based strategies for leading successful high-poverty rural high schools in Alabama. The tendency of educational policymakers is to view rural schools as a monolithic entity and to assume "a one-size-fits-all" approach to improving teaching and learning will work in all schools. One must remember that the majority of the research on high-poverty, high-minority schools is conducted in urban and suburban schools. We identified significant differences in not only the perception of the key stakeholders, but also in the needs of their rural schools in Alabama. Through this study, we point to ways leaders in rural schools can effectively foster teaching and learning. We believe that the findings provide a glimpse into the reasons for the high-achieving nature and ability to narrow the achievement gap of these rural schools in Alabama.

Keywords: rural schools, achievement gap, high-achieving minority schools, high-poverty, differentiated professional development, improved teaching and learning

Stakeholders' Perceptions of the Differences in Fringe, Distant, and Remote Rural Schools

The modern era of accountability emphasized the achievement gap between middle-class white students and minority and low-income students in the United States. This gap is identifiable when children enter kindergarten and continues to grow throughout their educational lives (Campana, 2018, 2020; Williams, 2011). Currently, researchers cannot agree on the root causes of this achievement gap (Carey, 2014; Williams, 2011) or how to close it. There is, however, agreement that closing the achievement gap will take a coordinated effort from all stakeholders involved in a student's education (Books, 2007; Moore et al., 2017).

There are those who suggest that it is imperative that governmental officials, researchers and the general public recognize that part of this achievement gap is grounded in social and cultural causes, which should be addressed (Bueker, 2022; Carey, 2014; Carter, 2012; Carter et al., 2017; Reardon et al., 2019). Previous researchers pointed to a variety of these potential causes, including: a lack of parental involvement especially in the poor communities; lower educational levels of low socio-economic families, greater amount of time spent on non-educational functions; and high levels of poverty (Carey, 2014; Gabrielli et al., 2022). Additionally, schools serving high-poverty, minority students tend to be staffed with younger, inexperienced teachers working with the most at-risk students (Stronge, 2018; Stronge et al., 2011).

Although social and cultural elements can influence a child's capacity to achieve in school, there are schools in which children from high-poverty backgrounds are achieving (Carey, 2014; Parrett & Budge, 2020; Reeves, 2019). There are also research-based strategies and procedures these schools employ that foster their success. Most of this research, however, has been conducted in urban and suburban schools.

Purpose of the Study

This research was the third phase of a study investigating successful high-minority, high-poverty, rural schools in Alabama. The purpose of this phase was to identify what, if any, differences exist in the perspectives of the stakeholders of the following three types of rural schools: rural fringe, rural distant, and rural remote. We wanted to understand these differences from the perceptions of some of the key stakeholders engaged in educating high-poverty and high-minority students in each type of rural school in Alabama.

Methodology

An exploratory qualitative multiple-case-study methodology was used for this study. Yin (2002) stated that case studies are an appropriate methodology when one is attempting to answer how or why questions. Additionally, a case study is used when the research is involving a real-life situation or setting (Yin, 2009). This study used a qualitative approach, as qualitative research is used when the researcher is interested in the process or context rather than a generalization (Yusuke, 2013). In this study, we used a multiple-case-study design as it was believed that it would enable the researchers to develop insight and understanding into why these high-achieving, high-poverty, high-minority, rural high schools in Alabama have increased

student achievement in the face of the present and potential challenges to success that so many other similar schools failed to overcome. The multiple-case-study approach enabled the researchers to study the individual cases to determine the key stakeholders' perceptions of the elements of the schools' successes and the impact of potential present and potential challenges to that success. This study is designed to identify if the perceptions of stakeholders about high achievement in rural schools are consistent across these three types of schools.

Data Collection and Analysis

A semi-structured interview protocol was used to gather information from school leaders, staff, faculty, parents, community members, and other key stakeholders. The use of open-ended questions was critical to capturing the participants' perspectives and opinions. When necessary, the use of follow-up questions, probes, and structuring questions was used to ensure as complete a record as possible. Institutional Review Board approval for this research was requested and received due to the inclusion of human subjects and to ensure compliance with applicable regulations, guidelines, and ethical research principles.

Data were analyzed using an iterative process, or what Creswell (2013) called the data-analysis spiral of collecting, reviewing, analyzing, reflecting, and sense-making of the data collected. The reduction, simplification, and transformation of the data were accomplished in a multi-step process.

Once we completed the analysis of the data and the themes that emerged, we attempted to triangulate the data. Triangulation is the process intended to ensure the validity and integrity of the findings. Triangulation is critical to ensure that the findings are based on the data and not on some pre-conceived ideas of what is believed to be true based on experiences and interpretation of the research (Berg & Lune, 2012; Bernard & Ryan, 2010; Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995, 2004, 2006; Yin, 2014).

We conducted peer debriefings as an external check on the validity and integrity of the data for each of the case studies. We asked professional colleagues to be a "devil's advocate" as a method to ensure the findings were valid. The peer debriefers asked questions about methods, sources, and analysis of data. As is the normal protocol, the researchers kept detailed notes on these debriefings and asked the peer debriefers to do the same.

The peer-debriefing process for each of the case studies focused on ensuring the validity and integrity of the data to answer the research questions of what factors do selected stakeholders perceive as present and potential challenges to their success and what factors do selected stakeholders perceive as facilitating their success? Additionally, this peer-debriefing process was completed during the cross-case analysis to ensure the validity and integrity of the data to answer the research questions of what, if any, differences exist in these perceptions between each stakeholder group or between each type of rural schools, fringe, distant, or remote.

Population and Sample

Although most researchers for rural schools considers them as one type of school, Geverdt (2019) identified three types of rural locale codes. Rural fringe is a rural school that exists in an area within five miles of an urban location. Rural distant schools operate more than five but less than 25 miles from an urban area. Schools classified as rural remote schools are more than 25 miles from an urban area. The sampling for this study included all three types of schools. This sampling was done to ensure that the results would be representative of all types of rural schools and to conduct an analysis of any differences in the perceptions within these types of schools.

Criterion sampling was used to select the schools that met the criteria of high-poverty, high-minority, and high-achieving, rural high schools. A three-step process was used to select the schools for inclusion in this study (Patton, 2001).

Once all rural schools in Alabama were identified, the researcher eliminated all schools that did not have at least 65% of the student body receiving a free/reduced-priced lunch. After the researcher identified the top 33% of the high-poverty, rural schools with a minimum minority population of 65%, and finally, schools failing to meet 100% of their Annual Yearly Progress goals were eliminated resulting in a pool of 12 schools. Of the 12 schools, two were rural fringe schools, four were rural distant schools, and six were rural remote schools. Once the school personnel were contacted and asked to participate in the study, a combination of random, purposeful, and snowball sampling was used to identify the actual participants. A review of the school's website and the local phone directory, retrieved electronically, were used to identify key stakeholders. Individuals were selected for participation based on their position or knowledge of the school.

Significance of the Study

Much of the research related to creating high-quality schools in which children from high-poverty, high-minority backgrounds succeed has been conducted at urban/suburban elementary and middle schools, and it is estimated that only about 6% of all educational research is conducted in rural areas (Caffey, 2020; Hardre` & Sullivan, 2008). This shortcoming is notable, as there are 7,810 rural school districts in the United States, comprising about 57% of all school districts in the country (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). An estimated number of 9,765,385 students or about 21% of the United States student population is enrolled in rural schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

The traditional southern region of the United States is home to about 23% of all rural school districts (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). These southern rural school districts are responsible for educating nearly 33% of all the region's school students, (Caffey, 2020; Johnson et al., 2014). In Alabama, where this study occurred, the rural student population is 42% (Johnson et al., 2014; Showalter et al., 2019). Many of these schools serve high-minority and high-poverty populations, and the schools tend to be identified as having low student achievement on standardized tests and low high school graduation rates. Additionally, much of the existing rural school research is conducted as if rural school were a monolithic entity, but

there is a great amount of diversity within the rural population in the United States (Haas, 2017; Irvin et al., 2012). In 2014, the National Center for Educational Statistics worked with the United States Census Bureau and changed the school identification locale codes to an urban-centric system. The locale codes for rural schools include locale code 41: rural fringe, which is defined as five miles or less from an urban area, locale code 42: rural distant, which is defined as between five and 25 miles from an urban area, and locale code 43: rural remote, which is greater than 25 miles from an urban area.

Review of the Literature

An analysis of the existing literature provided a clear course of action to creating high-achieving schools: high-quality teachers and administrators, high-quality professional development, high self-efficacy for both students and teachers, collaboration, a culture of high expectations for students and educators, inclusion of community and parents in the students' academic achievement and in decision making, and stressing the importance of high school (Chance & Sequra, 2009; Felton, 2022; Zuckerman & Wilcox, 2019). While these factors may be the key traits of high-achieving schools, the vast majority of the research on this topic is designed and conducted in suburban and urban elementary and middle schools with larger populations. Rural schools are often the center of community life, are often the largest employer for the community, and often serve as the meeting locations for many local organizations and clubs, local elections, and emergency and disaster shelter and relief facilities. Rural schools are the hub of the community (Carter et al., 2009; Cedering & Wihlborg, 2020; Lux et al., 2022; Nachtigal, 2019).

The Rural School and Community Trust (2001) found that rural schools tend to have smaller classes, which enables teachers to spend a greater amount of time with their students, learning their academic strengths and weakness. Along with developing a greater understanding of the students' academic needs, teachers and school staff can create a deeper understanding of the students' non-academic needs and family lives. This deeper understanding of the whole student enables rural-school faculty and staff to meet the needs of each student better (Johnson et al., 2002; Tucker, 2021); however, rural schools also face a myriad of challenges not typically faced in their suburban and urban counterparts.

Rural schools tend to be hampered by a resource-poor environment and a weak tax base, resulting in high turnover rates, because these schools cannot compete with the salaries that wealthier urban/suburban schools can offer teachers, administrators, and staff. This high turnover rate means that these rural schools have, in general, less experienced teachers/administrators educating students. Rural schools also tend to have high levels of persistent, intergenerational poverty (Connor et al., 2022; Johnson et al., 2014; Meij et al., 2020), increasing diversity in their student populations in terms of poverty and minority populations (Masumoto & Brown-Welty, 2009; Rude & Miller, 2018; Welsh & Swain, 2020) and transient populations. The transient nature of the rural school population results in a significant interruption of the education of their children and a lower level of achievement for students (Johnson et al., 2014).

Although there are some elements in rural communities that support schools and their purposes, rural school personnel face an uphill battle in providing a high-quality education for

their students. In many settings, there is evidence that they may be failing to prepare rural students for a productive and successful future in the increasingly diverse and global economy. Gibbs (2000) reports that urban/suburban students are more likely to take calculus (93% to 64%) and physics (64% to 34%) than are rural students. Rural students tend to have fewer career opportunities and limited opportunities of attending college or a post-secondary trade school (Hardre`, 2007). Additionally, rural students are less likely to have access to advanced placement and college credit courses or to take calculus (Clark et al., 2022; Irvin et al., 2012; Sowl & Crain, 2021). A Government Accounting Office Report recommended that the United States Department of Education provide targeted assistance to rural schools that will help them meet the unique challenges they face (Arnold, 2005).

Decision-makers often ignore or omit the input of rural schools during the discourse of educational issues and reform in the United States (Bergeron et al., 2018; Williams & King, 2002). Often the solutions to educational problems are attempted in a one-size-fits-all approach, and this approach does not work with rural schools due to their differing needs and diversity (Asada et al., 2020; Starr & White, 2008). Many scholars assume that they know what the "best practices" are and that they are the same everywhere (Howley, 2001). The United States Department of Education continues "…talking about rural communities as small cities" (Arnold, 2005, p. 3), and this philosophy forces rural schools to implement policies and reforms that were developed for suburban/urban schools. The generalizability of studies conducted in suburban/urban schools to rural schools is difficult (Bergeron et al., 2018; Hardre` & Sullivan, 2008). The United States Department of Education tends to fund programs designed to help rural schools solve issues that are unique to rural schools but are only appropriate for solving issues at suburban/urban schools in reality (Arnold, 2005).

The researchers from extant studies on what factors make rural high schools successful have identified several common traits. The creation of a culture of high expectations (Carter et al., 2009; Chance & Sequra, 2009; Sears, 2019; Tucker, 2021;), including the community and parents (Bergeron et al., 2018; Bottoms, et al., 2004; Chance & Sequra, 2009; Felton, 2022), a focus on the importance of high school (Bottoms et al., 2004), rigorous and focused professional development (Chance & Sequra, 2009; Garrett et al., 2019; Gore & Rosser, 2022), high-quality teachers, and school culture have a significant impact on the success of rural schools and rural student achievement (Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning, 2005). The most often implemented improvement strategies of successful rural schools are increased learning time, the use of professional learning communities for professional development, and an increase in the use of instructional technology (Caffey, 2020; Rosenberg et al., 2014). Along with these findings, strong leadership, supporting teacher quality, and developing supportive policies for the school are important for creating successful rural schools (Caffey, 2020; Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning, 2005).

In addition to strong building-level leadership, a critical element to the transformation of a rural school is the support of the central office leadership of the school's improvement efforts (Chance & Sequra, 2009). When transforming a school, the leadership must be mindful that change, even change that is slow and deliberate, can upset the dynamics and culture of the school (Chance & Sequra, 2009; Leithwood & Louis, 2021). Finally, a critical but often overlooked element of high-performing high schools is a well-prepared student starting from elementary

school (Lekhetho, 2021; Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning, 2005). There is a prevailing belief that rural students are not as well prepared as their suburban/urban counterparts (Gibbs, 2000; McCauley, 2019). The key challenge for rural high school personnel is to maintain the benefits of being in a small, rural community while improving the student's education and abilities to compete for high-tech, high-skill employment or college (Felton, 2022; Gibbs, 2000).

Findings

Through an analysis of the data, we identified several areas of noticeable differences in stakeholder perceptions of the three different types of rural schools: rural fringe, rural distant, and rural remote. The differences in perceptions ranged from the programs and processes within the schools to a lack of stability in the students' home lives. While some of the differences in perceptions are outside the effective control of the school, most of the perceived differences are in areas the school has the ability to impact, such as the programs and processes, instructional focus, teaching approaches, and collaboration.

Programs and Processes

The stakeholder perceptions most often referenced are programs and processes. Each of the participating schools had many differing programs and processes designed to remediate educational shortcomings, provide incentives, and prepare the students for required standardized exams. The participating school personnel worked to address any weaknesses they identified in teaching and student learning. These schools have cultures in which they teach students that being from a rural community is not an excuse for not excelling because the importance is placed on bettering themselves. One stakeholder stated, "some of them [the students] they come from some rough backgrounds, but we try to instill in them that where you come from doesn't dictate where you end up" (Tim, Ridge High School). Finally, Tim concluded that he believed that part of the job of the educators was to mentor and mold students into thoughtful and productive citizens, "…we can't control what we get, but we can take what we get and mold it and shape it into what we want it to be…" (Tim, Ridge High School). The stakeholders agreed that important factors in the level of student learning were providing students with legitimate educational opportunities, instilling the importance of being a productive citizen, and creating an environment that is caring and conducive to learning.

One stakeholder discussed an incentive program and how much the students looked forward to having their picture placed on the wall for earning a 20 or higher on their ACT. She believed the greatest benefit for the students was the belief that someone cared, she commented, "…knowing that somebody cares whether or not they succeed; it helps them…" (Julie, Ridge High School). As the students begin to see others become successful, it provides motivation and incentive for improvement. One participating school invited its most successful alumni back for homecoming each year as examples of the opportunities available for the students. One parent stated, "…look at the people who have left this school and look how successful they are…" (Jodie, a parent from Ridge High School). These school officials used data to identify strengths and weaknesses of students and teachers to ensure everyone was working to improve teaching and student learning.

Instructional Focus

As indicated through an analysis of the interview data, there was a major difference in the stakeholders' perceptions of instructional focus. The rural-remote school instructional focus was identified by 71% of the participant stakeholders, while it was mentioned 56% by the rural-distant school stakeholders, and 50% by the rural-fringe school stakeholders. In this analysis, however, we also identified that the rural-remote school personnel discussed instructional focus more in terms of the mechanics or practice of instruction, teaching "from bell-to-bell," "walk-throughs," and having the required information on the board. One teacher lamented that the leaders seemed more interested in their checklists. She discussed the following:

> With a walkthrough... They have developed a checklist of things they go around and check at points. 'Okay, everybody needs to have this done, this done, this done.' There'll be mock walk-throughs to help you understand if you've got that done, that done, that done, that kind of thing. (Zophiah, Buddy High School)

Another teacher complained that the leaders would come in "…at the beginning of class to see if you've got your essential questions up, and then at the end he'd want to see how you collaborate with your students…" (Heather, Buddy High School). All of the teachers at the rural-remote school did agree, however, that their principal was good at providing feedback, and one noted, "[a]fter he comes out or whatever [walk-throughs], at some point in time during the day he'll let you know what needs to be done or what he observed" (TaKara, Buddy High School). This instructional focus is very different in the rural-fringe and rural-distant schools.

The stakeholder perceptions of the instructional focus of the rural-fringe and rural-distant high schools were about the data, identification of issues, shortfalls, and taking corrective action to a greater extent. The rural-fringe high school personnel concentrated on using data to inform instruction. The principal discussed the time they invest in reviewing the data stating, "…we have to have data meetings, quarterly data meetings we bring in each department and we go over your data…" (Ian, Next Door High School). One of the teachers at this rural-fringe high school explained,

> …we've been forced to look at data and we realize there's a problem. Okay, we know that this is what's coming, so we think ahead of the curve, instead of behind it, and saying, Okay, this is where we're now needing to push… What will make our scores better on the front end and try to organize our schedule, try to put teachers in place that can best address. (Chrissy, Next Door High School)

This school has a data-driven instructional focus on the students, the critical question is "…what do our students need…" (Leslie, Next Door High School). Much like the rural-fringe high school the rural-distant high school personnel used data to inform their instructional focus, "[w]e identify what is causing the students not to reach that benchmark. Then once we identify it, we correct it by remediation, repeating the things that they're not doing well…" (Michelle, Ridge High School). The rural-fringe and rural-distant high schools have an instructional focus aimed at ensuring the students' needs are met.

Teaching Approaches

Closely related to instructional focus the perceptions of the participating stakeholders present were the differing educational philosophies and teaching approaches used by teachers with their students. Teaching approaches were mentioned as important in 67% of the rural-distant stakeholders' comments, 57% of the rural-remote stakeholders' comments, and 42% of the rural-fringe stakeholders' comments. The rural-distant school's stakeholders viewed teaching approaches from a very different perspective. There is a culture of meeting the students of the rural-distant school "where they are" and then "moving them forward." The principal of the rural-distant school believes that the school and teachers must "…use whatever it takes to get the kid where he needs to be. We can't just continue to go in a structured line…We've got to reach them where they are" (Tim, Ridge High School). Many of the students who struggle in school have difficulty reading, one teacher at the rural-distant school believed that this fact is the result of not having been read to as toddlers. A faculty member of the rural-distant school summed up the culture by stating the following:

> We move our students forward no matter where they come from because these students aren't at the same starting position as students in their state… And we have to figure out a way, during the same amount of time, not extra time, not extra time, taking their summer and making them go to school, not extending the date. (Matthew, Ridge High School)

In addition to a culture of meeting the students at their current academic level and moving them forward, the rural-distant school personnel also worked to ensure students in need of assistance were identified. One stakeholder stated, "…to make sure that we identify low students and not let them fall through the cracks and things of this nature…" (Michelle, Ridge High School). The culture of the rural-distant school was to ensure students' educational needs were met and academic growth was achieved no matter how far behind a student appeared to be at the start of the school year.

There is a noticeable difference in the focus of the teaching approaches between the rural-distant school and the rural-fringe school, the rural-fringe school's teaching approaches appear to be more focused on the mechanics, while the rural-distant schools focus on moving students forward. A major concern of the rural-fringe school participants and a major perception with the stakeholders is the need to protect instructional time. This belief is outlined in the school's accreditation report, "[e]very effort is made to protect instructional time, to limit classroom interruptions and to promote effective instruction during the school day" (Next Door High School Accreditation Report). The school leaders do enforce protected instructional time according to one teacher who noted, "…because we don't want to disrupt instructional time, so we try to protect that, as well" (Melissa, Next Door High School). In addition to the protection of instructional time, establishing high expectations is among the most important perceptions identified by the rural-fringe school stakeholders. Kathy stated, "I let them know my expectations and what I believe in…" (Kathy, Next Door High School) and one of the community stakeholders also identified high expectations when he said, "…just raising the expectations I think that's where you start seeing improvements…" (Ryan, Next Door High School). In conjunction with establishing high expectations, the staff and faculty believed in holding the students accountable for their own learning. One teacher discussed letting her students know when their performances were disappointing and telling them they had let her

down. The rural-remote school stakeholders expressed concern that teaching approaches were being hindered by limited resources. The teachers assigned to this rural-remote high school were teaching a total of six different classes requiring six differing preparations. One teacher lamented that resources were a limiting factor when she stated, "… again you're limited with the resources that you can have. You don't have the money to do everything, like other schools" (TaKara, Buddy High School); however, this teacher also commented that she was determined to show her students that "…the teachers are so determined to show kids that you can do a lot of stuff with what you have…" (TaKara, Buddy High School). The instructional coach for this school mentioned that she spent time trying to locate the resources teachers needed to have greater effectiveness in their classrooms. She stated, "I'll try to go out and find some resources…" (Heather, Buddy High School). The main difference in the focus on instructional approaches is that the rural-distance school's awareness of taking the students as they are academically and increasing their academic achievement. Another difference of note was the more mechanical approach outlined in the perspectives of the stakeholders of the rural-fringe and the rural-remote schools.

Collaboration

There is a substantial difference in the stakeholders' perceptions of collaboration between the rural-distant high school (56%) and the rural-fringe high school (25%) A major contributing factor for this difference is how collaboration is applied in the schools. In the rural-fringe school, collaboration is often tied to professional development and problem-solving while the rural-distant school is geared towards team building. The stakeholders of the rural-fringe high school discussed collaboration in terms of creating buy-in and as a tool for problem-solving. This collaboration is often centered around some type of professional development. Leslie stated, "[w]e collaborate a lot. Most times, when we have faculty meetings, we have it based on some type of PD that we're working on at that time…Hey, give me your idea on this" (Leslie, Next Door High School). The collaboration at the rural-fringe high school is not always centered on the professional development, but as a way to solve classroom issues. One teacher stated, "…collaboration piece is pretty good. Teachers, they talk amongst themselves about different ... what they're doing in their classrooms. If they're having, if a particular student is having some sort of problem in their classroom" (Kathy, Next Door High School). Finally, this school's personnel used collaboration to increase the likelihood of stakeholder buy-in, "[w]e have a lot of collaboration, we try to do that on everything because, if the teachers buy in to what you want them to do, then they're going to be successful" (Leslie, Next Door High School). The collaboration at the rural-distant high school has a different focus.

The rural-distant high school's collaborative focus is aimed at team building amongst the staff and faculty. Many of the stakeholders held the perspective that their school had a family atmosphere. One stakeholder phrased it, saying, "[b]y having a regular meeting with collaborating amongst ourselves and keeping in contact" (Shauna, Ridge High School). The perception of many of the rural-distant high school stakeholders have a common focus: making sure the students "get what they need." "We all work together collectively because we have the same purpose… Even if there's a dislike among faculty, they work together because all of them want the same thing: the student success..." (Julie, Ridge High School). The collaboration at the rural-distant school is responsible for the sense of family and teamwork the stakeholders

discussed. A rural-distant school parent stated, "[w]e try to be a family. Ever since I been here, we always put that first. We a family. They work good together" (Melanie, a parent of Ridge High School). The staff and faculty of the rural distant high school are focused on building an effective team, "…we make it a point to collaborate well, talk to each other about what's going on, and you know we have the departments, you know, departmental meetings. Even outside of the departmental meetings…" (Joseph, Ridge High School). To ensure the students are prepared for life outside of high school, "…we collaborate and we just try to have some different times to where we can make sure we're giving them that positive input that they need" (Joseph, Ridge High School). The focus is completely on helping students become successful.

Discussion

The purpose of this research project was to identify if there were any differences in the challenges or facilitators of success between the high-poverty, high-minority, and high-achieving, rural-fringe, rural-distant, and rural-remote schools in Alabama. Through an analysis of the data collected for this project, we identified two major themes with 11 areas with between 21 and 44 percentage point differences in the frequency of the stakeholder perceptions.

Table 1
Major Differences Among Schools

Theme	Next Door High School	Ridge High School	Buddy High School
Non-School Based Difference			
Negative Pressures on Students	50%	89%	86%
Lack of Stability	42%	56%	71%
Lack of Motivation	42%	78%	43%
School-Based Differences			
Programs and Processes	67%	89%	86%
Community and Parental Involvement	58%	78%	43%
Professional Development	33%	56%	43%
Shared Leadership	58%	67%	29%
Instructional Focus	50%	56%	71%
Teaching Approach	42%	67%	57%
Collaboration	25%	56%	71%
Limited Resources	42%	44%	86%

All three of the participant school types may have some of the same challenges and facilitators of success, however, the stakeholders' perceptions of the importance are different. The prior researchers for rural school did not differentiate between the categories of rural schools, and the previous researchers tended to place all types of rural schools into one group. In this research, we identified some major differences between the various types of rural schools.

The major differences in programs and processes were due to the higher level of emphasis in the rural-distant and rural-remote schools on overcoming any obstacle the students

encountered in their academic and personal lives. The previous researchers do place emphasis on creating an environment in which the desire to succeed coupled with an emphasis on academics and collective efficacy are important to improving student learning and achievement. The leadership teams of the rural-distant and rural-remote schools created a culture of learning and establishing high expectations in their classrooms that challenged the students to better themselves.

The rural-remote school stakeholders had a higher perception of the importance of instructional focus than the rural-fringe or rural-distant schools. This increase in the perception of the importance of instructional focus is the result of the number of different classes each teacher taught at the rural-remote school and the "old-school" nature of the principal. The focus within the rural-remote school was on the mechanics of teaching, what was written on the board, what was written in the lesson plans, and meeting the requirements of the checklist. The instructional focus in the rural-fringe and rural-distant schools was much more aligned with the data analysis and what was indicated in the data that the students needed to be successful.

Closely aligned with the instructional focus were the teaching approaches. The rural-distant school had a focus on moving students forward no matter the point at which they started in the beginning of the school year. The principal of the rural-distant school espoused the philosophy that they must meet the students at their current level to develop student academic ability and achievement to move them forward during the school year. The rural-fringe school personnel's instructional approach was focused on the protection of instructional time and the establishment of high expectations.

In the area of collaboration, the major differences between the schools was evident in the purpose of the collaboration. At the rural-distant school, collaboration was used as a team-building tool while in the rural-fringe school, it was designed as a problem-solving strategy and as a part of their professional development program. While the schools had differing purposes for their collaboration, the ultimate goal of their collaboration efforts was to ensure the students were provided a quality education.

Implications

The findings of this research cannot be generalized, although they do indicate some important implications. The participants of this research project believed that the most important aspect a teacher, school leader, or other school stakeholder could do to improve student learning and achievement was to have and project a genuine concern for the students. This genuine concern was reflected in an emphasis of the instructional focus on the students, dictated that teaching approaches used are those most helpful to students, and ensured that collaboration becomes an organic, authentic process between teachers, staff, and administrators. School leaders who are struggling to improve teaching and student learning must understand that the focus needs to be on what is best for students. Building trusting relationships with students is integral to student learning. As part of the focus on students, the staff and faculty must understand the students' home environments outside of the school day. A student's home environment often dictates the student's attitude toward education and authority figures. A key program must include teaching the students to deal with adversity and obstacles.

Additionally, the American educational system personnel need to move away from the "one-size-fits-all" mentally. The very nature of centralized management of the educational system prevents the local school officials from addressing their schools' unique circumstances. This prevents the local school leadership for exercising the agility necessary to address the needs of their students and community. The one-size-fit-all approach does not lead to the necessary improvements in teaching and learning to ensure all students are provided with a quality education.

Future Research

In this study, we focused on a very narrow population of rural schools in Alabama and confirmed some of the findings in the existing research. Through this project, we also identified some findings that will require additional research. The existing researchers group all rural schools into a monolithic group generalizing the findings across all types of rural schools. Additional research should be conducted to determine if these findings can be replicated and to what degree. In this study, there were identifiable differences between the three types of rural schools. We believe there is importance to explore whether these differences are similar in other rural schools in Alabama, the southeast, and throughout the country. Additionally, there needs to be additional research on the impact of centralized management of schools from the federal/state level on teaching and learning and the benefits of a greater decentralized approach to school leadership.

Conclusion

This research was conducted to identify if there were differences in the perceptions of the stakeholders of rural-fringe, rural-distant, and rural-remote schools in Alabama. As indicated in the results of the research, there are differences and rural schools are not a monolithic entity. We hope that this research will encourage increased attention to rural school research and serve as a catalyst for future research in this area.

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Concept Paper

User-Friendly Root Cause Analysis for Educators: End in Mind

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Abstract

Many educational leaders struggle in conducting root cause analysis (RCA) for their organizational improvement plans. The Georgia Department of Education has created a tool (Determining Validity and Reliability of Root Cause Analysis Protocol) to be used as a supplemental checklist focused on validity and reliability questions to identify a true root cause. By reviewing the questions before the RCA process starts, educators establish the "end in mind" mentality needed for effective and efficient RCA. Once a root cause has been identified, the tool then can be used to confirm whether or not the root cause is accurate for improvement planning.

Keywords: educational leadership, root cause analysis, school improvement, validity

User-Friendly Root Cause Analysis for Educators: End in Mind

Many educators struggle in conducting root cause analysis (RCA) for their organizational improvement plans. The Georgia Department of Education (GADOE)'s Office of School and District Improvement has created a tool (i.e. *Determining Validity of Root Causes*) for a school or district leadership team to use as a supplemental checklist focused on validity and reliability questions to identify a true root cause (GADOE, 2021). This checklist tool serves as a good "end in mind" frame of reference for effective RCA. Additionally, there are common mistakes often made with RCA. Educational leaders can avoid those mistakes by using the *Determining Validity of Root Causes* tool. In this article, there is an explanation of how RCA for educators (performance-based) is different from RCA for manufacturers (product-based). To understand RCA better, it is important to know a brief history of this continuous improvement tool.

RCA has its origins in the time period of the Industrial Revolution, especially during the beginning of mass production efforts (e.g., assembly line production). As industries began to produce large numbers of goods to sell to the general public, there existed a need to maximize product quality and reduce defective products sold to the consumer in order to be competitive in the market with other competing industries and their products. Industrial scientists explored different methods to reduce the number of defects or discrepancies among their finished products from the assembly line production. The advanced concept of RCA was developed by industrial scientists and engineers in the 1950s to help identify the main reason or "root cause" of why product defects occurred at their industrial plants (Thwink.org, 2022 p. 4).

In 1986, Motorola engineer Bill Smith developed a mathematical concept called "Six Sigma," which improved the quality of finished products by identifying and removing the causes of defects and minimizing variability (Allred, 2019). The Six Sigma concept was a major evolution of the RCA process. Six Sigma has been an effective tool for manufacturers, but there is a question about whether or not it is applicable to the business of educating students? A short answer is yes and no. Educational advocates against the Six Sigma concept assert that it is not applicable to the business of education due to the fact that students are simply not finished goods. Additionally, many educators would state that any set metric that measures the defect or discrepancy levels of students to an ideal or unblemished student standard is not realistic or even palatable. In the early 2000s, former ice cream executive and attorney, Jamie Vollmer was a keynote speaker at many educational conferences. Vollmer was popular among educators with his views on educational reform and how it differed from business reform. His main argument was centered on the fact that schools are unable to control the quality of their raw material. To convey this point, Vollmer enthralled audiences full of educators with his famous blueberry story (Vollmer, 2019). By explaining that his company could simply remove defective blueberries to ensure product quality, Vollmer was right in his comparative analysis that educators, especially public school educators, lack control of their primary raw material (i.e., students). Students and their academic abilities are diverse and different, and it is difficult to manage the numerous variables that exist within their education.

Conversely, advocates that favor the Six Sigma concept for education would state that classroom instruction and expectations for student mastery should be held to high levels of quality. Distinguished educational researchers such as Marzano and Hattie would encourage the

reduction of the variability in the quality of classroom instruction (Marzano, 2003) and high teacher expectations of student mastery (Hattie, 2012). An equivalent for the Six Sigma concept for educators consists of an analytic rubric, which is used to measure the difference between the exemplary lesson taught by a highly qualified teacher and a less effective lesson taught by a marginal teacher. In Georgia's teacher evaluation program, known as Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (TKES), teachers are rated on 10 performance standards on a performance appraisal rubric with four levels of progressive mastery (GADOE, 2022). To be considered an effective teacher, a rating of three is the targeted performance level. Consequently, the performance level of three in the TKES system could be considered the Six Sigma equivalent for Georgia educators.

Administrators and instructional coaches should work fervently to help marginal teachers improve their level of instruction. Additionally, opportunities and support for high-performing teachers to increase their abilities should be provided to continuously improve their pedagogical skills. By improving the pedagogy for both marginal and high performing teachers, the school and district leadership has a direct connection to improving classroom instruction, and ultimately student achievement. Therefore, the goal of educational leaders at the school and district levels is to reduce the level of variability of classroom instruction, and at the same time increase the overall level of teacher effectiveness for the entire school. Similar to how manufacturers of commercial goods use the RCA process to minimize product defects, educators can use RCA to reduce the variability of instruction in the classrooms to improve the overall quality of classroom instruction provided to students. District-level and building-level leaders can use RCA to increase teacher effectiveness and student achievement across all grade levels and curriculum areas. To accomplish these noble goals of improved student achievement, teacher effectiveness, and school/district improvement planning processes, educational leaders must avoid making several common mistakes in their use of RCA in their organizational improvement processes. Some of the common mistakes made by educators with the use of RCA include (a) relying on an inadequate needs assessment, (b) using a flawed identification of problem areas, (c) seeking to solve the problem while simultaneously conducting RCA, (d) basing a root cause on budget and/or grant objectives, and also (e) mistaking a contributing factor for a true root cause.

To help eliminate the common mistakes made by educational leaders with regards to RCA, the School and District Effectiveness (SDE) specialists from the GADOE have designed an educational tool entitled *Determining Validity of Root Causes.* This simple, but effective checklist tool helps to confirm the validity of a root cause identified by school and district leaders. The checklist tool is designed to be used as a supplement to a selected RCA protocol. Many educational leaders use RCA protocols such as *The 5 Whys*, *Fishbone Diagram*, *Affinity Model* or a combination of the protocols to identify a root cause for a priority area. Priority areas should be predetermined from the results of a comprehensive needs assessment.

The rationale for the *Determining Validity of Root Causes* tool is to help educational leaders distinguish a true root cause from misleading contributing factors. Once a true root cause for a priority or problem area is identified, the school or district leaders can efficiently work toward resolving the problem and improving the situation. To develop the *Determining Validity of Root Causes* tool, GADOE's school and district improvement specialists used research and professional work from Clark County School District's (2012) *School Improvement Planning*

Basics – Root Cause Analysis, Preuss's (2013) *School Leader's Guide to Root Cause Analysis: Using Data to Dissolve, and* Ammerman's (1998) *Root Cause Analysis Handbook.* The *Determining Validity of Root Cause*s tool helps to distinguish a root cause from contributing factors or causes by requiring the user to focus on validity and reliability statements. The **validity** statements for the *Determining Validity of Root Causes* tool are:

a. Does the school/district team that determines the root cause possess knowledge of programs, the capacity to plan and implement the needs assessment, and the ability to ensure stakeholder involvement?
b. Is there proof that this **specific** root cause exists (i.e., concrete, measurable and/or more than two data elements that provide evidence)?
c. Does this root cause avoid being a contributing factor? (In other words, the root cause is self-sufficient or stand-alone and does not need anything else for the stated effect to occur.)
d. Is the root cause the best explanation for the stated effect, and no other alternative explanations exist that fit better?

The **reliability** statements for the *Determining Validity of Root Causes* tool are:
a. Will appropriately addressing the root cause eliminate the problem?
b. Will appropriately addressing the root cause prevent the problem from **recurring** as the result of the **same cause**?
c. Will appropriately addressing the root cause avoid leading to **similar problems**?

The *Determining Validity of Root Cause* tool was vetted by the GADOE's school and district improvement specialists in field tests and is part of the *School Leadership Team Process Guide* provided by the GADOE Office of School and District Improvement to school and district leaders.

Dr. Jean Quigg, the National Certified School Improvement Specialist (CSIS) Director for the Institute for Performance Improvement, believes that the *Determining Validity of Root Causes* tool will certainly help educators to identify if something is a true root cause, but if it is not a root cause, it may still be a powerful causal factor that has a huge impact on a school's ability to improve. She believes that it is important to address powerful causal/contributing factors in school improvement planning as well as root causes. Quigg emphasizes that it is hard to say that something is a true root cause that, if solved or eliminated, will prevent something from reoccurring or the true root cause is out of our control to eliminate (e.g., poverty). She believes that paying attention to causal factors can be important. Causal factors are the actions, conditions or events that alone do not create the problem, but they directly influence the outcome of a situation or problem. Therefore, they are important enough to be addressed with corrective action in school improvement planning (J. Quigg, personal communication, July 11, 2019).

Quigg cautions educational leaders to be careful with trying to address too many causal/contributing factors. "It is easy for school and district leaders to try to 'bite off' more than they can chew" in school/district improvement planning. Often, school and district leaders try to do too much, so there is a need to prioritize and focus on a few major issues that, when addressed, would make a difference for stakeholders (J. Quigg, personal communication, July 11, 2019).

School leaders can manage the school/district improvement process if they can simplify it for their organizations. Many turnaround school and district leaders believe that school/district improvement plans should address only two to three priority areas with a focus on only one root cause for each priority area. A good opportunity for causal/contributing factors to be addressed can occur in the action steps of the goal that has been developed to resolve the true root cause that encompasses the robust causal/contributing factor(s).

In conclusion, RCA for educators is more closely linked to performance-based sports coaching such as a golf swing or free throw analysis than product-based industries such as the manufacturing of finished goods. Simply put, it is product variability versus performance variability. Classroom instruction is a performance-based activity. Golf coaches and basketball coaches assist their athletes by conducting their own version of root cause analysis by dissecting the athletes' mental and physical approach and performance to the specific activity (e.g., correct way to swing the golf club or shoot a basketball from the free throw line) and its desired results. With golf swing analysis for hitting a good drive off a tee, a golf coach may be able to correctly identify the true root cause for a problematic swing. Similar to a sports coach, school/district administrators can conduct RCA for staff and student performance. Coaches are famous for repeating the adage, "you are only as good as your weakest link." Ironically, this often-used quote supports the concept of Six Sigma for manufacturers. Consequently, RCA has been one of the analytical tools that educators have adopted from the business sector to identify the cause for a priority area of a district or school. In this sense, the business model use of RCA on how to identify problem areas with performance variability can be helpful to educators in their endeavor of reducing the variability of instruction for students. The use of the *Determining Validity of Root Causes* tool as a supplemental checklist can help school and district leaders confirm the identification of a true root cause, and therefore decrease time and monetary expenses related to addressing contributing factors instead of the true root cause. By reviewing the validity and reliability questions from the *Determining Validity of Root Cause* tool before the RCA process starts, educators help establish the "end in mind" frame of reference needed for effective and efficient RCA. Once a root cause has been identified, the *Determining Validity of Root Causes* tool then can be used to confirm whether or not the root cause is accurate for improvement planning. Afterwards, the school and district can confidently begin the next step of establishing goals and action steps necessary for addressing the root cause of a priority area of concern.

The *Determining Validity of Root Causes* is based on the vetting of a study group of school and district improvement specialists and active research conducted in several Georgia school districts and schools. The next step for the *Determining Validity of Root Causes* tool is for a formal research study to be designed and executed to determine the statistical validation of the effectiveness of the tool.

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Concept Paper

It's Lonely at the Top: Nurturing Principals Through University/School Partnerships

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Abstract

Bauer et al. (2018) examined factors involving the relationships among four attributes of principals' work environment: self-efficacy, burnout, job satisfaction, and intention to leave (persistence), and found that new principals' sense of isolation at work is associated with each of these four attributes. Recognizing and understanding school principals' sense of isolation and the stress related to it and then implementing strategies and developing programs to reduce it will support efforts to recruit and retain strong school leaders. By providing opportunities for networking, mentoring, professional development, and peer support, schools, and educational systems can help principals overcome feelings of isolation. In this article, we describe how one university and district partnership addressed the important issue of nurturing school leaders by providing experiences to reduce isolation. Specifically, this article discusses how the partnership collaborated to mentor and support the professional growth of school principals, focusing on their academic, social, and emotional needs. Further, in the article we share recommendations on how other partnerships can implement a similar initiative to support school-based administrators.

Keywords: partnerships, collaboration, professional growth, principal isolation

It's Lonely at the Top: Nurturing Principals Through University/School Partnerships

The role of the school leader is complex. There are political, social, and environmental components that can make the job seem impossible. Pressure from politicians who are constantly changing curriculum standards, local parent groups banning books, and the constant threat of school violence can take its toll. Unfortunately, principal retention and burnout are as common as teacher burnout. Based on a recent survey, the National Association of Secondary School Principals (2021) predicts a "mass exodus of principals from our pre-K-12 schools". They report that thirty-eight percent of the respondents are expected to leave the profession in the next three years. Ikemoto (2022) of the George W. Bush Institute found similarly concerning evidence, noting that approximately, one-third (29%) of principals reported being likely to leave their jobs by the end of the school year (2021–22). This is a substantial increase from before the pandemic when the number was less than 7%. Maslach (2003) spoke of burnout as a prolonged, negative response to stressors in the workplace. Fortunately, one's ability to cope with stress may be strengthened by a strong social support network. Bauer et al. (2018) examined factors involving the relationships among four attributes of principals' work environment: self-efficacy, burnout, job satisfaction, and intention to leave (persistence), and found that new principals' sense of isolation at work is associated with each of these four attributes. Recognizing and understanding school principals' sense of isolation and the stress related to it and then implementing strategies and developing programs to reduce it will support efforts to recruit and retain strong school leaders.

Defining principal isolation is essential to finding strategies to reduce it. Principal isolation refers to situations in which school leaders experience a lack of meaningful connections and support within their professional roles. Isolation is also the sense of not having adequate resources and networks to fulfill their responsibilities effectively and address the challenges they face (Green, 2016). Principal isolation can arise from various factors, including the hierarchical nature of their position. Principals bear significant responsibilities for managing the school, making important decisions, and ensuring the overall success of the educational environment (Griffin, 2017). Additionally, principal isolation can stem from limited opportunities for collaboration and professional development. Principals may find themselves lacking supportive networks to share experiences, exchange ideas, and seek guidance from peers or mentors. This isolation can hinder their ability to stay informed about best practices, innovative approaches, and emerging trends in education. Furthermore, the demanding nature of the principalship, including long hours, heavy workloads, and the need to balance administrative tasks with instructional leadership, can contribute to feelings of isolation. Principals may struggle to find the time and resources necessary to engage in collaborative problem-solving, engage with their staff and community, and foster a positive school culture. Addressing principal isolation is crucial for the overall well-being and effectiveness of educational leaders. By providing opportunities for networking, mentoring, professional development, and peer support, schools, and educational systems can help principals overcome feelings of isolation.

In this article, we describe how one university and district partnership addressed the important issue of nurturing school leaders by providing experiences to reduce isolation. Specifically, this article discusses how the partnership collaborated to mentor and support the professional growth of school principals, focusing on their academic, social, and emotional

needs. Further, in the article we share recommendations on how other partnerships can implement a similar initiative to support school-based administrators.

The Professional Development School (PDS) Partnership

The university and school district have a long history of collaboration and innovation. Partnerships involving single-gender pedagogy, restorative practice, garden-based learning, and science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics (STEAM) programs are just a few of the many multi-year, multi-school, partnerships in place between the university and district. The partnership developed goals that focus on developing exemplary practice to maximize student outcomes, providing optimum sites for pre-service teacher training, offering connected in-service teacher professional development, and implementing reflective inquiry to enhance teacher and student learning and development. The university and district partnership has grown stronger each year by continuing to focus on partnership goals and the needs of all stakeholders. A key aspect of the partnership has always been that the university provides research and support of school level innovative ideas. This shared commitment to innovative and reflective practice by all participants has led to strong relationships as university and school level personnel have been engaged actively in the development and sustainability of initiatives. With the trust and relationships that have been built over the years between the school district and university in the support of teachers and students, the decision to support the professional development of school leaders through initiatives like "Power Hour" was a logical choice.

Power Hour

Power Hour is a collaboration among university faculty and school leaders to support school principals as instructional leaders. As discussed previously, principals face many challenges, including the high stakes school evaluation and rating systems that require them to improve student achievement annually. Principals are held responsible for the success or failure of the students to achieve, but, unfortunately, often have little support in identifying solutions to increase student achievement. The principals in our PDS network expressed frustration that when one or more of the partnership schools showed outstanding progress in a specific academic area, no formal means to share or replicate the practices were provided or supported by the district. As the university team talked with each of the partner schools about how to best support them, the need to bring the school leaders together as a collaborative unit became obvious. It's lonely at the top and the principals needed a platform to collaborate and opportunities to mentor each other. Thus, Power Hour was created.

Power Hour's focus was a direct result of the expressed need of the partner school principals to increase student learning at their schools. Specifically, the emphasis on math was identified due to the success of one partner school with math achievement. Other principals wanted to learn how to increase their students' math scores based on the accomplishments of the school within their PDS network. The principal at the school with outstanding math achievement was asked to lead the professional learning community, which was designed to support partner school principals and assistant principals in collaborative discussions with university faculty about best practices that impact teaching and student learning in mathematics. What started as a meeting between two PDS principals and a university faculty partner quickly grew to monthly

meetings of administrators of all four partner schools. All school-based leaders at the partner schools were invited and encouraged to join. The group quickly realized the power of a community of schools and university partnership. The role of the university was to provide content area specific support, facilitate data review, and create opportunities for school leaders to share successful strategies that positively impacted teaching and student learning at their schools.

The principal leader of the Power Hour group shared her commitment to math learning by implementing the concepts from the book, *Power Standards, Identifying the Standards that Matter the Most* (Ainsworth, 2003). She shared the powerful practice of identifying the "power standards" in mathematics. Best practices in using the identified power standards to guide instruction and then carefully monitor student learning data were shared as essential practices during Power Hour. School administrative teams explored their student learning data, asked questions, identified barriers to implementation, and with university partners, brainstormed real strategies and solutions for each of their schools. Subsequent meetings were scheduled at the end of each session with an agreement by all to protect the date, while face-to-face and virtual options were provided to allow flexibility for participants. Teams from each school prioritized participation as they recognized the benefits of Power Hour.

Power Hour was successful because it was a safe space for principals to ask questions, express frustrations and seek solutions. The time together was social, frequently opening with principals sharing good news or expressing frustrations about something that recently occurred. The group celebrated together but also allowed time to sympathize with each other. Power Hour also provided emotional support as expressed by the participants. Principals willingly, and honestly, engaged in important conversations with each other on how to increase student learning in mathematics that would work best for their students. Power Hour was personalized learning at its best. Each participant came with the knowledge they possessed and were encouraged to question and learn.

Through the work of Power Hour, participants felt they were able to harness the strengths of the PDS to support the schools' administrative teams as learners and problem solvers. Power Hour provided needed support to school administrators as instructional leaders. The principal who led the group stated that "working with the university as part of the PDS partnership program has been enlightening for me. To know that I have experts willing to guide and be thoughtful partners has created self confidence in the work we are doing." Other participants shared that they valued the time spent with each other and university partners and that Power Hour reduced their isolation and replaced it with collaboration. Another member shared how she valued her participation in Power Hour as she wanted to engage in every available opportunity to grow her skills as an elementary school principal. She stated that Power Hour gave me a "sense of community…I feel like I am not alone…I can ask questions…we are all sharing ideas…shaping and changing the way we do business at our schools." Further, another participant shared that she wanted the opportunity to talk with other schools to increase her knowledge, so she is better able to lead similar conversations at her school. Power Hour was successful in supporting principals as learners and leaders. Power Hour planning for next school year is currently underway. The team has committed to continue its focus on math achievement as participants agreed that they had only scratched the surface, and all desired a deeper

understanding of math content and pedagogy. We will monitor math scores to learn how Power Hour influenced the achievement of students at each school.

Conclusion

As happens in many school districts around the country, our partnership will continue to face challenges and changes, including the transferring of principals to other schools. This year's Power Hour leader will be transferred to another school, which is not a partner school. When she learned of her transfer, the first question she asked about Power Hour was, does this mean I can't participate anymore? Everyone quickly expressed a resounding no—they wanted her to remain in the original Power Hour group even after she left the PDS site. Our principal leader will continue to share her expertise from her new assignment, and we will support her as she explores the needs of her new school. We will also invite any newly assigned administrators at our partnership schools to join Power Hour next year. The Power Hour group looks forward to continuing what has begun and in finding ways to make it better. The success of the first Power Hour was exciting, but the enthusiasm around what is yet to come is exhilarating and motivating for all.

As we reflect on what worked and lessons learned over the past year, we offer the following recommendations to other university/school partnerships who want to collaborate in the support of school-level administrators. To begin, we believe it is important that principals identify the needs specific to their schools and that this is not defined by the district or the university partner. Once school specific needs are identified, principals should invite other school leaders in their districts to create professional learning communities, such as Power Hour. Further, if there are local universities in the area, we encourage school leaders to reach out to ask for assistance. We also encourage university faculty to reach out to school administrators to form partnerships. Finally, we learned that having a principal lead the group is more effective than a university faculty member; university faculty members can support the learning community in other ways, such as sharing of expertise and providing impartial support.

Research emphasizes the important role of a principal in school success. Bartanen et al. (2019) stated that principal turnover lowers school achievement and increases teacher turnover. We need to find creative ways to support our school leaders and intentionally reduce the issue of isolation and attrition. School principals are responsible for nurturing teachers and students in their schools, but who provides this kind of care for them? We have found that initiatives like Power Hour are powerful ways to support, nurture, and mentor school leaders.

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