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JOURNAL FOR LEADERSHIP AND INSTRUCTION

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Journal for Leadership and Instruction

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About SCOPE

SCOPE Education Services is a not-for-profit, private, voluntary organization permanently chartered by the New York State Board of Regents to provide services to school districts. Founded in 1964 by school superintendents, it is a cooperative venture for sharing resources to deal with common concerns. It is governed by a Board of Directors of school superintendents and college representatives and serves as a regional School Study Council and School Board Institute.

Dedication to Dr. Robert Manley

In commemoration of the 25th Anniversary Edition of The Journal for Leadership and Instruction, SCOPE Education Services proudly dedicates this special publication to Dr. Robert Manley.

More than twenty-five years ago, as a member of the SCOPE Board of Directors and Superintendent of the West Babylon School District, Dr. Manley envisioned the creation of a professional, peer-reviewed journal that would serve as a meaningful resource for educators committed to improving teaching and learning for all children. From that vision, The Long Island Education Review was born.

Over the past quarter century, that original idea has grown into an internationally recognized publication, The Journal for Leadership and Instruction, respected by educators for its quality, relevance, and impact on curriculum development, instructional practice, and educational leadership.

Dr. Manley's leadership was instrumental in shaping the journal's foundation and guiding its early success. As Editor-in-Chief, he established the high standards and scholarly integrity that continue to define the publication today. Even in retirement, his commitment has never wavered, as he continues to serve as Co-Editor, contributing his wisdom, insight, and unwavering dedication to its ongoing growth.

This journal stands as a testament to Dr. Manley's vision, perseverance, and lifelong commitment to education. His work has influenced countless educators and, in turn, has positively impacted the lives of students across communities near and far.

With deep gratitude and great respect, we dedicate this 25th Anniversary Edition to Dr. Robert Manley, an educator, a leader, and a visionary whose legacy continues to shape the future of teaching and learning.

*George L. Duffy
Executive Director
SCOPE Education Services*



From the Desk of the Executive Director

It is with great pride that we celebrate the 25th Anniversary of SCOPE's peer reviewed research journal, The Journal for Leadership and Instruction. From its earliest beginnings as the Long Island Education Review to the respected publication it is today, the Journal has remained steadfast in its mission to advance educational leadership and instructional practice through rigorous scholarship and thoughtful inquiry.

This special anniversary edition reflects a quarter-century of commitment to excellence, collaboration, and the sharing of knowledge that strengthens our schools and communities. We are deeply grateful to our Editor-in-Chief, Dr. Richard Bernato, as well as to our dedicated Editorial Board and Peer Reviewers whose expertise, time, and commitment make this outstanding work possible.

Thank you to all who have contributed to and supported the Journal over these 25 years. We are proud to share this milestone edition with our readers.

George L. Duffy
Executive Director
SCOPE Education Services



Editor's Note - Silver Anniversary

I am thrilled that our Long Island Education Review published for the first time in December of 2000 has evolved into the peer reviewed, international, and ERIC listed Journal for Leadership and Instruction (JLI). Also, I am grateful to the Editorial Board, George Duffy, Executive Director of SCOPE and Coordinating Publisher, and Dr. Richard Bernato, Editor-in-Chief, for the opportunity to introduce six previously published articles representing highly engaged topics in diverse thematic groupings.

Dr. Bernato used several options in artificial intelligence (AI) to contrast approximately 400 articles for their number of citations and number of downloads and then, to place them in thematic categories before selecting the highest usage article in each category. The six articles that I am introducing represent just a smattering of the diversity and quality that we have published.

When I introduced the proposal to publish an educational review in the fall of 1999 to the SCOPE Board of Directors, I had in my mind the

impact of the Paris Review on literature and the arts as well as my conversations with our son, Michael, who was Editor-in Chief for the Fordham University Entertainment, Media & Intellectual Property Law Forum who advised me to begin with a peer review process for publication and an editorial board. I hoped that our publication would influence faculty and school leaders and help them to ensure that all students were learning how to read, write, calculate and be citizens in a democracy.

Today, we celebrate 25 years of publishing outstanding authors. We celebrate the people who have served as peer reviewers, members of the Editorial Board, Co-Associate Editors, our Editors-in-Chief: Dr. Kevin McGuire, Dr. Carl Bonuso, Dr. Richard Swanby, Dr. Rene Parmar and Dr. Richard Bernato, our publishing staff: Judy Coffey, Layout Editor, Dr. Amy Eckelmann, Editorial and Reference Editor, Christine Cosme, Liaison Representative, and Ann Nuzzo, Publication Reviewer.

We hope you enjoy these six articles in this 25th Anniversary issue.

In December 2000, Dr. Thomas Mangano in his article: *The Taxonomy of Kindergarten Intervention Programs in New York State* revealed a comprehensive review of New York State kindergarten programs from the most northern tiers to the southern tiers of the state. He provided a model for all school districts to employ in their efforts to attend to the needs of the youngest students attending school at that time.

Our next selected article from the 2015 issue is “The Effects of Mentorship on Assistant Superintendents and their Emotional Intelligence, Challenges, and Desire to Become a Superintendent” by Latoya Y. Key, Stephanie P. Thomas, Tanesha N. Hunter, Elsa-Sofia Morote, and Stephanie Tatum. The power and effects of sincere mentors are explored in this article. The participants reveal how mentors guide, inspire, encourage and help them to see their strengths and weaknesses.

In the spring 2022 issue, Dr. Elsa-Sofia Morote, Dr. Nalini Singh, and Judith Jeremie presented “Retention Strategies of a Successful Graduate Program.” In this case study, the authors discover the critical elements that doctoral students reported kept them working diligently and resiliently in a challenging program. Students report how important a sense of belonging that faculty and advanced students offered to them, the quality of the cooperative learning experiences designed to ensure success, and the personal attention, time availability and commitment to student success they experienced from faculty when they achieved an 80% graduation rate with 60% non-white students within seven years from their initial course.

In the fall 2023 issue, Dr. Gabriella Franza, Dr. Patrick Pizzo and Dr. Michele Williams proposed this question in their article: “Are All Schools Getting Fair Treatment Under New York State Education Law.” They revealed that New York finance regulations, state aid, federal aid and public policy affected some schools and students in adverse ways. They examine how high stakes testing and school comparisons diminish effective focus on processes that involve faculty and parents in a partnership to improve student engagement and learning. They offer insights into how public policy should fund effective schools.

Also, in the fall issue of 2023, Dr. Gustavo Loor and Dr. Catherine DiMartino examine systemic technology integration in their article: “Systems Thinking as an Approach to Technology Integration at the K-12 School

Level. The authors examine how the Covid epidemic revealed the systems and personnel that are essential to ensure effective technology practices in schools. They conclude with a Capital Change Model that can inform the thinking and practices of school administrators and faculty,

The last of the six selected articles appears in the spring 2024 issue where Dr. Kenneth Forman and Dr. Craig Markson contrast student scores on New York State Math and English Language Arts Assessments for grades 3–8 in 2019 and 2023. They compared percentage of students in grades 3–8, scoring levels of 3 and 4 before the Covid epidemic in 2019 to the student percentages in 2023. They found no significant differences. They report that the distant learning implementation in New York State and Covid funded innovations and social emotional support contributed to students maintaining their learning levels.

As you read the titles selected for republication, please remember that their diversity from early childhood, mentors at work, student retention in higher education, school finance, systems thinking and technology and distant learning represent a small sample of all the articles available on the SCOPE website. Enjoy being part of SCOPE and JLI.



Robert J. Manley
Editor-In-Chief
Long Island Education Review

Please note that all 25th anniversary publications are in their original format with minor stylistic revisions



TAXONOMY OF KINDERGARTEN INTERVENTION PROGRAM IN NEW YORK STATE

Thomas E. Mangano, Ed.D.
Dowling College
Fall 2000

Abstract

This study identified the characteristics of kindergarten early intervention programs in New York State with an eye toward the development of a taxonomy which would be useful in program implementation and enhancement. The common components of early intervention include language development, spatial relationships and concepts, readiness skills, transitions between pre-kindergarten and kindergarten, and kindergarten and first grade, and parent participation in the screening, assessment and implementation of intervention services.

Introduction

Children enter kindergarten with a variety of readiness behaviors, many of which are consistent with developmental expectations. Others enter kindergarten with behaviors that indicate that they may be academically at-risk. Kindergarten early intervention programs identify children who are academically at-risk and provide opportunities for the children to develop the skills they will need to prevent future difficulties from occurring. Early intervention programs attempt to ensure that children are not given the opportunity to fail (Slavin, 1996).

Children at-risk may demonstrate a variety of difficulties in the area of speech and language development, which would include phonemic awareness, the ability to follow directions and the ability to understand spatial relationships. These children may also demonstrate negative socio-emotional behaviors that may or may not be related to cognitive deficits. Even though they may not

have been identified as having special needs, these children may still be at risk of not achieving success in future school years (Slavin, Karweit, and Wasik, 1993). Without intervention, such deficits are likely to predetermine failure in the early school grades and beyond. Ensuring that every child enters school ready to learn is a basic tenet of good education and early intervention is a means by which children at-risk can be provided with the opportunity to develop essential language and reading readiness skills. While a variety of kindergarten intervention programs have evolved and the components of these programs are diverse, many similarities exist among the programs as well. The taxonomy presented in this article serves to illustrate diverse elements of intervention programs and provides an opportunity to identify those core elements integrated within these programs. Research questions included: Which schools in New York State report that they are currently offering kindergarten intervention programs for at-risk children?, What are the characteristics of the various types of kindergarten intervention programs currently offered in New York State?, Do the ten regions of New York State differ in the approach to kindergarten interventions for at-risk children?, What are the elements of kindergarten intervention programs that could be included in a taxonomy?

Genesis of the Intervention Taxonomy

Ramey and Ramey (1992) and McClean & Cripe (1997) identify characteristics consistent with kindergarten early intervention programs currently being offered. These characteristics

are similar in nature and provide the construct for the follow-up kindergarten intervention program survey developed for this study.

Table 1.2- represents the relationship between McClean and Cripe, Ramey and Ramey and kindergarten intervention programs that were surveyed:

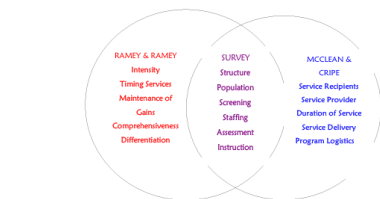
The taxonomy of early kindergarten intervention program characteristics includes assessment, instruction, population, screening, staffing, and structure.

Table 1.2- represents the relationship between McClean and Cripe, Ramey and Ramey and kindergarten intervention programs that were surveyed:

Table 1.2 – Kindergarten Characteristics Examined: McClean & Cripe – Ramey & Ramey Intervention Components

Survey Components	Recipients	Provider	Duration	Delivery	Program	Intensity	Timing	Maintenance of Gains	Comprehensiveness	Attention to Differences
Structure				X	X	X	X	X		
Population	X				X	X	X	X	X	X
Screening	X			X	X	X	X			
Staffing		X		X		X				
Assessment	X				X			X	X	
Instruction			X	X	X			X	X	

Table 1.3 represents the linkage among McClean and Cripe, Ramey and Ramey, and the kindergarten intervention program taxonomy.



Environmental Factors

Children coming from disadvantaged families are clearly at-risk when they enter public school. In addition to any specific learning disabilities, which may or may not be detected, these children face cognitive disadvantages as well (Hunt, 1961; Scarr-Salerpateh, 1971; Zigler & Styfco, 1994). Early educational programs such as Head Start were developed in order to improve students' chances of succeeding in schools. The Consortium for Longitudinal Studies provided evidence of the effectiveness of such programs by conducting studies of 11 experimentally designed programs implemented between 1962 and 1973. The findings indicated that children in intervention groups were placed in special education classes less often and retained in grade less often (Lazar, Darlington, Murray, Royce, Snipper, 1982; Royce, Darlington and Murray, 1983). Poverty is one of the many possible contributors to at-risk behaviors and poor school performance. Other contributors may be low birth weight, single parenthood, lack of

effective parenting skills, parental stress issues, fewer resources and less access to support and services (Huston, McLoyd and Garcia, 1994; Ceci, 1994).

The Pre-literacy-Literacy Component

Several investigations have sought to determine the relationship between phonological skills and reading acquisition. A direct relationship is evident between phonological awareness instruction and pre-literacy skills in kindergarten children.

Four studies (Castle, Riach and Nicholson, 1994; Davidson & Jenkins, 1994; McClure, Bisanz, & Ferreira, 1996; Morris, 1993) found that a direct relationship exists between segmenting spoken words into phonemes and better skills for beginning readers reading in kindergarten. Two of these studies (Castle, Riach, and Nicholson, 1994; Davidson and Jenkins, 1994) support the conclusion that direct instruction in phonemic awareness results in increased pre-literacy success.

Focus of the Study

The study focused upon the considerable changes that occur during the transition periods the child undergoes. Development is reorganized and new competencies emerge, often with consequences for the child that mark qualitative change. When the competencies of the preschooler interact with the demands of the school environment the child can emerge socially competent, literate, and capable of higher levels of mastery and self-reliance.

The developmental view illustrates the influence of early experiences on future development (Greenspan, 1989; Sroufe, 1989). The longitudinal view focuses upon the relationship between adjustments in the early school years and behaviors manifested in the period between infancy and pre- school (Ramey and Campbell, 1991). The use of both perspectives, the developmental and longitudinal, serves to broaden an all too often narrow frame of reference (Pianta and Walsh, 1996).

Theoretical Construct

The characteristics of structure, population, instruction, staffing, assessment, and screening represent the underlying factors consistent with research literature that characterizes effective intervention in general. A relationship is evidenced between the six characteristics identified by Ramey and Ramey (1992), which include: intensity, timing, direct versus indirect provision of services, environmental maintenance of gains, comprehensiveness, and attention to individual differences and McClean and Cripe's (1997) intervention program model which includes: recipients of services, timing, methods of implementation, and service providers.

A preliminary survey was distributed in order to determine those school districts which were offering a kindergarten intervention program, and to which a follow-up kindergarten intervention program survey would be sent. The survey contains a variety of categories including demographic data, name of school district, name of person completing the survey and their title. The format contained both open-ended questions and nominal selections. A data base was created to organize respondent information. The surveys were organized by the county and region in which the responding school district was located.

Limitations

The sample of school districts included in this study represent approximately one third of the school districts throughout New York State with the exception of large cities such as New York. Similarly, the taxonomy of kindergarten intervention program characteristics generated for the study is based upon such early intervention constructs as developed by McClean and Cripe, and Ramey and Ramey, and is consistent with related intervention research. The study in no way intended to represent other programs not included within the survey and which may currently be in effect.

Delimitations

The study recognizes that districts from which responses have not been received may be offering kindergarten intervention

programs and that findings of the study are based only upon the responses provided by the 191 school districts which completed kindergarten intervention program surveys.

Results

A total of 751 preliminary questionnaires were distributed to school districts in 10 regions throughout New York State. The return rate was 41% with 309 returned. Upon examination of the surveys it was determined that 194 school districts were offering some form of kindergarten intervention program, 77 districts did not have an intervention program, and 38 reported an intervention program on a grade level other than kindergarten.

The Taxonomy of Kindergarten Intervention Characteristics

The taxonomy is comprised of those characteristics which are included in kindergarten intervention programs offered by the school districts in New York State that participated in this study.

The column entitled Characteristics includes those elements which were reported in the areas of screening, structure, population, assessment, staffing and instruction. Space is provided in the column entitled District Checklist for the user to compare a local district to regional similarities or differences.

The columns entitled Utilization by Region provide a summary of program characteristics on a regional basis. The regions were represented by the responding school districts located in each of the ten regions in New York State that participated in this study.

Components which were least frequently reported by participating school districts, that is between 0 and 20% are noted by the use of the letter R (Rarely). Components which were reported with moderate frequency by participating school districts, that is between 21% and 50% are noted by the use of the letter M (Moderately).

Components which were reported with the highest frequency by participating districts, that is between 51% and 100% are noted with the letter O (Often).

Editor's Note: Contact the Author for Full Tables

Discussion of the Findings

Clearly, literacy and literacy related skills were reported as primary instructional elements. It should be noted that vocabulary, sound symbol relationships, letter identification, and listening were reported by at least 90% of the participants and represent as well the framework for literacy and literacy development. These findings are consistent with the notion that the components are reflective of supplying those supports and mechanisms that provide multiple strategies to children rather than a simple idea or curriculum. (Ramey and Ramey, 1992).

Approximately 80% of kindergarten intervention programs appear to be full year programs, beginning in September or October and ending in June. The full year quality of the program is complemented by findings which indicate that many reporting districts screen the population in the spring, prior to the beginning of kindergarten in September. Furthermore, the ongoing nature of screening is reflected in the findings that indicate districts are conducting screening at a variety of times before, during the start-up month, and in a few cases, after the programs begin.

Conclusions

Responding districts indicate that approximately 65% offer kindergarten intervention programs. The majority of districts screened children during the child's pre-kindergarten years. The structure and infrastructure of kindergarten intervention programs were flexible and compatible with the school calendar. A diversity of socio-economic, cultural, and instructional needs characterized the pre-kindergarten at-risk population. The instruction focused upon the development of literacy and language skills, and also included, though less emphasized, math concepts, spatial relationships, and problem-solving skills.

Program and student assessments are primarily related to student performance. Staff "clusters" providing the instructional services include kindergarten teachers, speech/language specialists, and reading specialists.

Limited parental involvement was discernible. Intervention was generally continued in grade one although the retention option was still considered as a viable alternative.

Implications for Further Research

Further research in the areas of class size, length of program, student characteristics, long-term benefits of continued intervention, and effective intervention instruction is certainly worthy of consideration. Furthermore, the topic of parental involvement in relation to early intervention would benefit from increased research attention. It is apparent that the ways in which parents' beliefs change as their child develops is critical to successful intervention outcomes.

Recommendations

Effective screening and assessment should be on-going in kindergarten intervention programs and should support classroom teaching. Class size should foster an optimal learning environment which allows for high quality interactions between the teacher and each child. Student assessments performed by teachers should include observations, anecdotal records, student profiles, and parental input. Collaborative instructional teams must employ a comprehensive eclectic approach to literacy and literacy related skill building. Recommendations to extend the intervention concept to the other primary grades will also help minimize use of the retention option and are consistent with the New York State academic intervention services scheduled to be implemented in grades kindergarten through twelve in September 2000.

Summary

The effectiveness of early intervention does not guarantee success throughout the early school years but rather, the issue that failure during these early years may result in failure in future years. Children who are identified as academically at-risk demonstrate behaviors, delays and deficits which, if left unattended, could establish a pattern of failure more complex and pervasive as they move through the grades. Effective kindergarten early intervention serves to identify and alter these patterns and develop essential readiness and

language skills.

Kindergarten intervention will play a pivotal role in meeting the needs of children at-risk and preparing at-risk students for the primary grades. Responsiveness to the diversity among children, proactive parental involvement, availability of support services and a continuation of developmentally appropriate practices throughout the primary grades will serve to foster student success.

The Taxonomy of Kindergarten Intervention Program Characteristics developed in this study is a tool for districts developing or modifying a kindergarten intervention program to help meet the needs of children and assist children facing the challenges of the 21st century. Intensive K-2 intervention programs are a powerful positive influence on the school performance of at-risk children and are a far more viable alternative to retention.

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Thomas Mangano, Ed.D. is a director of English teacher placement, student teaching field supervisor, and instructor for the School of Professional Development for Stony Brook University. Dr. Mangano was the 2022 recipient of the Bentley Glass-Mortimer Kreuter Excellence in Teaching Award.



The advertisement features a smiling woman with glasses and a maroon top on the left. On the right, the St. Joseph's University New York logo is displayed, including a shield with the year 1916 and three crosses. Below the logo, the text reads: "Ready. Set. Joe's." followed by "The teaching programs at St. Joseph's University, New York consistently rank among the state's best, and our graduates are highly regarded in districts across our region - and the nation." A QR code is provided with the text "Learn more at sjny.edu". At the bottom, it lists "Brooklyn • Long Island • Online". A large "Classroom Ready" graphic with a checkmark is overlaid on the woman's image.



EFFECTS OF MENTORSHIP ON ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENTS AND THEIR EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE, CHALLENGES, AND THE DESIRE TO BECOME A SUPERINTENDENT

Latoya Y. Key, Stephanie P. Thomas, Tanesha N. Hunter, Ed.D., Elsa-Sofia
Morote, Ed.D., Ph.D. and Stephanie L. Tatum, Ph.D.

Dowling College
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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine mentorship and its effect on assistant superintendents' emotional intelligence, challenges, and the desire to become a superintendent. The 149 participants surveyed in this study were assistant superintendents in Nassau and Suffolk Counties in Long Island, New York and Westchester County, New York. An independent sample t-test between assistant superintendents who have a mentor that were superintendents versus assistant superintendents that do not have a mentor was performed, followed by an item by item frequency analysis. The results show that assistant superintendents who have a mentor are more willing to take on the challenge to be a superintendent. An item by item analysis shows that assistant superintendents have 20% more value in the importance of items challenge and social networking.

Introduction

Future superintendents will benefit from receiving mentoring. For example, assistant superintendents can receive emotional and intellectual support to successfully navigate work related challenges by being mentored. The Council of School Superintendents Snapshot (2012) discussed three trends with the superintendent's position: Expanding performance expectations driven by economic and global considerations, pattern shifts in the educational delivery system driven by opportunities granted by

technologies and new models reflecting new ideologies and constraints driven episodically by the recession. The influence of each of these trends on the public education system is at the center of the added constraints of the leaders in education. To better understand the leaders, the pressures they face, the environment in which they work – examination of the literature suggests that mentoring from fellow professionals provide preparation and the confidence and motivation to apply for a superintendent's position (Fale, 2012).

The purpose of this study was to learn if and how mentorship affects assistant superintendents' emotional intelligence, challenge of the position, and their desire to be a superintendent. Emotional support centers on balancing professional and personal domains, which align with their emotional intelligence (self-confidence, self-image, fear of failure). Intellectual support is centered upon professional goal setting, constructive criticism, and strategies for improvement and reflection that are on par with the challenge of the position (personal challenge, professional challenge). The desire to be a superintendent (willing to be in a social network and willing to become a superintendent) lends to support given by the superintendent to the assistant superintendent which leads to an increase in confidence and ultimately aspiring to lead a school district.

Theoretical Framework

This study has significance for the field of education and others, offering current assistant superintendents and aspiring superintendents a viewpoint into an area of increasing importance –mentoring. Large numbers of retirements, increased expectations, and mounting political pressures have resulted in a reduced talent pool for school superintendents (Kamler, 2009). The recruitment and professional development of school superintendents hinge on the attractors and barriers. The Council's Snapshot (2012) identified what preparation or experience would give individuals the confidence and motivation to aim for the superintendent's position. The top five influences are on-the-job experience, mentoring from associate professionals, academic preparation, encouragement from colleagues and encouragement from family.

Emotional Intelligence

It is important that assistant superintendents who are considering becoming superintendents are aware of who they are, both as a leader and an individual. Emotional Intelligence begins with knowing oneself including emotions, personal values, biases, perceptions, strengths, weaknesses, and career goals (Goleman, 1995). An assistant superintendent who has emotional intelligence will adapt to changes that may occur without disrupting the culture and climate of the school district. They also have the ability to display control and make appropriate decisions despite how difficult a situation may be. They are also reflective, which allows for an autopsy of decisions that are made to ensure that growth is occurring daily (Kouzes & Posner, 2011).

Leaders with low emotional intelligence are often described as aggressive, confrontational, and demanding. Leaders with high emotional intelligence are described as assertive, ambitious, patient and charming. Emotional intelligence is a skill that can be taught but it requires honesty, commitment and practice. Emotional intelligence can affect our relationship with the staff as well as decision making. Leaders with high emotional intelligence are more effective at completing their roles and responsibilities including delineating tasks, communicating with staff,

making decisions, judging the emotions of the staff and resolving conflicts (Kouzes & Posner, 2011).

Personal and Professional Challenge

The personal challenges include the willingness to give up time spent outside the office. Accepting a superintendent's position may interfere with an individual's personal life (Brunner, 2008). Some choose to remain single to avoid potential conflict that could follow if they had a family or other duties. The professional demands placed on a superintendent include hard deadlines, long hours and an abundance of public duties (Blount, 2004). Missing a deadline or failure to attend public duties can lead to an adverse rating and ultimately a removal (Grogan, 2008).

Increased professional responsibilities can leave little time for personal obligations including birthdays, holidays, events and favors. Superintendents are often forced to choose between professional obligations or family obligations (Blount, 2004). It can also interfere with making healthy lifestyle choices including sufficient sleep, eating well and exercising regularly. Superintendents are often forced to choose the job responsibilities over themselves and their family. When a superintendent believes that they are not balancing their personal lives well they often feel guilt and stress. Males often receive support from their wives or significant other while females receive very little to no support from their husband or significant other (Grogan, 2008; Derrington, 2009).

Desire to be a Superintendent

Assistant superintendents who plan to take on a superintendent's position have to possess a desire to lead a district because of the personal sacrifice involved. Superintendents are expected to be available 24 hours a day seven days a week. Although this sounds unrealistic, in many districts the work demands and accountability are high and therefore need a commitment that surpasses the average position. Holding the superintendent's position often competes with their personal lives because of time constraints.

Some assistant superintendents may seek a superintendent's position because they

desire the power and prestige that is associated with the position. Many assistant superintendents have worked diligently throughout their career and believe that holding a superintendents' position will be the highest reward that culminates their efforts. Holding a superintendent's position allows an individual to be a part of an elite social network. Membership in this group enables superintendents the opportunity to communicate and discuss decision-making topics with their peers.

Assistant superintendents that have been mentored by their own superintendents have an increased desire to pursue an available superintendent position. School districts that make the development of new leaders a top priority recognize that mentoring is a critical component of leadership development (Johnston, 2013). Superintendents are viable candidates to mentor assistant superintendents because they have a wealth of knowledge to share. Experience and expertise develops from years on the job and a willingness to accept new challenges.

Research Question: Is there a mean difference between mentor and no mentor groups in the variables Emotional Intelligence, Challenge and Desire?

Methodology

A survey was developed based on a thorough examination of research literature regarding internal barriers, external barriers, motivators, stressors, and discriminatory acts assistant superintendents would encounter on the route to the superintendence and their willingness to pursue the position as superintendent (Hunter, 2013). The survey consisted of 68 closed-ended items and one open-ended question.

The original data was separated into three groups, to contrast assistant superintendents who had a mentor that was a superintendent (24) versus assistant superintendents who had no mentor (81); the remaining (44) people had a mentor that was not a superintendent but a fellow professional, and they were not part of this study. The researchers randomly sampled 24 assistant superintendents from the 81 who had no mentor. A t-test was performed to learn the differences between

groups who had a mentor (24) versus the group with no mentor (24).

The survey was conducted in Suffolk and Nassau Counties, Long Island, and Westchester County, New York. Data was collected using a 68 item survey that was developed by Hunter, (2012) and approximately 75% (n = 149) usable surveys returned by assistant superintendents were a sample of the overall population.

From the author's survey the researchers selected items that represented the following three variables: Emotional Intelligence (reliability= 90.6%), Challenges - Personal and Professional (reliability= 83.1%), and Desire to become a Superintendent (reliability= 66.6%) (See Table 1).

Table 1: Table of Items	
Number	Item Description
Emotional Intelligence	
Question 1	Self-Confidence
Question 2	Self-image
Question 3	Fear of Failure
Challenge	
Question 4	Personal Challenge
Question 5	Professional Challenge
Question 6	Desire to be in leadership
Desire	
Question 7	Willingness to be a part of a social network
Question 8	Willingness to pursue a job as a superintendent
Question 9	Lack of desire to lead a district

Table 2:						
t-test /Group Statistics						
		M	SD	t	df	p
Mentor	Yes, the Superintendent in My District Mentored Me	6.69	2.78	1.23	45.00	.224
	No, I Did Not Have a Mentor	5.66	2.92	1.234	44.99	.224
Challenge	Yes, the Superintendent in My District Mentored Me	13.13	2.71	1.75	45	.086
	No, I Did Not Have a Mentor	11.41	3.84	1.77	41.46	.084
Desire	Yes, the Superintendent in My District Mentored Me	11.39	2.517	.405	45	.688
	No, I Did Not Have a Mentor	11.04	3.32	.407	42.73	.686

The first variable was Emotional Intelligence which encompassed self-confidence, self-image and fear of failure. The second variable was Challenge which involved personal challenge, professional challenge and the desire to be in leadership. The third variable was Desire, the willingness to be a part of a social network of superintendents and the willingness to pursue a position as a superintendent.

To answer the research question, is there a mean difference between mentor and no

mentor groups in the variables Emotional Intelligence, Personal and Professional Challenges and Desire to become a Superintendent?

The researchers found that there is a mean difference between mentor and no mentor group in the variable Challenge. A p-value of .086 was found to be more than 0.05; the result would be considered approaching statistical significance.

In order to determine if a causal relationship exists among the variables between assistant superintendents, data was separated into three groups to contrast assistant superintendents who had no mentor (81) versus assistant superintendents who had a mentor that was a superintendent (24) and assistant superintendents who had a mentor who was not a superintendent but fellow professional (44).

Table 3: Frequency Table						
	Mentor			No Mentor		
	No Importance & Of little Importance	Somewhat Important	Important & Very Important	No Importance & Of little Importance	Somewhat Important	Important & Very Important
Emotional Intelligence						
Q1 - Self Confidence	65.2	26.1	8.7	70.8	16.7	12.5
Q2 - Self Image	65.2	26.1	8.7	79.2	8.3	12.5
Q3 - Fear of Failure	56.5	26.1	17.4	70.8	20.8	8.4
Challenge						
Q4 - Personal Challenge	4.3	13	82.7	16.7	20.8	62.5
Q5 - Professional Challenge	4.3	8.7	88	16.7	16.7	66.6
Q6 - Desire to be a leader	4.3	4.3	91.3	12.5	4.2	83.3
Desire						
Q7 - Willingness to be part of a social network	13	4.3	82.6	20.8	12.5	66.7
Q8 - Willingness to pursue a job as Superintendent	34.8	13	52.1	41.7	20.8	37.5
Q9 - Lack of desire to lead a district	13	17.4	69.6	13	4.2	87.5

Results

An independent sample t-test was conducted to compare mentorship for assistant superintendents and assistant superintendents with no mentor. No significant differences were found in the other variables. There was an approaching significant difference in the scores for assistant superintendents with mentor-superintendents. Personal and professional - Challenge ($M=13.13$, $SD=2.71$), and assistant superintendents with no mentor personal and professional - Challenge ($M=12.32$, $SD=2.71$); $t(45) = 1.75$, $p = .086$. No significant differences. These results suggest that assistant

superintendents with mentors have an effect on Personal, Professional Challenge and the desire to be a superintendent. Specifically, our results suggest that when assistant superintendents have mentors, they are more willing to accept the responsibility of leadership.

A t-test was performed and the variable personal and professional Challenges for assistant superintendents with a mentor is approaching significance (.086). Item and analysis with and no mentor is presented in Table 2.

Data for the mentor group is 20% higher than the no mentor group (Q4 and 5) and Desire to be a Superintendent (Q6). The Desire to be a Superintendent variable is 20% more significant for the mentor group. The no mentor group is 20% higher in their willingness to be part of a social network, and how willing they are to pursue a job as a superintendent. Last, 30% more assistant superintendents in the no mentor group lack the desire to lead a district.

Discussion and Implications

This study examined mentorship and its effect on assistant superintendents and the following variables: Emotional Intelligence, Challenge, and the Desire to Become a Superintendent. The relationship between Mentorship, Emotional Intelligence, Challenge and the Desire to become a Superintendent are evident in the Challenge variable which examines assistant superintendents' Personal Challenge, Professional Challenge and Desire to be a Superintendent. A total of 149 assistant superintendents in Nassau and Suffolk Counties in Long Island, New York and Westchester County, New York were surveyed. An independent sample t-test between assistant superintendents who have a mentor that were superintendents or a fellow professional versus assistant superintendents that do not have a mentor was performed and shows that those who had a mentor-superintendent or fellow professional had the willingness to be in leadership.

Results of an item frequency analysis showed that assistant superintendents who have a mentor-superintendent or fellow professionals are more willing to take on the challenge of a Superintendents' position. An

item by item analysis showed that 20% of the assistant superintendents valued the importance in the items listed as challenge and social networking.

A strong sense of self-confidence and self-image allows a leader to adapt to changes that may occur without disrupting the culture and climate of the school district. Emotional Intelligence begins with knowing one-self including emotions, personal values, biases, perceptions, strengths, weaknesses, and career goals. Assistant superintendents who employ Emotional Intelligence have the ability to control themselves and make appropriate decisions despite how difficult a situation may be (Goleman, 1995).

District leaders are faced with many challenges and it is their duty to ensure that students are able to compete in a global market. Superintendents are viable candidates to mentor assistant superintendents because they have a wealth of knowledge to share. Experience and expertise develops from years on the job and a willingness to accept new challenges.

Assistant superintendents are often excited to meet the new challenges that are ahead because of their strong desire to lead a district. While this self-confidence is admirable, others who are just as qualified are hesitant to apply because they have weighed the role and responsibilities against professional and personal satisfaction and have deemed it unbalanced.

Assistant superintendents may also desire to hold the superintendent position to have greater impact and the ability to initiate change within a school district as compared to other positions. Assistant superintendents who plan to take on a superintendent's position have to possess a desire to lead a district because of the personal sacrifice involved.

There are a large number of qualified potential candidates that are available to apply for the position of superintendent but the pool remains very limited. Recommendations made by the Council of Superintendents (2012) are to focus on effective leaders who can provide the new generation of superintendents or aspiring superintendents a view of how to balance work effectively. Include strategies of how effective leaders manage the increasing

demands of the superintendency and other life roles. Provide opportunities for informal guidance and mentorships to new superintendents. The increased accountability that has been placed upon Superintendents has led to highly qualified candidates questioning the professional and personal benefits of holding the Superintendents' position.

The findings of this research suggest that assistant superintendents are the main candidates for the position of superintendent because they work directly with the superintendent and have access to their knowledge. Mentoring by a superintendent or other fellow professionals can have a great impact on assistant superintendents and their future.

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Latoya Y. Key, is a Doctoral Student at Dowling College, Long Island, NY, and Assistant Principal of Safety and Security, New York City.

Stephanie P. Thomas, is a Doctoral Student at Dowling College, Long Island, NY.

Tanisha N. Hunter, Ed.D., is an Assistant Principal at NYC Department of Education.

Elsa-Sofia Morote, Ed.D., is a Professor, Department of Educational Administration Leadership and Technology, at Dowling College, Long Island, NY.

Stephanie L. Tatum, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor/ Department Chair, Department of Educational Administration, Leadership and Technology, Dowling College, Long Island, NY.



RETENTION STRATEGIES OF A SUCCESSFUL GRADUATE PROGRAM

Elsa-Sofia Morote, Ed.D., Ph.D., Nalini Singh, Ed.D.,
and Judith Jeremie, Ed.D.
Dowling College
Spring 2022

Abstract

This case study analyzed a unique doctoral program in education at Dowling College, Long Island, NY that had an 88% graduation rate within seven years that included 60% of students of color in contrast with doctoral graduation rates in the United States that are an average of 38% within seven years with only 24% students of color graduating. This study used a qualitative analysis to learn about their retention. It included documents analyses, pre-survey to alumni, in-depth interviews with thirty-two alumni and three faculty/administrators. Three major themes emerged: a sense of belonging, cooperative learning, faculty-administration support, and students' purpose, and competence. Recommendations to make a graduate program successful are presented.

Introduction

Most of the studies concerning retention and attrition come from undergraduate studies. Tinto's Student Integration Model (1975) and Beans' Student Attrition Model (1985) were the most cited models. Both models are based on undergraduate students, where students' academic and socioeconomic backgrounds are presented as strong variables. However, few studies focus on doctoral programs (Ampaw & Jaeger, 2012).

In 1988, Girves and Wemmerus suggested there is little information on graduate student retention, degree progress, or those motives contributing to some students succeeding in

graduate school while others drop out. In 2016, Okahana, Allum, Felder, and Tull presented an extensive study at the Council of Graduate Studies that included 21 universities' doctoral programs. The study showed that the average completion rate for a doctoral program in seven years is 42%, and in 10 years, 50% (Okahana et al., 2016).

This study is focused on a unique case of an Ed.D. doctoral program in the Department of Educational Administration, Leadership and Technology at Dowling College, New York. Within seven years, the doctoral program completion rate was 88% (Manley & Perry, 2014). The doctoral program was serving an average of 135 students per year. This program increased student diversity from 24% in 2008 to 60% in 2016 (Morote, 2016). This study sought to answer the following research question:

What themes emerge from crucial insights of alumni and administrators regarding how the doctoral program challenges or influences their retention?

Doctoral Program Background

As of 2019, the Council of Graduate Studies (GGS) reported that doctoral programs in the USA had 1.8 million students: 59% were women, 24% students of color, and 18% were international students (GSS, 2018; National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). In contrast, Dowling's doctoral program increased the share of students of color from 24% in 2008, 35% in 2011, to 60% in 2016 (Morote, 2016). This is higher than the national diversity

average of 24% in 2019.

Dowling College was a non-profit, private higher education institution on Long Island. In 1996 a Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) program was registered in the New York State Office of Higher Education. The initial foundation for the Program was a proposal of "most progressive thinking in the fields of higher education and administration and k-12 leadership" (Smith & Ruhl-Smith, 2000, p.1). At the time of the college closing (in 2016), the doctoral program had three major concentrations: Higher Education, K-12, and Health Care.

The Dowling doctoral program was designed with a cohort model, intensive technological infusion process, a single fee payment plan, a portfolio documentation of successful learning outcomes, and the use of field-relevant topics for student dissertations. Smith and Ruhl-Smith (2000) noted that the doctoral program increased attention to the relationship between technology and leadership (Smith & Ruhl-Smith, 2000).

The most crucial decision of student admission was made in an interview with a group of faculty members. The purpose of the interview was to learn if prospective students had a vision of their future and would be comfortable working in a cooperative learning model with their cohort members. It was essential to know that the student understood the work and effort that the doctoral degree required (R. Manley, personal communication, January 4, 2021).

Faculty were typically seven to nine full-time professors, half of them were retired superintendents who served as mentors for future k-12 leaders. Typically, four were professors with experience in higher education and social agencies. Faculty expertise varied from qualitative researchers, quantitative researchers, and mixed methodologies researchers. The health care students and other students were attracted to the Ed.D. program because of its emphasis on technology applications, leadership, research skills, and encouragement to focus one's coursework research on topics of one's own personal and professional interests. Health-care experts were often invited as guest lecturers.

Students typically collaborated with faculty in writing articles and often, they traveled to present their research at national and

international conferences. Ninety percent of the students had the opportunity to present and achieve a peer-reviewed publication or conference paper before graduation. Prestigious conferences, such as the American Educational Research Association (AERA), blind-reviewed doctoral candidates' research and accepted them to present at their annual conference. Dowling College doctoral students were consistently selected by this AERA Conference during these years.

The doctoral program completion rate at five years had an average of 85% and at seven years was 88%. This rate was consistent during its 18 years (Manley & Perry, 2014). This doctoral program produced college presidents, superintendents, principals, professors, hospital directors, and leaders in social agencies (A. Inserra, personal communication, December 12, 2020).

Theoretical framework: Retention in Doctoral Programs

Tinto (1975) explained that students enter university or college with different intentions, goals, commitments, and expectations. These differences can mainly be traced to students' characteristics (e.g., gender, study skills), prior schooling performance, and family background (e.g., socioeconomic status). Tinto (1975) differentiated between the academic (performance) and social systems (peer relationships) that students are a part of and should be integrated into efforts to prevent attrition. Bean and Metzner (1985) studied attrition on older nontraditional students and found that there were four factors: academic (study habits, course availability), student background (gender, ethnicity, high school performance); environmental (family responsibilities, finances), and psychological (utility, satisfaction, outcome).

In 2012, Ampaw and Jaeger presented a conceptual framework to explain the drop-off rate of doctoral students. They presented three stages of successful persistence-transition, development, and research (Ampaw & Jaeger, 2012, p. 644). Ampaw and Jarger show that although financial aid as a whole is important, the type of financial aid received is even more significant and has differential impacts on doctoral students' retention at each stage. Doctoral student

retention with higher expected earnings motivates doctoral students (Ampaw & Jaeger, 2012).

In 1985, Noel, Levitz, and Saluri explained the importance of college personnel's caring attitude as the most potent retention force on campus. While not the only way to promote a sense of belonging in adult education, group learning (cohorts) has been found to foster it and studies indicate that adult learners benefited greatly from a group learning environment. Drago-Severson et al. (2001), who studied adult learner retention, concluded that participants demonstrate that cohort experiences seem to facilitate academic learning, increased feelings of belonging, broadened perspectives, and, at least by participants' reports, learner persistence. Financial advisement is also crucial. Ehrenberg and Mavros (1995) found that completion rates are sensitive to the types of financial support available to the students.

The most important relationship for a doctoral student is with an advisor, faculty, or chairperson, and this relationship is identified as a critical element for retention (Holley & Caldwell, 2012). However, an advisor, or chairperson who is a good instructor may not be a good mentor (Mullen, 2007; Mullen et al., 1999). Graduate students often worry about the range of permissible dissertation topics (and methods) becoming restricted or where faculty considered suitable for mentorship becomes fewer (Mullen et al., 1999). Minority female mentors, or those practicing alternative forms of research, may experience their mentoring status and efforts diminished during such times by other faculty (Mullen et al., 1999).

Underrepresented students in doctoral programs experienced isolation, marginalization, and less effective interactions with program faculty and tend to drop the program (Ellis, 2005; Jaeger et al., 2009). Developing a collegial relationship with their faculty contributes to success for doctoral students of color (Isik-Ercan, 2012).

This study uses a theoretical framework from Andy Nash and Silja Kallenbach (2009). Nash and Kallenbach analyzed 18 adult programs in New England, USA, and identified the persistence strategies that derived their power from the fact that they met six affective

needs of adults (Nash & Kallenbach, 2009). The six affective needs are described as: Sense of belonging & community of learners: This is referred to how students experience the sense of belonging to a community at the program or class. Clarity of purpose: This is referred to as that learner should have concrete and measurable goals. Agency: Learners feel capable of initiating actions to benefit themselves. Human agency is the capacity for human beings to make things happen through their actions. Competence: Learners want to build competence in areas that more schooling can address. Learners believe their efforts will lead to success. Relevance: The instructional program is meaningful to the learners' needs and interests; and Stability: The program offers the structure, predictability, and sense of safety that learners need to feel confident about their progress.

In 2015, Bolliu, Agasistc, and Johnes did a quantitative study analyzing several independent variables correlated with the doctoral graduation rate. The following variables were evaluated –entrance tests such as GRE, assistantships, grants for students, student support activities such as writing support, statistics support, annual review, workspace, on-campus research conferences, and travel support. Also considered were program-based statistics on the share of female faculty, female students, international students, faculty research, faculty tenure. Of all the variables mentioned, they found to be relevant the following variables for doctoral programs: small universities tend to have a higher graduation doctoral rate, an international student body, presence of female students, students focused (full-time) on their research interests (and the presence of financial support), high-quality (and recently trained) academic staff in addition to an on-campus conference at which students could present their work appeared to be related significantly to completion rates.

Methodology

A short survey was posted to an alumni social media group. Thirty-two people answered that survey. Alumni were asked if they were willing to be interviewed. Of those willing, the researchers divided participants among race, ethnicity, gender, place of work

(k-12 or higher education or social agency) and then randomly sampled the respondents according to the group to which they were assigned. Three researchers created an interview guide after the pre-survey, making minor changes to the open-ended questions. Researchers conducted semi-structured interviews of twelve individuals: nine alumni and three professors/ administrators.

All data was stored in a password-protected Dropbox cloud (dropbox.com). The researchers maintained a comprehensive case-study database in Microsoft Word to include interview schedules and interviewees' demographics (Yin, 2018). Multiple methods to collect data facilitated its triangulation during the analysis phase and contributed to the credibility, dependability, and quality of the collected data (Billups, 2014; Creswell, 2017; Tracy, 2010; Yin, 2018). A two-step process (Mayring, 2008) was applied to analyze the data. The first step was to analyze the single cases using thematic analysis. The researchers engaged in a cross-case analysis (Cruzes et al., 2015). The first step in analyzing the recorded data consisted of a complete transcription of the recordings. The zoom transcripts were immediately subjected to find critical themes of the interview. A cross-sectional analysis was performed by the three researchers who sequenced and coded the data independently. The researchers then triangulated the data, sharing the coding they had done independently, one interview after another. In addition, the researchers shared with the interviewees thematic findings to get feed-back on whether the results represent their lived experiences. Their comments were used to refine the findings.

Description of the participants

Thirty-two alumni spanning over two decades of the program responded to the pre-test. Seventy-eight percent were female and 21% male. Fifty percent were Caucasian, and fifty percent were from underrepresented groups. Fifty percent are currently working in K-12, 25% in higher education, and 25% in social agencies. Sixty-two percent were over 50-year-old, and 38% were between 30-49 years old. From these participants, nine alumni volunteers were invited to in-depth interviews. Alumni were coded (K= working in k-12 environment, S = working in social agency or

higher education institution, C = Caucasian, M = Minority, F = Female), and three faculty/ administrators were coded as A1, A2, and A3. The following three themes emerged:

Theme 1. Sense of belonging & cooperative learning

This theme reflects that doctoral students need to feel part of a group and desire connections with their peers, professors, and administrators. This was reinforced by the comments of respondents that the program was organized in cohorts between 9-15 students creating a doctoral family. In addition, students felt comfortable seeing the diverse faculty. The following comments support this: KC2: "...that sense of community has never really gone away"; SMF1: "I appreciated the environment, after a while, I think they created a good learning environment"; SMF2: "There was a sense of belonging as we had the largest group of our cohort...we ended up writing a book together." Students of color mentioned that having professors of color was essential for them.

Three categories were highlighted on this theme: people create sense of belonging, cooperative learning through cohorts, and diversity.

- Students, faculty, and administration create sense of belonging: KC2: "100%, I would say that you felt like part of a family, I think the support you know within the cohort and also from the faculty was tremendous"
- Cooperative learning through cohorts. The doctoral program created a community of learners. The comments were very positive towards cohorts: KSCF: "You know, with the cohort model we felt that we belong to each other."; A3: "At the open house we say, you are going to join a diverse community of scholars; you are going to join a community of professional leaders."
- Diversity. Most of the students celebrated being in a diverse group and the faculty diversity. Some students pointed out some differences between faculty diversity and cohort diversity. Diversity was understood differently from the interviewee's background. Comments such as: KCF1: "The diversity amongst the staff ... had such different views, allow us as students to go

in with eyes wide open and if you were the sponge that wanted to soak it in, they let you."

Theme 2. Faculty-administration support

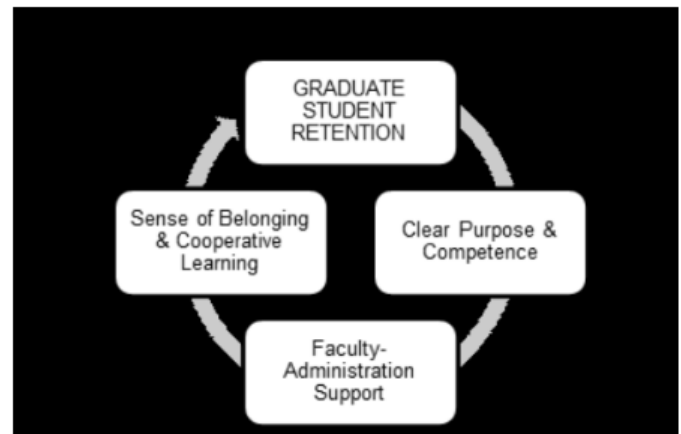
Students explained that they felt faculty support and mentorship during the process and after the process. They developed close ties with their professors specially with their methodologist and chair of the dissertation. Administrators often played the role of counselor and supported the students with a personal interest in their well-being. Professors often ended up co-authoring articles and travelling to conferences with students. The following comments support this theme: KCF1: "I was drawn to the professors, which was a blend of those who were current practitioners and those who were full time professors. I did not want a program that was 100% theory or 100% practical. I wanted the combination". SMF1: "...the biggest factor was my referral (to the doctoral program) from my mentor"

Theme 3. Clear purpose & competence

Students, faculty, and administration had one purpose- Student graduation and success. This purpose comes from the administration's desire to see the students succeed. Students reported that the faculty created a culture of success. The students also felt the information provided in the doctoral programs was relevant and increased their competence level, assuring themselves that they were employable after graduation. A2 commented: "one of the things we had decided early on is if we accepted someone into the program they were going to be successful, and we were going to make that happen" and the same for students as commented by KCF1: "...what Dowling offered in their program matched up to what my personal and professional goals were" and SMF3: "Education was always the priority in my family". Comments that show confidence in their competence were KCF1: "You know I think it helped me grow personally and professionally. I don't think that I would have been here as easily as a superintendent of a medium-sized school district or a female who had never been in the K-12 classroom, the doctorate helped me." Quotes that show confidence and competence were: KC2: "...I

was fortunate enough to have an opportunity to apply for Superintendent. I entered the Superintendent's role probably somewhat ahead of the curve at the time"; SMF3: "I'm a Vice President of a hospital!"

In sum, retention is supported by three major themes: sense of belonging and cooperative learning, faculty-administration support, and clear purpose & competence (Figure 1).



These themes are consistent with the literature (Table 1). However, variables such as background (race, previous academic performance) mentioned by Tinto (1975) and Bean and Metzner (1985) were not retention factors in this case study. The sense of belonging & cooperative learning was discussed by Nash and Kallenbach (2009) when they analyzed the retention of adult students.

This sense of belonging was also promoted for the cohort model that Dowling doctoral program followed. This is consistent with several studies such as Drago-Severson (2016); social systems (Tinto, 1975), and Mullen et al. (1999), who found that cohort models supported a sense of belonging and included peer support. Bolliia, Agasistc, and Johnes (2015) mentioned the role of international students in retention. However, few studies mentioned student and faculty diversity as part of creating a sense of belonging, as was found in this case study.

Faculty-administration support was a key theme that supported retention. Several studies support this, such as (Nash & Kallenbach, 2009; Girves & Wemmerus, 1988; and Bolliia et al., 2015). These studies discuss faculty training, faculty mentorship, and

caring administration (Nash & Kallenbach, 2009; Girves & Wemmerus, 1988; Bollia et al., 2015).

The last theme was clear purpose & competence. This theme is aligned with Nash and Kallenbach (2009) when they pointed out "purpose" as one of their six components of adult retention and goals (Bean & Metzner, 1985). At the same time, Nash and Kallenbach (2009) highlighted the importance of students feeling their learning is relevant and leads to competence. Competence is related to the goal of getting higher earnings as Ampaw and Jaeger (2012) indicated.

Table 1	
Themes	Topic / Literature aligned
Sense of Belonging & Cooperative Learning	- Group learning (Noel, Levitz & Saluri, 1985); cohorts (Drago-Severson et al., 2001). - Sense of belonging & community of learners (Nash & Kallenbach, 2009) - International students (Bollia, Agasistc & Johnes, 2015) - Research conference on campus (Bollia, Agasistc & Johnes, 2015) - Social systems (Tinto, 1975)
Faculty-Administration Support	- Financial advisement (Ampaw & Jaeger, 2012) - College caring attitude (Noel, Levitz and Saluri, 1985) - Advisor (mentor) key element of retention (Holley & Caldwell, 2012; Mullen, 2007; Mullen et al., 1999). - Collegial relationship with faculty (Zeynep Isik-Ercan, 2012). - Stability (Nash & Kallenbach, 2009)
Clear Purpose & Competence	- Expected earnings (Ampaw & Jaeger, 2012, p. 644). - Clarity of purpose (Nash & Kallenbach, 2009) - Competence (Nash & Kallenbach, 2009) - Relevance (Nash & Kallenbach, 2009) - Psychological – outcomes, goals (Bean and Metzner, 1985).

Recommendations

In summary, the purpose of the doctoral program for some is their personal growth, personally and professionally, and for others it is to expand their confidence level and the skills and aptitude that will help them in opening doors to career advancement.

The following recommendations summarize the aspects of doctoral programs that increase graduate student retention and graduation rates.

Sense of belonging & cooperative learning:

create cohorts as they have been proven to increase retention; create peer mentorship activities and support social networking activities.

Faculty and administration support: increase diversity in the student body and faculty body; have an administrator or counselor on-site that provides individualized counseling and follow-up with students, and create on-site research activities such as symposiums or conferences

Clear purpose & competence: provide engagement activities to support student perseverance and review curricula to align with current market needs.

Adult learners require a clear purpose, a caring faculty and administration, relevance and participation in the learning process, a sense of belonging and collegiality in their studies and research efforts. Small group seminars at the stage of writing a dissertation can expand peer and faculty support as well as task commitments of students.

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Dr. Elsa-Sofia Morote is Dean of Graduate Studies at CUNY John Jay College of Criminal Justice and Professor of Public Management.

Dr. Nalini Singh is Principal of Antonia Pantoja Preparatory Academy, NYC Dept. of Education, Bronx, NY.

Dr. Judith Jeremie is a Teacher & Curriculum Writer at Brooklyn Technical High School, Brooklyn, NY.



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ARE ALL SCHOOLS GETTING FAIR TREATMENT UNDER NEW YORK STATE EDUCATION LAW?

Gabriella Franza, Ed.D., Patrick Pizzo, Ed.D., and Michele Williams, Ed.D.
Baldwin UFSD, NY; Robbinsville Schools, NJ; NYC DOE, NY
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Abstract

This article examines the needs in New York State for public policy to address disparities in educational outcomes, opportunities to learn and appropriate evaluations that assess student readiness to advance in their education or work opportunities. Several proposals for educational public policy changes and practices are offered in the conclusion of this article.

Introduction

Federal education law under Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires state education systems to include high-stakes accountability policies and multiple indicators of success, such as growth scores from standardized tests, English Language Proficiency, and absenteeism, to determine the accountability status of schools and districts for rewards or sanctions. In New York State, high-stakes accountability policies do not hold schools accountable for student progress related to learning standards. Instead, they use comparative measures to rank schools against each other to determine their proficiency levels, annual yearly progress, and accountability status. Critics argued against using comparative measures, stating that it would make the accountability system inherently unfair (Koretz et al., 1992; NYSED, 2018; Williams, 2021). Research has shown that these policies promote uniform learning outcomes, control of educator behaviors, and test-driven learning cultures that do not align with the reality of instruction and learning in public schools with predominantly minoritized

student populations. Instruction and learning are dynamic because educators and students have diverse sets of skills, talents, cognitive processes, and various levels of access to resources within the learning environment. This makes uniform learning conditions challenging to establish as school leaders and teachers work under restrictive policies to prepare students for the high-stakes exams and diploma requirements (Williams, 2021).

Historical Overview of NYS Education Assessment Policy and Accountability

The New York Board of Regents has been at the forefront in the design of policies to influence the direction of schooling using assessments as they sought to institute statewide uniform learning standards to expand educational opportunities for its diverse student population. For example, in November 1865, the New York State Board of Regents created a uniform high school entrance examination to determine the most qualified elementary school students to continue their education. Students were awarded a certificate at graduation, and this influenced educators to prepare students for the test (Bishop et al., 2000). During the 1870s, there was a strong national movement for uniform high school graduation standards and college admissions requirements that was led by the National Educational Association (NEA), whose members were primarily college presidents and state superintendents (Williams, 2021). In June 1878, New York took the lead and administered its first curriculum-based assessment for high school Regent's credit (Bishop et al., 2000; The

University of the State of New York, 1965). These exams were deliberately designed to be a strong supervisory and instructional tool that influenced educators towards the state's version of effective pedagogical practices, not just to measure student achievement. For example, New York State Assistant Commissioner for Examinations and Scholarship, Sherman Tinkelman, was successful in getting foreign language teachers to emphasize conversational and reading comprehension skills by including these components on the Regents exams (Bishop et al., 2000; The University of the State of New York, 1965).

This push for common standards and uniform testing at the state and national level has been in progress for over a century and the same methods are still in existence. One of the consequences of the Regents tests was that it created two educational tracks for students—Regents diploma and local diploma. There were more students in low income and underfunded schools that received local diplomas as opposed to Regents diplomas and some attributed this to low expectations. However, NYS did not provide any incentives for students to pursue a Regents diploma. For instance, New York State-sponsored scholarships required an aptitude test, and Regents scores were not used for in-state or out of state college admissions or employment, so students avoided them (Bishop et al., 2000). In 1984, Commissioner Gordon Ambach wanted to address low expectations and established a policy which required schools to demonstrate universal competency in all academic subjects and remediation for students that failed the new Regents Competency Tests. But this policy revealed another factor that the state was not addressing. "By demanding the same set of tests from all schools, administrators documented the gap between performance in the poorer New York City and upstate schools" and other public schools (Johnson, 2009, p. 8). This factor continued to be ignored.

During 1991, the U.S. Congress created the National Council on Education Standards and Testing (NCEST) to determine the feasibility of national standards and assessments, and they recommended states increase their learning standards, use high stakes standardized tests for students and school

system accountability. NCEST wanted assessments "used for such high-stakes purposes as high school graduation, college admission, continuing education, and certification for employment," and to have a mechanism in place for their alignment to NAEP (Vinovskis, 1998, p. 37; Williams, 2021). New York State began to implement these recommendations.

In 1994, New York City Chancellor, Ramon Cortines, blamed school failure on the low expectations of students and teachers and declared that all students entering ninth grade must pass three Regents level science and math courses to graduate. This was supposed to abolish the bottom local diploma track. Two years later, the New York State Board of Regents established a new policy that mandated all students take Regents courses and pass five Regents exams. The Regents believed "that requiring all students to take and pass five Regents examinations will significantly improve student achievement" (Bishop et al., 2000, p. 335).

This policy of blame and raising standards continued with the Federal government's 2001 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and the 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Federal education policies made high-stakes tests, learning standards, school supervision, and systems of punishment the dominant education agenda in each state. ESSA policies were implemented through state and local education agencies to regulate schooling using business principles. This resulted in a reduction of local control over curriculum, instruction, and learning, while power to influence schooling shifted towards policymakers and business markets (Madaus, 1999; Rossides, 2004; Williams, 2012). Policies requiring a mandatory, rigorous curriculum did not always result in improved student achievement or graduation rates and may be discouraging for some groups of students (Comprehensive Center Network Region 2, 2022).

Beneficiaries of the Current Paradigm

High-stakes tests have greater consequences for minority and poor children than they do for majority and more affluent students, albeit non-diverse students are also impacted by the power of these tests (Madaus & Clarke, 2001). Resulting from high-

stakes testing, low-income children of color are subjected to a qualitatively different educational experience than that of their Whiter, more affluent counterparts who have a much higher likelihood to access a more engaging, content-rich education (Au, 2015). The empirical test results provided by presumptively "objective" standardized tests, could mask school structural advantages, the existence of systemic racism, justify racial hierarchies, and promote bias towards specific racial groups as less intelligent and inferior (Au, 2009b, 2013) within a seemingly meritocratic framework (Au & Ferrare, 2015).

Racial Disparities Reinforced by the Current Paradigm

As stated by Ford (2005), psychological and psychoeducational assessment is an area that has been heavily subjected to complaints about the differential treatment of diverse groups. Korchin (1980), and others contend that standardized tests have contributed to the perpetuation of social, economic, and political barriers confronting diverse groups (Padilla & Medina, 1996; Suzuki, Meller, & Ponterotto, 1996).

Research suggests that many diverse communities have suffered from the application of high-stakes testing. Decades of research demonstrate that Black, Latinx, and Native students, as well as students from some Asian groups, experience bias from standardized tests administered from early childhood through college (Rosales, 2021).

Children of color have experienced sharper curricular and pedagogic squeeze, resulting in a disparate education than affluent, primarily White, counterparts (Nichols & Berliner, 2007; Nichols et al., 2005; von Zastrow, 2004). The resulting outcome portrays low-income students of color as failures through high-stakes, standardized testing. This allows unequal opportunities to be imposed on low-income, children of color (Melamed, 2011).

What is the Solution?

Performance-Based Assessments

New York is one of twelve states who require an exit exam to graduate from high school. Of those 12, NY is one of five that do not

allow for the ACT or SAT to be one of the options of an exit exam. Performance-based assessments offer an alternative to the high stakes standardized testing that is being utilized in NY. These assessments are meant to measure the skills that are developed after a unit of study and can vary greatly depending on the subject/grade/unit. Although the tasks can all differ, they should all be complex and rigorous in design, and have an extensive rubric that measures mastery of the skill.

Work Based Learning

According to the NYS Education Department, Work-Based Learning (WBL) is the umbrella term used to identify activities which collaboratively engage employers and schools in providing structured learning experiences for students. These experiences focus on assisting students develop broad, transferable skills for postsecondary education and the workplace. A quality WBL program can make school-based learning more relevant by providing students with the opportunity to apply knowledge and skills learned in the classroom to real world situations. (2022). Students are able to earn credits for their jobs and internships, which can replace several credits towards graduation, with a focus on career development and outside learning. Work Based Learning programs have allowed students to earn credits for their work and outside experiences. The programs have not yet been able to have students use these credits toward their learning unless they are participating in the New York State (NYS) Career Development and Occupational Studies (CDOS) Commencement Credential, which requires a connection to a Career and Technical Education (CTE) course load.

Alternative Settings: Big Picture Learning and New York Performance Consortium Schools

Big Picture Learning Schools are a network of schools, who use mentorship and internship to educate students, which has a different structure when compared to traditional schooling. Students at Big Picture schools spend half of their time outside of schools on internships and experiences, where their learning of numeracy and literacy occurs through real life experiences. Students in Big

Picture Learning Schools can choose to participate in the NYS Regents, or they can apply to be a part of the Consortium, and only participate in the NYS English Language Arts Exam (Big Picture Learning, 2023).

New York Performance Consortium Schools have a similar model to the Big Picture Schools, where the focus is about learning through experiences outside of the classroom. Schools who are a part of the consortium only have to participate in the NYS English Language Arts Exam. As opposed to a focus on internship, there is a focus on project-based learning.

Both Big Picture Schools and Consortium schools need to go through an application and acceptance process in order to create a shift to this way of evaluation and participation. To make a shift into one of these programs would take a tremendous amount of time, money, resources, re-structuring and community buy-in, which is not accounted for in policy recommendations.

Policy Recommendations

New York State has mechanisms that appear to maintain the failing status of marginalized students by setting different performance expectations for Regents accountability. For instance, the NYS Education Commissioner established higher proficiency benchmark scores for Title 1 schools than for non-Title 1 schools. On the Algebra 1 test, Level 3 proficiency cut scores ranged from 65% to 84% for non-Title 1 schools, but only from 79% to 84% for Title 1 schools. By increasing the benchmark to 79% and reducing the performance range, this policy increased the chances of accountability failure and sanctions against Title 1 schools (Williams, 2021). The New York State Board of Regents defined equity as the "guarantee of fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for all while striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of all groups" (Young Jr., 2021, p. 6). Performance Level Score Ranges represents one barrier for Title 1 school advancement. One recommendation to help our most vulnerable students is to level the playing field by holding all students and schools in New York State under the same Performance Level Score Ranges for Regents Accountability and a benchmark cut score

that is equitable, reachable and does not fluctuate annually. This will be one measure to guarantee fair treatment for Title 1 schools under state education policy.

A second would be supporting schools through Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (D.E.I.) implementation. School districts and practitioners are expected to institute DEI strategies and mechanisms to create effective learning environments for students, while the state education policy undermines this mandate. The Board of Regents sets requirement levels for achievement and expects every school to meet them in a uniform manner without considering the local learning conditions of school instructional environments, such as the lack of appropriate funding to purchase instructional resources, equipment for schools, repair and upgrade of building facilities, and the hiring of high quality and experienced educators. Local taxes vary throughout the state and determine the amount of funding to school districts. This affects their ability to meet New York State education requirements to provide all students with a significant opportunity for a high-quality education. These are some areas the state should consider when evaluating policies related to the success measures of schools and educators.

Therefore, it is recommended that the NYS Board of Regents and the NYS Commissioner of Education create a DEI rubric to evaluate education policies, metrics, and regulations, whether under development or in existence, to ensure it equitably supports and meets the needs of students, educators, schools, and districts across the state. Those policies and regulations that do not meet proficiency levels on the DEI rubric are to be revised or eliminated, and schools and districts should not be penalized during the review and revision process. The Board can adapt their New York State Integration Project (NYSIP) tool kit for the purpose of evaluating state-level education policies. This kit is provided by the State to assist districts and schools in initiating, monitoring, and maintaining DEI integration efforts. As outlined in the tool kit, the Board can begin their review "with the crucial recognition that there is a system that by design (whether intentionally or accidentally or a combination of the two) creates the conditions that your integration

initiative aims to change" (NYSED, 2023, p. 16). The Board's primary responsibility is to comprehend the impact of their policies on schools and districts, and can begin by responding to these revised tool kit questions: What people, conditions, or forces within NYS are likely to be positively or negatively affected by the current state of education policies? What people, conditions, or forces inside or outside NYS exert considerable influence on the policies that are intended to be altered? (NYSED, 2023). Schools and districts will benefit from this process as the Board will collaborate with local education agencies in the collection of data. This may represent the first instance of state-level reforms being driven from a grassroots perspective, as all districts participate in DEI evaluation and integration.

Additionally, Funding for New York State schools varies greatly from community to community. Progressive calculations for Foundation Aid, the largest wealth-based aid category, and expense driven aid mitigate the inequities of local resources. The Foundation Aid formulas, which are a focus of future funding, are again under review. Changes in population and other factors need to be re-evaluated to capture changes in the communities served. Which constituencies will establish the future formulas, and then maintain the required wealth-based adjustments, is a current concern for equitable funding. Traditionally, wealthy districts which had the ability and will to increase local funding (local levy) were able to offset short falls in state funding, although that option is vastly reduced by the tax cap now codified into law. Low-wealth districts rely more heavily on State Aid for their revenue, therefore any reduction in State Aid will have a disparate impact on low-wealth districts.

In a Tax Cap environment there is no viable option for low-wealth communities to mitigate this substantial impact. The Campaign for Fiscal Equity settlement was implemented by Governor Hochul and has been phased in to achieve full funding of the Foundation Aid formula. Reliance on Foundation Aid impacts low-wealth districts far more than higher-wealth districts. During our current funding paradigm, inequities have been mitigated, but not eliminated, by the full funding of Foundation Aid. Federal pandemic aid funds

are expiring for districts, which are known locally. But, despite the assurances from New York State, federal aid will be reduced for the state as well. This reduction, which has occurred periodically over the last several decades (GAP Elimination/ DRA), will occur again, and then will have a greater impact on low-wealth areas.

Cross System Impacts

The basis for any funding mechanism must be consistency of the flow of resources. Effective planning for schools, and really any organization, includes long-term plans based on an understating of the future resources to be allocated. Historic fluctuation in resources had a more severe effect on low-wealth districts, which impedes potential student progress for our most vulnerable students.

Low-wealth, and often diverse, districts who are most affected by non-local resources (state/federal) need fiscal certainty to implement, support, and evaluate programmatic changes based on promised resources. New programs need support which may include additional staff, staff training, and infrastructure related alterations. The financial impact of these changes will occur during multiple years and be impacted by increases related to contractual settlements and general inflationary pressures. Implementing any new program is a long-term commitment.

Effectively implementing and supporting, via policy and fiscal resources, new programs is key for success. Any program initiated without a multi-year commitment and an effective plan of support will ultimately fail. Programs must be implemented after proper planning to ensure an academic benefit for students and a consistent funding stream to support the changes long-term. Variations to programs must only be after a consistent application over a pre-prescribed period of time and proper support for professional development for staff throughout the process. If long-term changes are required, they must be validated by data, and a component of a comprehensive plan.

New York State establishes long-term progress goals for schools and districts over a 5-year period and collects annual data on various aspects of education, including school achievement, learning environments,

educator quality, and demographics. We propose this data be used to develop an algorithm that predicts the necessary level of foundation and federal funding to provide consistent support and resources to schools. It would benefit the NYS Board of Regents to incorporate this funding element into their DEI rubric, along with a review of educational regulations, policies, school models, and accountability metrics to ensure that the process promotes equity of opportunity for all students.

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Gabriela Franza, Ed.D. is the Assistant Director of Instructional Programs for St. John's University. Dr. Franza's professional focus centers on strengthening school-to-career pathways, advancing inclusive practices, and creating meaningful opportunities that support student success beyond the classroom.

Patrick M. Pizzo II, Ed.D., M.B.A. is the Superintendent of Robbinsville Public Schools and an Adjunct Professor at Stony Brook University. He also serves as Education Chair of the NAACP Hempstead Branch, President of Equity 4 LI Youth, and previously as a member of the New York State Special Legislative Task Force to Combat Antisemitism.

Michele Rene Williams, Ed.D., is an education policy researcher, independent scholar, and adjunct assistant professor at Lehman College, City University of New York. Her research examines the legal and structural dimensions of federal education accountability policy, with a focus on its racially disparate effects on Title I schools and school leadership in urban settings.



SYSTEMS THINKING AS AN APPROACH TO TECHNOLOGY INTEGRATION AT THE K-12 SCHOOL LEVEL

Gustavo Loor, Ed.D. and Catherine DiMartino, Ph.D.
East Meadow UFSD and St. John's University
Fall 2023

Abstract

Amid the pedagogical and leadership shifts that the COVID pandemic placed on the K-12 educational landscape, the pandemic itself brought to light the systems that need to be in place for technology to be effectively integrated in classrooms and school buildings. The COVID transition period has produced a technology rebirth in K-12 schools across the country. This article provides a theoretical framework for K12 leaders to utilize as a guide to establishing a technology integration system in schools that is effective and sustainable. This comparative case study examined two school districts and utilized multiple methods to formulate an actionable framework for technology leaders. Through the combined theoretical lens of Peter Senge's learning organizations and Hargreaves & Fullan's professional capital model, researchers highlight the need and value of current instructional technology measuring and evaluative tools, and how they resourcefully support and guide technology leaders. Findings revealed leadership practices and systems thinking matter, and that they have a prominent impact on technology implementation and adaptation within the fabric of K-12 schooling.

Keywords: K-12, technology, systems, post-pandemic

Introduction

There is a new technology era within the K-12 educational arena. The COVID pandemic

disrupted education in the United States and the world; first closing schools and then pushing them to pivot to distance learning (Alvarez, 2020; McLeod, 2020). K-12 teachers and leaders have become more resilient to change and equipped and confident to leverage technology within their practices. Leading schools and teaching learners amid a pandemic have taught leaders a great deal. Success and missteps during the COVID transitional period have brought to light the systems and personnel infrastructure that need to be in place for effective technology practices in K-12 schools. As this study highlights, in order to achieve the kinds of instructional technology effectiveness required for 21st-century teaching and learning, a systems thinking approach is needed by leaders.

The International Society for Technology in Education, or ISTE, identified key roles of leaders in effectively leading the integration of instructional technology. The new standards identify essential components of technology leadership and have been adopted by many school districts to guide technology integration initiatives and serve as a technology accountability tool (ISTE, 2018; Christensen et al., 2018). Most recently as a response to the pandemic, Congress has increased funding to the Emergency Connectivity Fund, which provides monetary funds to selected elementary schools, secondary schools, or libraries to purchase equipment or services (e.g., Wi-Fi hotspots, modems, and routers) for use by students and

staff at locations other than the schools (Flannery, 2020). The National Education Technology Plan (NETP), released in 2017, laid out the vision of the U.S. Department of Education for the purpose and use of technology in American K-12 education. Nationally, the United States government has spent billions of dollars for technology infrastructure in K-12 schools and has made it clear that technology is at the forefront of educational initiatives.

As technology in education today is evolving and transforming instructional pedagogy, research in the field must also be ongoing and progressing to keep up to date with evolving times. Leaders today must be capable of establishing a system that mobilizes resources to support and build the collective capacity of teachers with instructional technology. This study identifies actionable steps that leaders can take to create supportive and sustainable technology integration opportunities. All the elements identified in this study relied on the technological leadership skills of sitting administrators and their ability to react to change. This study provides a useful framework to facilitate systemic change needed in today's schools, as well as capturing research-based practices that lead to effective technology leadership and integration during a time of change and in preparation for 21st century teaching and learning.

This study's purpose is guided by the following research questions:

- What leadership practices and approaches influence technology implementation and adaptation efforts at the K-12 level?, and
- What elements within a system infrastructure are necessary to effectively support and sustain technology integration initiatives at the K-12 level?

Theoretical Framework

The researchers chose to review the research base through the combined theoretical lens of systems thinking (Senge, 2006) and professional capital (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Peter Senge (2006) has identified five disciplines of a learning organization:

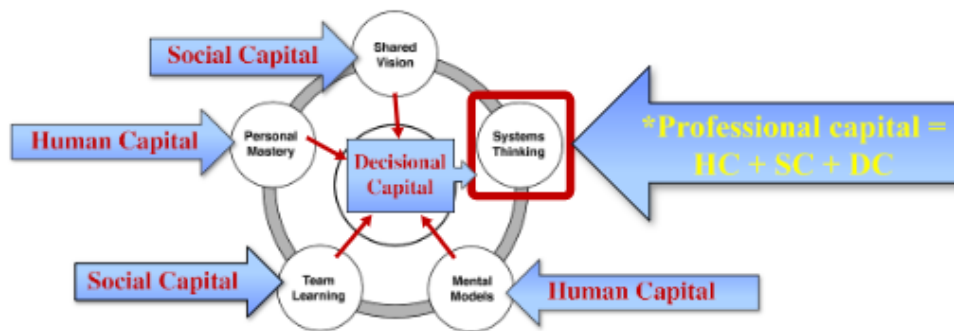
Systems Thinking, Shared Vision, Mental Models, Personal Mastery, and Team Learning. Systems thinking is the core of the five disciplines. Systems thinking allows us to recognize the interrelationships of the disciplines and how each one is needed to foster the growth of a learning organization (Senge, 2006). Hargreaves & Fullan (2012) express professional capital in a formula, where PC is professional capital, HC is human capital, SC is social capital, and DC is decisional capital. Effective learning and teaching during a change process (e.g., COVID pandemic) can be viewed as a product of these three kinds of capital amplifying each other (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

Merging Theoretical Frameworks

To organize the concepts in a coherent way, the researchers integrated both frameworks and constructed the Systems and Capital Change Model (See Figure 1) as a comprehensive framework intended to guide educational leaders during change efforts. Although there are two separate constructs, professional capital can effectively be applied within the five disciplines of learning organizations. As seen in Figure 1, three effective interconnections can be made by coupling and integrating both constructs:

- (a) Human capital corresponds to individuals attaining personal mastery and shifting mental models;
- (b) Social capital aligns to the disciplines of team learning and shared vision within a learning organization; and
- (c) Decisions made with a high level of decisional capital can help establish and sustain systems thinking. The human and social element of Fullan's professional capital theory strengthens and reinforces the dynamics of Senge's systems thinking in collaborative and efficient ways. The investment in the progression of people matters (Fullan's model) and can only be attained within a system that cultivates the process (Senge's model). Educational leaders nationwide will benefit from the fusion of both Senge's and Fullan's theoretical frameworks as they attempt to establish a system and culture of learning and collaboration among teachers during a time of change.

Figure 1
Systems and Capital Change Model



Review of the Literature

Following the ISTE standards for educational leaders, and to further synthesize and organize the robust literature, effective technology leadership is sub-categorized into five essential aspects: (1) establishing vision; (2) empowering and collaboration; (3) model & advocacy; (4) connected learner; (5) systems designer; and (6) accountability.

Technology leaders must build on a shared vision by collaboratively creating a plan that articulates how technology will be used to enhance learning. Creating a shared technology vision during a change process enables leaders to communicate and collaborate with key stakeholders and facilitate conversations regarding technology initiatives or implementation plans (Schrum et al., 2011; Tucker, 2019). The ISTE leader standards recommend that leaders create a culture where teachers and learners are empowered to use technology in innovative ways (ISTE, 2018). To ensure that teachers feel empowered, technology leaders must provide opportunities for them to learn (e.g., professional learning communities, or PLC's) and participate in conversations that drive and support technology initiatives (e.g., technology committees).

Technology leaders must be willing to model change efforts (Afshari et al., 2010). According to the ISTE standards for education leaders, technology leaders need to model digital citizenship by intentionally adopting

and demonstrating best practices to teach others (ISTE, n.d.). Further, technology leaders must consistently encourage teachers to enhance their teaching craft, actively introduce new technological resources to teachers, and advocate for their usage and effectiveness in the classroom (Hsieh et al., 2014). To stay current and effectively model and advocate for innovative technologies, technology leaders need to stay connected with other leaders as continuous learners of technology. ISTE recommends for technology leaders to sustain a continuous learning mindset in the field of technology by practicing being connected learners (ISTE, n.d.) and remain current with current research, best practices, and technological trends and advancements (Christensen et al. 2018).

According to the ISTE standards for leaders, technology leaders must assure that systems are in place to effectively implement, sustain, and continuously improve the use of instructional technology to support teaching and learning (ISTE, n.d.; Machado & Chung, 2015). Technology leadership involves designing and establishing a system of interrelated support components that promote and invest in the growth and enhancement of the teachers (Bleakley & Mangin, 2013). Part of that system infrastructure include technology committees, professional learning communities (PLC's), enhancement opportunities (e.g., training, workshops), and support teams (e.g., technology coach/es, IT department). It is

necessary for technology leaders to set the path and structure for all the essential components of the system to be established and implemented within the dynamics of a school system. Lastly, ISTE contends that it is important for technology leaders to implement evaluative procedures that allow for the technological growth of teachers (2016). Two current commonly utilized and researched evaluative tools for instructional technology include the Substitution, Augmentation, Modification, Redefinition model (SAMR) and the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge model (TPACK). Technology leaders need technology evaluative and reflective tools along-side them to create and sustain a system of technology integration accountability within their building or district. In an evolving educational technology landscape, it is essential that technology leaders approach technology integration in a systematic and reflective way.

Methodology

The researchers conducted a comparative case study to capture the lived experiences of participants as they navigated technology in their diverse school contexts within a real-life, contemporary context (Creswell & Poth, 2018) – K-12 technology integration during a time of change (e.g., COVID). Purposeful sampling was used to select two high-achieving suburban school districts in opposite counties in Long Island, New York (Nassau and Suffolk). Data collection spanned the 2020–2021 school year. Open-ended, semi-structured interview questions were utilized during both individual and focus group interviews. Each case (school district) within the study provided insight from various stakeholder perspectives (administrators and teachers), which facilitated understanding of their district's technology integration system design during a time of change. Participants included elementary and secondary level principals and teachers, and district-level technology directors and building-level leaders for this study. Additionally, district documents, archived documents (e.g., technology integration plans; Smart School Plan; teacher contracts) and district website were analyzed to gain further input on technology initiatives, budgetary allocations, or contractual

language regarding technology integration efforts. The researchers triangulated the data by utilizing not only three methods of data collection (individual interviews, focus group interviews, document analysis), but also three sources of data from divergent stakeholder voices (leader perspectives, teacher perspectives, varying grade levels) to confirm this study's findings.

Findings

Three pertinent overarching themes emerged from the study:

- Technology Leadership;
- Systems infrastructure; and
- Accountability.

Technology Leadership

The analysis of the interview data found that technology leadership requires a specific set of interpersonal skills to be able to influence teachers' instructional technology usage. In essence, people skills allow technology leaders to build trust and communicate change efforts more effectively. Across both cases, most teacher and leader participants emphasized that technology leaders need patience. Patience to listen and value their perspectives. Patience to understand and acknowledge that teachers have diverse levels of technology proficiency. Both leader and teacher participants across both cases also expressed that technology leaders must have humility to accept assistance from others when needed, and humility to not be afraid to learn along with teachers. Among the main practices identified by most leader and teacher participants included, modeling expectations, allocating time for teachers to learn and practice instructional technology along with colleagues, listening to understand, and practicing a continuous learning mindset. As expressed by many teacher participants from both districts, time is also an essential consideration technology leaders must consider if they want teachers to successfully incorporate technology. Lastly, most district leaders expressed the importance of technology leaders consistently practicing being life-long learners by staying current with best practices, collaborating with other leaders, and seeking learning opportunities.

Systems Infrastructure

The analysis of the interview data found that, overall, systems thinking matters with technology leadership. The findings revealed that every aspect or element of instructional technology relates back to the system that has been put in place to support and sustain it, which leaders are charged with establishing. Most leaders across both districts agreed that adequate bandwidth speed and Wi-Fi capabilities are crucial foundational system needs. Without adequate bandwidth or Wi-Fi capabilities, schools and districts will not be able to sustain technology integration initiatives. In addition to foundational needs, the majority of leader and teacher participants across both cases reported that technology leadership must continuously structure enhancement opportunities for teachers with technology more consistently to enhance their craft. Teachers must have support available when it comes to instructional technology. As such, teacher and leader participants across both districts identified specific technology positions and departments within a K-12 district or school system that provide available support. A prominent position that surfaced from all leader and teacher responses across both districts was the notion that having a designated person (e.g., technology coach) responsible for assisting and guiding teachers' technology usage in the classroom is vital to a district's success with technology integration. The information technology (IT) department was also reported as an essential support component alongside technology coaches. The IT department takes care of all network and hardware/software related matters within instructional technology, while technology coaches focus on the instructional aspect of technology in the classrooms.

Accountability

Findings revealed that technological accountability is an important aspect for an effective technology integration system. The 2018–2021 Instructional Technology Plan from both cases communicated and outlined a three-year plan for the district's technology vision, short-term and long-term goals, and action steps. The presence of each district's 2018–2021 Instructional Technology Plan

showed alignment with the ISTE standards. Moreover, all leader participants shared that their district utilized Google Forms as surveys to gather information from parents, students, teachers, and administrators to evaluate the needs and progress of their technology initiatives. All leader participants also expressed the importance of establishing technology committees within the district to be able to gather stakeholder input and collaboratively work towards a technology vision. Technology committees develop consensus and create and facilitate buy-in from stakeholders at all levels. Another important finding was that no other guiding framework, such as the SAMR model, or standards, such as ISTE, were being utilized by teachers or leaders within each district. Across both districts, findings revealed that most teacher participants from both districts were not knowledgeable or familiar with either standards or framework. This key finding alludes to the notion that ISTE technology standards and guiding frameworks such as SAMR or TPACK are just touching the surface of awareness by K-12 educators. Lastly, the researchers also discovered that contract language regarding instructional technology expectations were non-existent in both district's teacher contracts.

As the findings reflect across both district cases, a system thinking approach is necessary for technology leaders to establish a system of interrelated support components that are integral to the instructional technology infrastructure of schools and districts.

Discussion and Conclusion

Creating a system that nurtures teacher's growth with technology, and providing a framework for consistent collaboration and communication were found to be vital components for a functional, efficient, and effective instructional technology environment in schools. After interviewing and listening to the stories of leaders and teachers from both participating districts, the researchers identified the following key conclusions: a) technology leaders must establish processes and systems design as foundational aspects of the technology infrastructure within a school; and b) accountability for the effectiveness of instructional technology

integration is needed, thus K-12 technology leaders and teachers will benefit from adapting and utilizing models that are guiding, evaluative, and reflective (e.g. ISTE; SAMR; TPACK). Future studies should investigate leader preparation programs and determine if leadership programs are adequately preparing leaders to become technology leaders. The digital divide between school districts with varying demographics are also an area that merits further study. School districts, educational leaders, and leader preparation programs can utilize the findings from this study to provide a basis to inform and guide 21st century technology leadership.

In a continuously emerging technological age marked with rapid change, it has become imperative and necessary to continue understanding the depth of influence that leadership practices and systems and structures have on technology integration efforts at the K-12 school level. Only then can educational leaders establish and sustain the means to experience success with instructional technology implementation initiatives.

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Gustavo Loor, Ed.D., is the current assistant principal at East Meadow High School for East Meadow UFSD.

Catherine DiMartino, Ph.D. is a professor and doctoral coordinator for St. John's University School of Education.





NO AFTERMATH: A COMPARISON OF PRE- AND POST-PANDEMIC ASSESSMENT SCORES FOR MATHEMATICS AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS IN GRADES 3-8

Kenneth Forman, Ph.D. and Craig Markson, Ed.D.
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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to compare pre-pandemic assessment results with post-pandemic assessment results for grades 3 - 8 in the areas of Mathematics and English Language Arts to determine the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and remote learning. A series of independent sample t-tests were conducted in 99 school districts spanning two large adjacent counties located in the Eastern suburbs of New York City. Although the mean passing rates in the Mathematics and English Language Arts Assessments were slightly higher in the post-pandemic year of 2023 when compared with the pre-pandemic year of 2019, the results of the t-tests showed no statistically significant differences. These results supported the conclusion that this region of the country effectively utilized remote instruction and pandemic relief funding to reduce the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on student achievement.

Purpose

Fundamentally, people, organizations, and their various systems change for two reasons: out of inspiration and out of desperation. Clearly, the COVID-19 pandemic was a desperate situation, requiring most school districts to shut down their face-to-face instruction for a period of time and introduce remote instruction. Remote instruction forced school districts to further embrace technology as a means to initiate virtual classrooms. Critics of remote instruction have argued that virtual learning was an inferior substitute for traditional face-to-face instruction. Furthermore, studies have found that virtual

connectedness was not an adequate substitute for in-person connectedness and the face-to-face social isolation brought on by the pandemic. Social isolation had social, emotional, and academic consequences, particularly among elementary and middle school students (Islam & Islam, 2023; Miller & Schueler, 2022; Schneider, 2024).

Conversely, prior research by Forman and Markson (2021) found that technology could and should be leveraged to enhance student achievement, particularly in the New York State Mathematics and English Language Arts Assessments for grades 3 - 8. As a result of these concerns and controversies stemming from the pandemic, the purpose of this study was to compare pre-pandemic assessment results with post-pandemic assessment results for grades 3 - 8 in the areas of Mathematics and English Language Arts to determine the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and remote instruction.

Theoretical Framework

COVID-19, Learning Loss, Remote Instruction and District-Wide Strategies to Cope with the Pandemic

This investigation examined reading and mathematics achievement during the pre- and post-pandemic periods to evaluate districts' efforts to support its student learning. It also reviewed studies that analyzed the impact of COVID-19 on student success.

Newsday reported the latest data on reading and mathematics achievement, which showed that about 50 percent of students tested statewide versus 58 percent in

Nassau and Suffolk counties were proficient in math. In English Language Arts, the figures were about 48 percent and 53 percent, respectively. State education department officials who run the annual assessment program said scoring was more complex than usual because it involved switching to new academic guidelines known as Next Generation Learning Standards from the Common Core Standards. Academic progress was increasingly concerning as New York State boosted its financial investment in public education. Over the past three years, state lawmakers have approved record increases in aid, including more than \$1.6 billion for Island schools alone (Hildebrand, 2024).

Districts have struggled to implement widescale, academically intensive interventions post-pandemic to ameliorate students' academic performance as a result of the COVID-19 hiatus. Researchers from the National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education examined a variety of interventions, including tutoring, small group instruction, extended school days or years, and expanded summer school opportunities. The researchers focused on 12 districts in 10 states that together enrolled more than 600,000 students with a higher-than-average proportion of minority students and high-poverty schools. The data indicated that these types of programs reached about 20 percent to 30 percent of the targeted students, equal to about 5 percent to 10 percent of the total population of students. The researchers found that district leaders struggled to implement programs at the intended scale and intensity, especially with the many extraordinary challenges districts faced during the COVID-19 school years, such as continued COVID-19 surges and increased mental health needs of students and staff, so that academic growth was challenging (Carbonari et al., 2022).

Moreover, districts faced difficulties in student engagement, staffing, scheduling, and getting buy-in from parents and the community. The researchers also found that students generally fell behind academically. However, parents tended to think their own children were doing okay academically and that the problem was elsewhere. The researchers concluded that complete academic recovery and acceleration were urgent to ameliorate learning loss (Carbonari

et al., 2022).

Another study by Kurtz et al. (2023) examined learning loss. School and district leaders were asked whether teachers in their schools or school systems increased or decreased their focus on small group work in order to help their students master material they should have learned during the pandemic but didn't. Sixty-four percent observed an increase, while 34 percent observed no change, and just 2 percent noted a decrease. Furthermore, seventy-four percent of administrators working in suburban communities saw an increase in teachers' emphasis on this approach compared to 69 percent in urban school systems and 56 percent in rural areas. The researchers found that respondents from rural communities were more likely than their peers in suburban or urban areas to report that use of group work had not changed compared to pre-pandemic levels. Forty-four percent of rural respondents but just 31 percent of urban and 22 percent of suburban leaders saw no changes in this practice.

Schwartz (2023) cited a study by Emily Oster, a professor of economics at Brown University, and School Hub Director, who concluded that students have made some progress toward academic recovery, but overall achievement hasn't yet reached pre-pandemic levels. The School Hub recently aggregated 2023 student-test-score results across grades 3-8 in math and reading for about half of all states. The results showed that most states have made up some ground in math, compared to the earlier school years. However, in reading, some states have made progress while others have regressed. Only a few states have recovered to pre-pandemic levels: Iowa and Mississippi in math and ELA, and South Carolina and Tennessee in ELA.

The latest data from the COVID-19 School Data Hub indicated that students have progressed toward academic recovery, but overall achievement hasn't reached pre-pandemic levels. The results further showed that most states have made up some ground in math, compared to the 2020-21 school year. However, the data for reading was less substantive. In reading, some states were making progress while others have regressed (Schwartz, 2023).

When comparing 2019 state assessments

with 2021, Hudson et al. (2022) found a decline in scores on Mathematics and English Language Arts Assessments in California, for grades 5 – 8 across the board. There was one exception in this study, with grade 8 performing higher in 2021 when compared with 2019 on the English Language Arts assessment. In a similar study of Mathematics and English Language Arts Assessments for grades 5 – 8 in the State of Pennsylvania, Lipscomb et al. (2022) found a partial recovery on these assessments. However, the scores still were well below the 2019 pre-pandemic year, compared to 2022. The partial recovery was more significant in the area of English Language Arts.

Sahni et al. (2021) conducted a meta-analysis of the research literature of remote instruction during the pandemic. The researchers found improved outcomes in English Language Arts from online teaching but not in the areas of Mathematics for grades K – 12. In contrast, Golden et al. (2023) found achievement gaps across multiple subjects widened under remote instruction, specifically as it related to diverse students living in poverty and students with disabilities.

Students in Florida, where a school was in person during the pandemic, 97 percent of the 2021–22 school year, experienced the same five-point decline in fourth-grade math scores as in California, where students were only seven percent of the year. Reading scores showed similar results. The expectation was that the states with the longest school closures would fare far worse in student outcomes than those where schools were reopened foremost of the school year, but that did not prove to be true (Bailey, 2023).

Islam, M. A., and Islam, M. R. (2023) revealed a substantial increase in children's use of social media platforms and screen time during the pandemic, with many students spending excessive amounts of time online. This finding supported the notion that academic achievement has been interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, the study found that excessive social media and screen time usage was linked to adverse effects on child development in areas such as cognitive, physical, emotional, and social development. These results emphasized the necessity for parents, educators, and policymakers to address the issue of excessive

screen time and promote alternative activities that promote healthy child development (Islam, M. A. & Islam, M. R., 2023).

Data Sources

The New York State Education Department {NYSED} Data site (2023) was the primary source of data in this study. The school districts selected for the analyses were from Nassau and Suffolk County, New York. These school districts were from two large adjacent counties located in the Eastern suburbs of New York City. A total of 99 school districts were included in this study, from the pre-pandemic year of 2019 and the post-pandemic year of 2023. Several school districts were excluded from this region for having fewer than 100 test-takers or for not being full K–12 school districts that included testing on the full range of grades from 3 – 8 in Mathematics and English Language Arts Assessments. The researchers purposefully chose a testing year immediately preceding the pandemic (2019) to compare with a year immediately following the pandemic (2023), as well as a range of assessments for grades that would have included a large block of students who went through either all or part of the pandemic. Doing this could determine if the pandemic and remote instruction caused "learning loss" (Schneider; 2024).

It should be noted that the New York State Mathematics and English Language Arts Assessments for grades 3 – 8 do evolve over time. For example, computerized testing was implemented in some school districts in 2023, as opposed to none in 2019. While the core content and learning objectives remained largely the same, the learning objectives differed slightly between the 2019 Common Core Standards and the 2023 Next Generation Learning Standards due to ongoing teaching and learning refinements. Additionally, the 2023 Mathematics and English Language Arts Assessments saw significant changes in cut scores and performance standards compared to 2019. Finally, the 2023 assessment included field-tested items, while the 2019 versions did not. This means the 2023 test may have included some new content not yet fully integrated into teaching and learning. The researchers examined the test objectives of the 2019 and 2023 Mathematics and English Language Arts Assessments, comparing the

objectives and found both examinations had compatible objectives, with somewhat more complexity in 2023 testing (Amin, 2023, NYSED, 2017a, 2017b).

Method

The grades 3 – 8 Mathematics and English Language Arts Assessments had four reporting levels. Level 1 was the lowest level, and this score was characterized as performing below grade-level expectations. A Level 2 score was described as only partially proficient but still below the grade-level standards. A Level 3 score was considered to meet grade-level standards, and Level 4 was described as exceeding grade-level standards (NYSED, 2024). Independent samples t-tests were performed comparing the percent of students who achieved Levels 3 and 4 scores on the grades 3 – 8 Mathematics and English Language Arts Assessments among the 2019 and 2023 reporting years for the contributing school districts in Nassau and Suffolk County, New York.

Results

Table 1 below shows the independent samples t-test comparing the pre-pandemic year of 2019 with the post-pandemic year of 2023 on the Mathematics Assessments. Although the mean passing rates on the Mathematics Assessments were slightly higher in the post pandemic year of 2023, the results of the t-test showed that there were no statistically significant differences between the pre and post pandemic year on the passing rates for the grades 3 – 8 Mathematics Assessments, $p > .05$.

Table 1								
Pre and Post Pandemic Differences on Mathematics Assessments (N2019 = 99, N2023 = 99)								
	Year	N	M	SD	SEM	t	df	p
Math	2019	99	60.85	16.88	1.70	-0.919	196	0.359
	2023	99	63.11	17.76	1.78			

Table 2 below shows the independent samples t-test comparing the English Language Arts Assessments from the pre-pandemic year of 2019 to the post-pandemic year of 2023. Although the mean passing rates

on the English Language Arts Assessments were slightly higher in the post-pandemic year of 2023, the results of the t-test showed that there were no statistically significant differences between the pre- and post-pandemic year on the passing rates for the grades 3 – 8 English Language Arts Assessments, $p > .05$.

Table 2								
Pre- and Post-Pandemic Differences on ELA Assessments (N2019 = 99, N2023 = 99)								
	Year	N	M	SD	SEM	t	df	p
ELA	2019	99	52.00	15.93	1.60	-0.99	196	0.323
	2023	99	55.52	31.52	3.17			

Conclusion

The results of this study suggested that this region of the country effectively utilized remote instruction as well as State and Federal pandemic relief funding. There was no "learning loss" as measured by the New York State Mathematics and English Language Arts Assessments for grades 3 – 8 when comparing pre-and post-pandemic results. These findings were consistent with the findings of prior research by Forman and Markson (2021), that technology could and should be leveraged to enhance student achievement, particularly in the New York State Mathematics and English Language Arts Assessments for grades 3 – 8.

Implications of the Research and Recommendations for Future Studies

While critics of "too much" technology, remote instruction, and excessive screentime have argued that there is no substitute for in-person instruction, there clearly was evidence supporting its usage during the pandemic in this region of the country. Perhaps those critics were what has been commonly referred to as "digital immigrants," and the pandemic students in grades 3 – 8 were "digital natives" who could appreciate a greater degree of instructional technologies to enhance their learning. Future research should be qualitative in nature to gain a better understanding of generational differences in technological aptitudes and appreciations.

The researchers would be remiss if they

didn't recommend future studies to determine how the school districts in both Nassau and Suffolk County, New York, effectively utilized technology, remote instruction, and pandemic relief funding to reduce the pandemic's negative impacts on student achievement. The detrimental impact COVID-19 had on student success was noted throughout the research literature, and as a result, what occurred in the school districts in Nassau and Suffolk County, New York, was truly special.

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Craig Markson, Ed.D., is the Director of the Educational Leadership Program at Stony Brook University, in Stony Brook, New York.

Kenneth Forman, Ph.D., is the Associate Director of the Educational Leadership Program at Stony Brook University, in Stony Brook, New York.



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| Editor's Note - Spring 2026

I am privileged to introduce this most special issue that is the sum of our collective desire to celebrate this journal's academic research and application triumphs across its 25 years. In this journal you will find our articles' selection of those submitted for this spring.

In addition, you will find articles that we have selected that are the most cited articles in five themes we've established across the journal's tenure.

We will also provide you information about how these were selected and commentary about how ideas and issues have evolved across the journal's twenty-five years. Check our website for more information!

SCOPE's Executive Director, Mr. George Duffy, has provided his greetings and comments across the journal's years. In addition and as important, Mr. Duffy has dedicated this journal to Dr. Robert Manley who was its founding editor and continues to contribute mightily to its efforts.

Fittingly Dr. Manley has provided a column introducing the reprinted articles.

You will also enjoy our newest feature, a Letter to the Editor page where readers and researchers are invited to comment on our offerings.

Having often used the futures theme in these columns this is one more where the notion of future unites the articles we have published in our Spring 26 segment of our 25th anniversary issue. In this case the future-based metaphor is Architecting a Responsive Educational Ecosystem

The core theme here is moving education from a static, one-size-fits-all institution to a dynamic, responsive ecosystem. Every piece we have shared deals with recognizing the

complexities of the modern student and adapting the system to meet them where they are, all the while acknowledging the real-world constraints of doing so.

Here is how the pieces build that theme:

- ***The Inclusivity Mandate (Culture & Language)***: In Community Perceptions of a Culturally Responsive English Language Arts Assessments, Nisha A. Julien and Thao T. Vo from Washington State University use innovative qualitative research methodology to consider arguments that the educational system must recognize, measure and value the diverse cultural and linguistic realities of today's communities that demand layered and rich analyses.
- ***The Human Engine (Agency & Collaboration)***: Teacher Agency as a Catalyst for Student Empowerment, Molloy University's Joanna Alcruz, Mubina Schroder, and Andrea Honigsfeld highlight the professional development responsibility to provide teachers and special educators with the capacity to find meaningful ways to be mutually effective in their common tasks. This self-study emphasizes that change happens when teachers are empowered to act and work together.
- ***The Reality Check (Infrastructure)***: Dr. John Galligan's The Reality of Funding Quality Schools grounds the discussion. You can't build a future-driven system without addressing the harsh math of state aid and local revenue. Add in to that notion by adhering to vision and principles a district espouses in the face of these challenges.

- **A Known/Unknown Future (Cultural Intelligence):** In *Beyond Bilingualism*, Dr. Ann Macaluso's research suggests that students' level of Cultural Intelligence is affected by language proficiency and clearly lays out the rationale for expanding language education requirements to promote these attributes. Were we to make room for this premise we are more likely to be part of the global fabric.
- **Greasing the components, (Sustaining the Engine):** Transformational leadership and grit on the actions of principals in secondary schools, co-authored by Dr. Michael Doria and Eustace Thompson's qualitative study examine the qualities of persistence and grit as embedded in characteristics of transformational practice that more nearly assure effective schools. Their findings suggest that leaders that are gritty and transformational have higher instances of retention in their leadership role.
Editor's Note: We wish to point out that this article is co-authored by Dr. Eustace Thompson whose passing is a true loss to educational leadership development for this Journal and for prospective administrator students!
- **The Ultimate Goal (The Unknown Future), Our Think Tank Feature:** We're Preparing for a World That Doesn't Exist Yet serves as the thesis statement for the whole collection. It highlights why all the above changes—funding, agency, cultural responsiveness—are urgently necessary; Dr. Gabriella Franza (Administrative Writer), Morgan Jackson (Student Writer), Brianna Horneck (Student Writer), Bruce Revels III (Student Writer), and Kylee Hopkins (Student Writer) provide unique and refreshing perspectives.
- **Letter to the Editor:** Dr. John Coverdale's *Letter to the Editor* in reference to Dr. Robert Manley's Fall 25 piece about innovative

hiring practices within the DEI conversation is terrific material for continuing dialogue in our newest feature where we invite commentary about our publication choices.

- **Book Review, The Several C's and the Ultimate C:** Dr. Bernato reviews Dr. Kevin Perks latest book, *School Leader's Guide to VITAL Collaboration*, building and sustaining PLC Systems that improve teaching and learning by advocating a thoughtful and comprehensive process based strategy – set to assure rapid, effective, and sustainable ends.

Together, this issue looks backwards to recognize how this journal has evolved and looks forward to a future that seems poised to ask: *Do we have the resources, the empowered educators, and the cultural awareness necessary to propel ourselves into an entirely unknown future?*



*Richard Bernato, Ed.D.
Editor-In-Chief
Journal for Leadership and
Instruction*

COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS OF CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS ASSESSMENTS

Nisha A. Julien, Ph.D. and Thao Vo, Ph.D.
Center for Measurement Justice

Abstract

This qualitative study comprised 23 community members' perceptions on engagement and emotional impact of an English Language Arts (ELA) fifth-grade culturally responsive assessment (CRA). Selected passages aligned with Gay's Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) qualities, giving priority to qualities that parents and teachers identified as important. Students expressed curiosity, higher self-efficacy, increased positive emotions, and greater engagement after, preferring CRAs over traditional assessments. Parents and teachers perceived CRAs as a promising step toward student engagement and addressing systemic K-12 assessment inequities. Implications are for those seeking to improve assessment and learning outcomes.

Introduction

In today's educational context, initiatives like Science of Reading (SoR) and implementing high-quality instructional materials (HQIM) focus on improving K-12 literacy where standardized English language arts (ELA) tests serve as a major accountability measure. An essential yet underemphasized component is the integration of relevant diverse student culture, including assessments in measuring accurate student learning and growth (Taylor & Ferrara, 2025). Cultural responsiveness in assessments builds equitable opportunities to demonstrate learning and knowledge in uplifting ways (Taylor & Ferrara, 2025).

Culturally Responsive Assessment (CRA) is a conceptual approach evaluating students'

knowledge, skills, and understanding by factoring unique cultural identities (Walker et al., 2023). This approach normalizes students' diverse backgrounds in demonstrating proficiency. While culturally responsive education has historical roots, such as "culturally relevant pedagogy" (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and "culturally responsive teaching" (CRT) (Gay, 2000), its application in assessment is a recent development.

Research indicates traditional assessments, like K-12 state tests, often center dominant societal experiences, norms, and views (i.e. mainstream white, Eurocentric) (Russell; 2023; Taylor & Ferrara, 2025). While these assessments aim for fairness through standardization (i.e., uniform administration, scoring, and interpretation), this "one-size-fits-all" approach can disadvantage students from marginalized backgrounds (Evans, 2025; Randall, 2021). Therefore, developing fair assessments includes creating opportunities for all learners to accurately display learning that honors their experiences and values. Few studies have examined students' experiences and perceptions of CRA content (e.g. Patterson, 2025; Randall, 2025).

A U.S. curriculum and assessment vendor and the Center for Measurement Justice (CMJ) partnered in this qualitative study to examine the impact of an ELA Common Core State Standards (CCSS)-aligned CRA on the emotions and engagement of fifth-grade students at a school in the southern U.S. Research questions (RQ) included: 1) How do community members perceive the impact of ELA CRA on students' emotions and engagement? and, 2) What are key considerations for improving an ELA CRA?

Findings offer practical considerations for assessment developers, educators (e.g., administrators and teachers), and district leaders to improve assessment for students from historically marginalized backgrounds. While the vendor remains anonymous at their request, this study used their standardized reading assessment product. The vendor has been rated as a HQIM by EdReports in 2023. This program is adapted across U.S. K-12 public schools and is grounded in the SoR for multiple grades, including grades K-8.

Methodology

Participants/Community Members

A total of 23 community members (students = 11, parents = 4, and teachers = 8) volunteered to participate. All participants identified as Black and/or African American with English as their primary language. Among the 11 students who participated, eight identified as female and three as male. Among four parents, three identified as female and one as male. All eight teachers identified as Black and/or African American.

ELA Assessment

Students received twenty minutes to work on a fifth-grade ELA CRA. The three passages aligned with CRA qualities adapted by Randall (2025) from Gay’s (2000) framework on CRT. Table 1 displays key components of the ELA CRA.

Data Collection Process

Following the administration of the CRA via the Questionmark platform, students participated in either twenty-minute focus groups (n=2) or cognitive interviews (n=2). Cognitive interviews were conducted to understand the cognitive processes that the participants engaged in while taking the ELA assessment. Teachers and parents independently reviewed the assessment and then completed semi-structured interviews (n=7). Each conversation was recorded via Zoom. Participants received a \$50 electronic gift card after completion.

Thematic Analysis

Participant audio files were saved, anonymized, and transcribed by Zoom. All transcripts were uploaded into NVivo (Version 15) software (QSR International Pty Ltd., 2024) for inductive open coding. The open inductive coding process ensured participants’ language and sentiments were represented when deriving codes. Researchers created a codebook to track participant anonymized numbers, identify example participant quotes, define codes derived from examples, and establish the final code. The inductive open coding process allowed codes to emerge directly from the data, refining existing codes or expanding them further.

Inter-coder reliability was calculated to evaluate coding consistency between two researchers. First, the lead researcher coded three transcripts to create an initial codebook saturation. Then, another CMJ researcher coded one transcript using the initial codebook. Both CMJ researchers met to discuss coding consistency within the first transcript before coding 20% of the total transcripts. Afterwards, the two researchers discussed the transcripts and codes until 100% agreement was reached.

Table 1
Culturally Responsive English Language Arts Assessment Composition

Passage	Summary	CRA Quality	CCSS	MC Items
Passage One	Main character experiences an unintentionally harmful comment about sunscreen and skin color by a friend. Through honest conversation, the friendship deepens and her friend gains understanding.	Validating	RL5.2 RL5.6 RL5.1 RL5.2	4
Passage Two	A young child raises awareness for Cesar Chavez Day in his community, urging others to honor Chavez’s legacy through service and efforts to improve lives.	Empowering	RI5.2 RI5.6 RI5.2 RI5.4	4
Passage Three	Main character and his sister connect with a classmate from a different cultural background through a shared tradition of whistling. They build a friendship and sense of belonging overcoming embarrassment.	Humanistic	RL5.2 RL5.3 RL5.2	3

Key Findings

RQ1: How do community members perceive the impact of ELA CRA?

Overall, students expressed curiosity, higher self-efficacy, increased positive emotions, and higher engagement following the CRA experience. All students reported favoring CRAs over traditional assessments because they felt like they “belonged” due to relevant topics such as shared values, curiosity about healthy conflict resolution, and reflection of lived experiences. Students reported being confused by passages that lacked enough detail and passages that had too many details, making it difficult to follow the story. Student discussion emphasized how students value CRAs as long as they are presented in a specific way. Specifically in “positive,” “encouraging,” “uplifting,” and “making them think about the world” ways. Parents and teachers described the content students were trying to describe as being framed as “asset-based.”

In addition to students’ expression of positive emotions, greater engagement, and increased self-efficacy and belonging, parents and teachers viewed CRAs as opportunities for learning (i.e., learning through assessment) and assessment as learning (i.e., using the assessment itself to deepen learning). They also viewed CRAs as an opportunity for social-emotional growth, where students could reflect and learn emotional skills such as empathy from the content. There were also opportunities for improvements to CRAs to create more societal value of the assessment and an inclusive experience. Recognizing that traditional assessments have had over a century to evolve, parents and teachers acknowledged the importance of allowing CRAs time and space for iteration and refinement (Araneda, 2025; Hamdani et al., 2025). One area of divergent ideas between parents and teachers was around passage details. While teachers emphasized the importance of students discerning key details from the text, parents preferred minimizing what they perceived as extraneous details to prevent student confusion altogether.

Cognitive Impacts CRAs Had On Students

Even when students (n=9) expressed that

they disliked a passage (Passage Two and Passage Three), they were actively engaging with the content, as expressed through verbal reflections on their own thoughts, reactions, and actions if they were in a similar situation as the passage. As a result, students reported social-emotional growth, like empathy, and being called to action, seen through their verbal processing comments of “understand[ing] why the main character felt excluded” (Passage Three) or “feeling inspired after seeing the peaceful community organizing” (Passage Two). These comments by students display text-to-self reflections with shifting emotions (e.g., feeling inspired), which affirms the “assessment as learning” perspective that parents and teachers perceive CRAs fostering.

Students also demonstrated sustained engagement despite disliking a passage. Passage Two was a historical-fiction text that five students shared they did not “care for.” However, in both focus groups, students explicitly reported increased confidence (i.e., self-efficacy) in answering multiple-choice questions, attributable to having previously learned about Chavez in the school’s history curriculum earlier in the school year. Interestingly, liking a passage was not the only factor required to increase engagement. One student expressed, “Well...I’ve read a lot of Cesar Chavez, so I was just thinking what new information could I get from this text?” This reflection demonstrated active thinking by searching for new knowledge (i.e., assessment for learning). The student reported “feeling confident” in their ability to answer multiple-choice questions, explaining how their background knowledge increased self-efficacy and engagement despite disliking the text.

Despite differences in cultural, racial, and ethnic backgrounds between students and the characters of certain passages, students shared that they felt they could connect or relate to some aspect of each passage, further validating their lived experiences. This is important because all students reported feeling connected to the content, empathizing with characters who “looked different than them” due to shared experiences like sibling dynamics or affirmed sense of belonging (i.e., Passage One and Three).

CRAs Disrupt Traditional Assessment Past and Present Harm

Parents and educators perceived CRAs to actively disrupt harm caused by traditional assessments by including asset-based content countering deficit-based narratives and stereotypes. Parents and teachers viewed traditional assessments as undermining self-efficacy of culturally diverse students because they perpetuate deficit-based single-story narratives and content, or omit these narratives altogether (Adichie, 2009, 4:15).

Currently, in traditional assessment experiences, marginalized students are required to contextualize contexts that often center on dominant societal norms (Evans, 2023). CRAs have the potential to reduce that cognitive load and shift more directly in evaluating standards students are expected to meet. This sentiment of CRAs helping marginalized students with engagement was seen when a student remarked that the CRA experience was “still boring...because tests are boring when you have to sit there...but [CRA] passages actually had something interesting about them and [I] understood a lot.” Six students found the CRA test “boring” due to factors like passage length, number of multiple-choice items, and pre-existing beliefs that “tests are boring.” Despite this, 100% of students reported preferring CRA over traditional (e.g., state exams).

RQ2: What are key considerations for improving an ELA CRA?

Developing Student-Centered Assessments

Community members presented considerations to improve the next iteration of CRAs. Key considerations include identifying what culturally relevant content is for students from diverse backgrounds. This would require practitioners, such as assessment developers, school districts, administrators, and teachers, to talk with students and families in identifying trends in themes and topics that spark students’ curiosity, as this can be a key factor in increasing engagement. This co-creation approach can be more effective than simply relying on students’ preferences (e.g., liking a passage), since students need to develop the ability to stay motivated with topics they might not enjoy, as not all subjects will appeal to them in future assessments. By increasing

content relevance, students can strengthen their sense of identity, self-efficacy, and belonging. Content relevance can also position assessments to better reflect students’ prior knowledge, creating authentic opportunities to apply standards-based learning.

Balancing Details and Brevity

Another consideration is balancing essential details with brevity to support comprehension and mitigate confusion. While confusion does not necessarily lead to disengagement, as expressed by students and parents who experienced Passage Three, it can create misunderstandings in reading comprehension. For example, participants appreciated the themes of the passage, specifically how people from different cultures “learn about other cultures and the way those cultures interact.” This sentiment supports the CRA quality of “Humanistic” (i.e., fostering empathy and understanding), which the passage was intentionally aligned with. Yet, some participants missed key details that would have helped them identify themes due to confusion while trying to situate and comprehend the text. When this balance was not achieved, students reported struggling to grasp themes, impacting their comprehension, emotions, and engagement.

Validating Lived Experiences While Addressing Bias

Considerations of clarity in diverse representations helps address potential unintentional biases. For example, although participants enjoyed Passage One, aligned to the CRA quality of “Validating” (i.e., accurate representation of lived experiences), parents and teachers suggested clarifying the main character’s friend’s skin color. This detail mitigates confusion and potential bias about a friend’s racial identity and combats stereotypes around sunscreen usage for different racial identities and skin tones. During a student cognitive interview, one student assumed the main character’s friend was “White,” revealing the unintentional bias that parents and teachers perceived. This reflection highlights how missing details can unintentionally perpetuate biases. Community members found it validating to



see a lived experience reflected in assessments and learn how to address conflict with supportive accountability as modeled by the main character. Parents and teachers stated the importance of providing specific details to not detract from the major themes around forgiveness, accountability, and grace.

Updating the Development Process and Future Topics

When writing passages or items that are culturally responsive, it is important to consider incorporating qualities of CRA throughout the process, particularly during brainstorming and the writing process of items and passages (Hamdani et al., 2026). The intentional use of the qualities of CRA in assessment development has a positive impact on both student emotions and engagement when implemented effectively. This positive impact is apparent in all passages, where each passage was written to a CRA quality and students expressed the intended effect.

Limitations

There are several limitations. One limitation was time constraints (e.g., insufficient interview time, the time of day interviews

occurred, parent/guardian pick-up time). Additionally, students' independent reading levels were unaccounted for. This means that the assessment, while written on grade level, could have been on, above, or below a student's independent reading level, influencing engagement and emotions. Also, both reading levels and previous assessment experiences may have contributed to a student's assessment experience, including feelings of testing anxiety or boredom. Testing anxiety can affect emotional responses and engagement. These feelings can manifest in various ways (e.g., task avoidance, excessive talking during the assessment, and focus) but were not measured. Lastly, while participant sizes typically for generalizable studies are larger, these key considerations shared by a historically marginalized group often not included in research (Randall, 2021) are necessary in disrupting processes of marginalization. This study contributes to the growing body of research in studying participant responses to CRA content (e.g. Patterson, 2025, Randall, 2025) rather than prescriptive, causal, or universally generalizable conclusions. These insights are recommended to be viewed as starting points for practice and future research with key considerations rather than definitive recommendations in CRAs.

Conclusion

The goal is not two separate assessment systems, but rather to re-evaluate and re-define the current assessment model (Evans, 2025). The redefinition of the current model involves embedding diverse culturally relevant content. For practitioners, this means asking: 1) Who are we serving? 2) What content is most relevant to their lived experiences and identities? 3) How can we reflect that relevance in assessments while still measuring academic standards? Engaging directly with the marginalized communities served rather than relying on top-down practices mitigates risks of reinforcing stereotypes (Hamdani et al., 2025). HQIM and SoR supports rigor in literacy development, but equity demands examining how culturally relevant these materials are from curriculum to assessment. When students feel connected to content, practitioners are more likely to receive accurate data to better support students' learning and trajectories.

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Nisha A. Julien, PhD., CEO/Founder, Collective Futures, LLC
 Thao T. Vo, PhD., Research Associate, in the Learning & Performance Research Center at Washington State University

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TEACHER AGENCY AS A CATALYST FOR STUDENT EMPOWERMENT: A SELF-STUDY EXPLORATION IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

Joanna Alcruz, Ed.D., Mublina Schroeder, Ph.D. and Andrea Honigsfeld, Ed.D.
Molloy University

Abstract

This study examines how teacher agency is enacted within a social-justice-centered education leadership program. Three faculty members engaged in a collaborative inquiry to explore how their identities and commitments to equity shaped their pedagogical practices. Grounded in Rios' (2018) conscious engagement framework of teacher agency for equity, this collaborative self-study examined narratives, shared reflections, and teaching artifacts through dimensions of purpose, competence, autonomy, and reflexivity. Findings suggest that teacher identity informed how agency was enacted in practice, particularly through modeling, mentorship, and reflective dialogue. While student outcomes were not examined directly, the study highlights how teacher agency becomes visible within leadership preparation contexts and offers insights into the role of reflective identity in equity-oriented teaching.

Introduction

Within teacher and leadership education programs, there is a growing emphasis on ways to prepare educators to facilitate learning, challenge inequitable practices, and cultivate transformative learning spaces (Sheilds & Hesbol, 2020). At the heart of this transformative work is teacher agency. This dynamic, content-based capacity empowers educators to purposefully and reflectively act to shape their pedagogical practice and educational environments. Meaningful

collaboration, mentorship, and exposure to equity-centered pedagogical practices are essential when cultivating teacher identity and agency (Avalos, 2011). This research contributes to the growing literature on teacher identity and agency. Specifically, this study examines how teacher agency is defined and enacted within a social justice-oriented leadership program. Through collaborative self-study, we explored how our identities informed our pedagogical choices and mentoring practices. Rather than evaluating student outcomes, the focus of this inquiry is on how agency is expressed in practice and how those enactments shape the learning environment.

Literature Review

Teacher identity is a dynamic and multidimensional construct of a teacher's sense of self, shaped by beliefs, experiences, and social interaction within and beyond the classroom. Research on teacher knowledge and beliefs (e.g., Pajares, 1992; Vygotsky, 1986) defines teacher identity as a personal and political process that is shaped by reflective practice and professional engagement. Flores (2023) argues that teacher identity encompasses agency, reflection, and pedagogical commitment across diverse educational settings, while Yazan (2022) speaks to the importance of reflective practices in shaping identity, especially in navigating tensions between personal values and institutional expectations. Teacher identity can also become a pedagogical tool to better understand the holistic development of

teaching practices (Sahling & De Carvalho, 2021).

There is a strong connection between teacher self-knowledge and agency, where the more attuned educators are to their values, cultural identities, and positionalities, the more intentional they can be in engaging in transformative and responsive pedagogies. Cong-Lem (2021) in the recent systematic review on this topic identified teacher agency as a process that is both situated and developmental, and is anchored in three dimensions: (a) iterative, which is based on past experiences; (b) practical-evaluative, which is dependent on the current context; and (c) projective, which is oriented toward future goals. Teacher agency goes beyond a personal trait and is shaped by the interplay between individual capacity and the socio-cultural and structural conditions of the educational settings in which they work (Biesta et al., 2015). Teachers who embrace and take pride in their cultural identity can also support an authentic classroom environment, potentially facilitating more engaged learning (Impedevio, 2021). Consequently, teacher identity may shape how teacher agency is enacted in practice.

Teacher Identity in Relation to Teacher Agency

Teacher identity and teacher agency are closely connected in the literature; however, they present some key differences. Teacher identity reflects the evolving sense of self shaped by cultural background, lived experience, professional commitments, and reflective practice (Buchanan, 2015; Cong-Lem, 2021). Conversely, identity reflects how teachers understand themselves and their commitments; teacher agency refers to the enactment of those commitments within specific institutional and relational contexts (Biesta et al., 2015). In this study, identity is understood as foundational, informing how we see our role as educators. At the same time, agency represents the ways those understandings are expressed in pedagogical decision-making and justice-oriented action. Distinguishing between the two allows for a more focused examination of how identity informs practice.

For the purpose of this study, we conceptualize teacher agency as a construct

that is contextually situated and focuses on the reflexive ability to act purposefully in line with the teacher's professional commitments to equity and social justice. This definition builds on the work of Rios' (2018) conscientious engagement framework, with the focus on purpose, competence, autonomy, and reflexivity. It also aligns with Biesta et al.'s (2015) understanding of agency as shaped by past experiences, enacted within present contexts, and oriented toward future goals. Within this context, teacher identity reflects the evolving sense of self shaped by both lived and professional experiences. In contrast, teacher agency refers to how that identity is enacted in practice, especially in relation to equity and social justice

Student Agency

While this study centers on teacher identity and teacher agency, these constructs are often discussed in relation to student development. In leadership preparation contexts, the ways faculty enact agency may influence how students understand their own roles and responsibilities. For this reason, it is important to consider how student agency is conceptualized in the literature briefly.

Student agency refers to the learner's capacity to act purposefully, critically, and with autonomy in shaping their educational journey and communities (Mameli et al., 2023). The development of student agency can be meaningfully shaped by teacher agency, in which educators intentionally model justice-oriented practices (Min et al., 2021). Educational leadership programs that support teachers in their quest for reflective awareness of their own identity and agency can subsequently help create learning environments that encourage students (Roegman et al., 2021). Offering students opportunities to observe how their educators leverage their professional roles to advocate for marginalized communities may shape how students interpret and engage with questions of advocacy and change.

Theoretical Framework

Rios' conscientious engagement framework for teacher agency (2018) provided the lens through which our study revealed the complexity of the interactions between and

among the multiple selves we claim. It also helped us problematize the notions of personal and professional selves and allowed for meaningful connections between and among the various acts we engage in. The framework outlines four interrelated dimensions of conscious teacher engagement: (a) purpose, (b) competence, (c) autonomy, and (d) reflexivity. The sense of purpose reflects the teacher's clarity of vision and intentionality in aligning pedagogical decisions with social justice goals. It is guided by a moral and ethical commitment to disrupt inequity and affirm student identities.

Competence relates to pedagogical content knowledge and the critical awareness required to navigate complex cultural, political, and institutional contexts. It involves developing skills that enable teachers to respond effectively to students' diverse needs. Autonomy reflects the ability to act according to one's convictions—even when the level informs those who challenge dominant norms or policies of professional agency and critical consciousness. Reflexivity relates to the sustained practice of self-reflection, where educators examine how their positionalities, biases, and experiences shape their teaching and student relationships.

This study examined how three researchers define and enact teacher agency for equity and social justice in their teaching practices. After defining the negotiated identities in professional and personal spaces, we examined our engagement practices with students through four distinct lenses: a sense of purpose, competence, autonomy, and reflexivity. The following research questions guided our systematic examination of our practice in support of our students: (a) How is teacher agency enacted in our teaching practices through a sense of purpose, competence, autonomy, and reflexivity? (b) What notions of teacher agency emerge as most salient in how we engage with, mentor, and facilitate learning for our students? (c) How do we relate our teacher identity to the teacher agency in the context of social justice?

Research Design and Methodology

We employed a qualitative self-study methodology, centering reflective practice to enhance our teaching. Self-study, qualitative

and autobiographical in nature, focuses on the researcher's lived experience as a base of inquiry (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009). It encourages deep examination of one's teaching to foster professional growth. As Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) note, self-study seeks to balance personal reflection with the shared realities of professional practice, emphasizing not the self alone but the insight that emerges in dialogue with educational theory and collective knowledge (Clandinin & Connelly, 2007).

The choice of self-study as a methodology for this inquiry was based on the alignment with our research questions that centered on how we understand and enact teacher agency within our own teaching practices. Since the focus of the study was on examining our lived experiences, identity negotiations, and pedagogical decision-making in context, a methodology that positioned practitioner knowledge as a basis of inquiry was necessary. Self-study became a vehicle for us to critically examine our own practice while situating our reflections within broader theoretical conversations about agency and social justice.

Specifically, this study aligns with LaBoskey's (2004) characteristics of self-study research, in which it was self-initiated and directly focused on improving and better understanding our own teaching practices. The study emerged from ongoing professional dialogue that we engaged in about our teaching within a social justice-focused leadership program. This inquiry was collaborative and interactive in nature. It involved continuous dialogic engagement among the three of us as researchers and educators. It also relied on qualitative data sources and systematic analytic procedures rather than informal reflection. Finally, trustworthiness was strengthened through triangulation across narratives, shared reflections, and teaching artifacts, as well as through iterative theme refinement and collective analysis. In this way, self-study functioned as a structured methodological approach grounded in established qualitative traditions.

We used collaborative inquiry, which LaBoskey (2004) defines as "self-initiated, improvement-driven, interactive, and grounded in qualitative methods and

trustworthiness. The study originated from conversations about our similarities and differences in light of the diversity and how our lived experiences inform and enhance our teaching practices. The artifacts we collected included (a) the written narratives, (b) shared reflections, and (c) teaching artifacts. We triangulated findings to ensure credibility and establish trustworthiness, and we made our data transparent through representative quotes and thematic connections. Through dialogue and reflection, we co-constructed meaning by connecting personal narratives to share research knowledge, aligning with Pinnegar and Hamilton's (2009) assertion that "we use the voices of others in our practice to support our interpretation" (p. 15).

Participants and Setting

Our research team consisted of three experienced female educators from a suburban university on the East Coast. Each of us has at least 20 years of classroom teaching experience preparing future teachers, educators, and leaders. Two of us are Caucasian immigrants from the former communist bloc countries of Poland and Hungary, and one is an Asian-American New Yorker of Indian-Pakistani heritage. We are all in cross-cultural and inter-racial relationships, with husbands of Filipino, Jewish, and German backgrounds. We are also mothers who conscientiously try to instill in our children the richness of our diverse backgrounds and linguistic opportunities since all three of us are bi- or multilingual. Our faith backgrounds include Roman Catholic, nondenominational, and Abrahamic faith. Our diverse professional and personal backgrounds and experiences gave us unique insight into how we negotiate our multifaceted identities as teachers and how these translate into our teaching practices. We used the following pseudonyms: Miranda, Viola, and Emilia.

The reflections on professional practice were situated within the educational leadership doctoral program within a private, small suburban university. The leadership program prepares socially conscious and equity-minded educational leaders committed to serving and transforming diverse school communities. Anchored in frameworks of transformational leadership and culturally responsive pedagogy, the

doctoral leadership program offered a rich context to explore teacher agency and equity-driven practices.

Data Sources, Collection, and Analysis

We utilized three primary data sources: (a) written narratives, (b) shared reflections, and (c) recordings of teaching practices. Each of us wrote two personal narratives reflecting on our stories of cross-cultural, interfaith, and cross-linguistic identities, in the context of our experiences in professional and personal spaces. Next, we met multiple times to discuss and respond to one another's narratives, engaging in dialogue as a way of deepening understanding through shared reflections (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009). Lastly, we used the recordings of teaching practices that were transcribed and included in the analysis.

Data analysis occurred in several stages. We began by coding together our own narratives and teaching transcripts to identify patterns related to identity, commitments to social justice, and enactments of agency. We then revisited the data using Rios' (2018) framework with four dimensions of purpose, competence, autonomy, and reflexivity to guide our second layer of coding. Through ongoing comparison and discussion, we refined the emerging themes across our data sources. Analytic notes were kept throughout the process to document decisions and clarify interpretations.

Results

Several of our reflections related to early formative experiences that shaped our evolving understanding of social justice. In particular, immigration narratives illuminated moments of disruption that prompted us to reconsider equity, privilege, and belonging. These identity shifts informed how agency was later enacted in practice.

Our own narratives also reflected how identity evolved through lived experiences, particularly in moments of transition and cultural displacement. Our immigration experiences, in particular, surfaced shifts in how we understood access, privilege, and institutional structures. These moments reshaped not only personal identity but also how we approached questions of equity within our teaching.

We organized our findings around Rios' (2018) four dimensions of teacher agency. While these dimensions are distinct in the framework, our reflections revealed that they often overlapped in practice. The sections that follow illustrate how each dimension was enacted within our teaching and how identity informed those enactments.

Sense of Purpose

When examining our sense of purpose, defined as beliefs about our role as agents of change, we viewed ourselves as facilitators of thinking and challengers of perspectives that students hold and bring to a classroom. This is echoed in Emily's statement: "We are here to guide them, but we also are here to disturb a little bit of their inertia so that they can start thinking about things in different ways." There were multiple instances in which personal beliefs about social justice impacted our teacher identity and cascaded into classroom identity. For example, in the context of the social justice theme of the program, focused on addressing how to respond to inequities and oppression in society and in the school systems, Miranda stated: "We are very well positioned as professors in this program to embrace this notion of constantly trying to be agents of change."

A point raised repeatedly was the aspect of modeling change for our students. As teacher educators, we demonstrate what it means to be an agent of change through various professional activities, collaborations, and community partnerships. While many of our students expressed a desire to contribute to meaningful change, they often lacked the tools or direction to engage.

Through intentional modeling and mentorship, we enacted teacher agency in visible ways within our professional roles. While this study did not directly measure student outcomes, we observed that students frequently referenced these modeling practices in class discussions and reflective assignments. Rather than claiming a direct transfer of agency, our findings indicate that modeling serves as a potential mechanism through which social justice-oriented dispositions are made visible and thinkable within leadership preparation contexts.

These examples suggest that purpose is

more than a stated belief; it shapes how we as educators structure classroom dialogue and respond to student perspectives. In line with Rios' (2018) framework, purpose was reflected in the intentional ways we connected course content to broader questions of equity and responsibility. Agency, in this case, was evident in how we positioned ourselves and our students within those conversations.

Competence

Competence, as a dimension of teacher agency, is reflected in the resources and strategies we, as teacher educators, employ to address the systematic exclusion and underachievement of marginalized students. As researchers, we critically examined how classroom culture can be shaped to address equity and inclusion issues. We described the classroom as "its own organism," which requires attentiveness to dynamics that are not always visible. Competence here extended beyond content expertise to relational awareness.

One key insight also emerged from the multiple-mentorship model embedded in our educational leadership program, in which students are guided and supported by more than one faculty member throughout their educational journey. Viola noted that by serving as a mentor and an educator to the same group of students, she can have multiple perspectives on the personal dynamics in the classroom and create a sense of collective social justice identity. Emily pointed out that "as a professor at the helm of the class, I may not be the expert that the students need at the moment," highlighting the importance of collaboration within the learning community, which is essential to provide students with multiple areas of resources. We intentionally aimed to strike a careful balance between being a model of change and not imposing preset ideas about what change is.

Competence, as described by Rios (2018), extends beyond subject-matter knowledge to include the ability to navigate complex social and institutional contexts. Our reflections illustrated how competence was enacted through collaboration, shared mentorship, and responsiveness to student needs. In this sense, teacher agency focused more on relational

and professional independence than on individual authority.

Autonomy

Autonomy as a dimension of teacher agency was addressed in multiple ways. The co-teaching environment in some of the classes we teach creates a unique setting for learning, where autonomy is further defined as two teachers create and share the learning space through co-planning, co-delivering instruction, and co-assessing students. The concepts of authentic presence and authentic self, related to teacher identity development, also emerged. "Putting on a teacher's hat" or "putting on a show" to elicit and hold student interest resulted in varying degrees of revealing the authentic self while teaching. We noted that embracing our teaching identity needed to come first to be more faithful to ourselves in the classroom. For one of us, it came with the increased comfort that years of classroom experience brought, while for the other, it arrived closer to the end of the semester, by the time students had established more rapport with her.

Autonomy was also reflected in comfort with our evolving professional identity. As Emilia noted, "I don't feel I have to put on the show... I just come in, and I am myself," including becoming less self-conscious about accent and presence. Autonomy, then, was not only structural but personal—developing confidence to teach without masking identity. Another reflection by Miranda highlighted how identity disclosure is negotiated over time, beginning with establishing common ground and gradually revealing aspects of cultural identity. Autonomy was therefore shaped by context and audience, rather than enacted uniformly.

Autonomy also emerged from our reflections as the capacity to make intentional pedagogical decisions within shared, and sometimes constrained, institutional spaces. Consistent with Rios' (2018) framework, our autonomy was not framed as independence from context, but more as the ability to act with integrity. Specifically, agency here was reflected in how we negotiated authenticity in the classroom, our co-teaching dynamics, and institutional expectations while remaining aligned with our commitments.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity, rooted in anchoring teachers' capacity to analyze and evaluate their practices and institutional settings, was embraced by all three of us with a deep-rooted interest in reflecting on our own work, the impact we have on our students, and the quality of teaching we deliver. Within the culture of our institution, we have frequent opportunities to reflect on our own teaching in multiple ways beyond the semiannual observations and annual evaluations. An example is the open-door policy that encourages intervisitations among faculty members, which two of us regularly participate in. After sitting in on each other's classes, the two faculty members engage in a collegial conversation about teaching, including elaborate discussions and reflections on methods used in the classroom. Similarly, in co-teaching, the two of us practice shared reflection on teaching.

Reflexivity was central to how we understood our ongoing development as educators. We described it as ongoing rather than episodic—"it's a loop"—involving immediate adjustment, future planning, and long-term course redesign. For us, reflexivity also included examining patterns in student engagement and access. Viola noted how some students struggled not due to lack of ability but limited social and cultural capital, including uncertainty about how to leverage institutional resources. This awareness prompted reconsideration of how support structures were modeled and communicated.

In alignment with Rios (2018), reflexivity functioned as a continuous practice of examining how our identities, assumptions, and institutional contexts shaped our teaching. In that context, the agency was therefore not static but continually informed by reflection and dialogue.

Discussion and Implications for Practice

This self-study contributes to the scholarship on teacher agency by examining how identity informs the enactment of agency within a social justice-oriented leadership program. Departing from the view of agency as an abstract construct, our findings show how purpose, competence, autonomy, and reflexivity take shape through lived

experiences and everyday pedagogical decisions. The study also points to modeling and mentorship as practical ways for the agency to become visible within doctoral preparation contexts.

By examining teacher agency through collaborative self-study, this inquiry draws on practitioner experience as a source of insight into equity-oriented teaching. The findings suggest that agency is shaped not only by institutional contexts but also by ongoing reflection on identity and professional relationships within leadership preparation programs.

Our beliefs about social justice are embedded in our teacher identities, which aligns with Buchanan's (2015) assertion that identity acts as both a lens and a catalyst for agentic action in the classroom. The teacher agency, driven by teacher identity, also reflects a projective dimension that Priestly et al. (2015) defined as shaped by personal values and future-oriented equity goals. The continuous evolution of our teacher agency also echoes the reflective practice that Cong-Lem (2021) describes as essential for sustaining ethical responsiveness in educational spaces.

Our findings suggest that teacher agency may create conditions in which students may experience autonomy and agency in their learning processes through structured opportunities for student choice, reflection, and action (Benson, 2016). Explicit connections can be made between teacher decisions and student choices through reflections on how the curriculum and pedagogy support their learning and growth as change agents. Furthermore, incorporating co-inquiry models with students participating in questioning and curriculum decisions can further support mutual agency (Cook-Sather, 2020).

We see ourselves as agents of change in facilitating, challenging, and mentoring our students to model how equity and social justice can be promoted in the classroom and beyond. As we enact teacher agency through mentoring, challenging, and supporting our students in these conversations, we are the facilitators of learning and co-constructors of equitable educational cultures. Therefore, the teacher agency may function as a visible model within leadership preparation contexts, shaping how professional responsibility is

discussed and understood. The reflexivity about our teaching practices is often self-motivated and strongly promoted within the community of scholars to which we belong.

Limitations

This study presents several limitations, especially due to its context-specific and self-referential design. This research study involved three faculty members within a single doctoral leadership program, which naturally limits broader applicability. Although student empowerment is discussed in relation to teacher agency, we did not collect or analyze student data. As a result, the findings reflect only our interpretations of practice rather than documented student outcomes. As with all self-study research, our analysis is shaped by our positionalities; however, collaborative dialogue, shared coding, and iterative reflection were used to strengthen credibility and deepen reflexivity behind the study's findings.

Conclusion

Engaging in this inquiry allowed us, as researchers and practitioners, to gain a better understanding of how our teaching identities, embedded in our cultural heritage, classroom experience, and personal values, inform our choices about how to exercise agency. This reflexive process illuminated the nuanced ways teacher agency can be enacted for equity. It allowed us to view the extent of our conscious engagement in the classroom and the ways our actions, presence, and authenticity may inform how programs that emphasize social justice use the experiences and ideas of their faculty to create a unique curriculum and pedagogical approaches. Additionally, the dynamic nature of teacher agency was highlighted in our authentic presence and freedom to determine when and how we reveal our authentic selves through our teaching practices. Such reflections further illuminate the complexities and implications of equity teaching practice and its ongoing development.

Overall, this inquiry underpins the idea that teacher agency is not fixed but is shaped over time through contextual framings of identity development, institutional context, and professional relationships. By examining our

enactments of purpose, competence, autonomy, and reflexivity, we gained a clearer understanding of how agency is expressed in practice within leadership education.

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Joanna Alcrúz, Ph.D., is a doctoral professor and co-director of the Cognition and Learning Lab for Molloy University.

Mubina Schroeder, Ph.D., is a doctoral professor and co-director of the Cognition and Learning Lab for Molloy University.

Andrea Honigsfeld, Ed.D. is a professor at Molloy University. Dr. Honigsfeld has authored over 30 books about the topics of engaging multilingual learners and co-teaching practices.



THE REALITY OF FUNDING QUALITY SCHOOLS: A 2025 QUANTITATIVE EXAMINATION OF STATE AID AND LOCAL REVENUE STRUCTURES OF LONG ISLAND PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICTS

John J. Galligan, Ed.D.
Sachem Central School District

Abstract

This study investigates how revenue structures affect the ability of educational leaders and boards of education to sustain high quality public school systems while fulfilling mandated service obligations in Long Island school districts. Employing a quantitative analysis of recent fiscal data, including revenue composition, student enrollment, and per-pupil state aid allocations, this research offers an updated empirical assessment of the financial conditions influencing school district leadership decision making. Building on the conceptual framework and findings of a 2017 analysis of Long Island school district finances, the study revisits the same districts and incorporates insights from a 2025 longitudinal review of four decades of recession-recovery policies and the impact of New York State's Property Tax Cap on regional school funding. Focusing on twelve districts within a single suburban township, the analysis reveals significant variation in total revenue capacity and in the balance between state aid and locally generated property taxes. These findings highlight the persistence of heterogeneous fiscal structures among districts in similar regional, geographic, and economic contexts, raising critical questions about fiscal equity, policy design, and long-term financial sustainability.

Keywords: Foundation Aid, School Finance, Long Island Schools, New York Public Education Funding, New York Tax Cap, New York School District Revenue

Literature Synthesis: Economic Policy Impacts on School District Fiscal Stability

As educational standards evolve and service expectations accentuate, school districts are increasingly required to deliver broader and more complex programs within fiscally constrained revenue frameworks. In New York State, suburban school districts, many of which are consistently identified as high performing based on state accountability data and national comparative rankings, operate within an education finance structure in which district revenue capacity is closely tied to local property wealth, resulting in differences in fiscal capacity among districts and increased reliance on locally generated revenue to support instructional programs and mandated services (Comesanas, 2024; New York State Education Department [NYSED], 2024; Niche, 2025; U.S. News & World Report, 2024).

Historically, Long Island's school districts and other downstate suburban regions have experienced myriad financial pressures, including economic downturns and policy shifts that have had lasting impacts. Over the past two decades, overlapping state and federal tax policies, including regulatory measures established under New York State's 2011 2% Property Tax Cap and the federal limitation on State and Local Tax (SALT) deductions imposed between 2017 and 2025 through the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, have been associated with constrained local revenue capacity in suburban school districts, contributing to persistent challenges in

managing mandate driven expenditure growth (Freking, 2024; Tax Cuts and Jobs Act [TCJA], 2017).

Concurrent with continued reliance on the Foundation Aid formula adopted in 2007 (New York State Education Department [NYSED], 2007), prior research indicates that educational standards and student needs have expanded significantly, while district revenue structures remain heavily dependent on locally generated funding constrained by statutory tax levy limits and escalating state mandated cost drivers. These conditions have been associated with persistent fiscal stress and long-term stability challenges, particularly during periods of economic downturn and recovery cycles when inflationary factors and expenditure growth historically outpaces available revenue capacity (New York State Comptroller, 2025; Galligan & Dragone, 2025).

According to the 2023 Financial Condition Report issued by the Office of the New York State Comptroller, New York State recorded the highest per-pupil education spending in the nation during the 2020–2021 school year, at \$26,571, substantially exceeding the national average of \$14,347. Despite elevated spending levels, Galligan and Dragone (2025) found that the continued reliance of most Long Island school districts on locally generated property tax revenue limits fiscal capacity to sustain mandated educational services amid rising cost pressures, including special education, Section 504 accommodations, and English Language Learner supports, as well as structural cost drivers such as New York State Teachers' Retirement System pension contributions and employee healthcare expenditures. Compounding these pressures, the Property Tax Cap statute imposes a 4 percent limit on unrestricted fund balance, historically restricting financial flexibility and limiting districts' capacity to absorb unanticipated inflationary pressures or rising operating costs without corresponding reductions in educational services (New York State Comptroller, 2023).

The Galligan and Annunziato (2017) study provided a comprehensive analysis of twelve Long Island school districts between 2008 and 2014, a period encompassing both the aftermath of the Great Recession and the

implementation of the New York State Property Tax Levy Cap in 2011. At that time, the study identified persistent structural fiscal challenges affecting districts during this period. Mandated expenditures, particularly those associated with employee healthcare and pension contributions, continued to increase, while districts' capacity to generate local revenue became increasingly constrained by the tax levy cap, which limited annual tax levy growth to the lesser of 2 percent or the rate of inflation. The 2017 study findings indicated that districts responded by drawing down reserve funds, reducing instructional expenditures, and implementing staffing reductions, despite only modest declines in student enrollment. The authors, at the time of the study, characterized this fiscal condition as unsustainable, reflecting a potential growing disconnect between districts' fiscal capacity and their expanding educational obligations.

Galligan and Dragone (2025) extended the 2017 study by situating its findings within a broader longitudinal analysis of recession-recovery policies and their cumulative impact on the finances of Long Island school districts since the early 1990s. Their policy review examined four decades of recession-era responses and tax-limitation measures, identifying a recurring pattern in which economic downturns are followed by short-term aid infusions or temporary policy interventions that leave the underlying structural imbalance between mandated expenditures and sustainable revenue capacity unresolved. The authors further noted that the increasing reliance on local property taxation has contributed to persistent fiscal disparities and long-term instability, particularly in districts with limited taxable wealth or declining enrollment.

Collectively, the research efforts identified three recurring themes. First, statutory limitations on local revenue associated with New York State's Property Tax Cap constrain districts' revenue growth in the context of increasing mandate-related expenditures. Second, temporary fiscal measures, including the Gap Elimination Adjustment and episodic federal stimulus funding, function as short-term interventions rather than long-term fiscal mechanisms. Third, reliance on a property tax-based funding structure is associated

with ongoing equity and fiscal stability considerations, particularly among districts with higher levels of local revenue dependence.

Within this context, at the time of their research, Galligan and Annunziato (2017) outlined potential adjustments to the tax cap informed by policy models used in regional neighboring states such as New Jersey and Massachusetts, while Galligan and Dragone (2025) extended this line of inquiry to examine broader structural features of New York State's education finance system. Taken together, these research efforts highlighted the distinction between near-term policy adjustments and longer-term structural reform and noted that, in the absence of such measures, districts on Long Island, including those examined in the 2017 Long Island analysis, could continue to encounter ongoing fiscal pressures that affect financial planning and the capacity to address evolving educational obligations.

The Challenge Facing Long Island School District Leadership

Historically, Long Island school districts have operated within a constrained fiscal environment shaped by New York State's Property Tax Cap, including statutory limits on reserve fund balances, reduced local revenue capacity following the federal limitation on the state and local tax (SALT) deduction enacted under the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017, and variability in state aid allocations. Within this context, state and federal mandates, increased employer healthcare contribution requirements under the Affordable Care Act, and rising New York State Teachers' Retirement System (TRS) pension costs, combined with a two percent tax levy limit, have constrained districts' ability to sustain existing educational services amid limited revenue growth over the past two decades (Tax Cuts and Jobs Act [TCJA], 2017; Cunningham, 2014, p. 1).

Research indicates that Long Island school districts derive approximately 60–65 percent of their operating revenue from local property taxes, while New York State aid typically accounted for less than one-third of total funding. This revenue structure reflects the region's elevated reliance on locally generated resources relative to other areas of

New York State. Within this asymmetrical funding context, school district leaders must rely on multi-year financial forecasting estimates and a statutorily constrained four percent reserve capacity to anticipate and manage mandate-driven expenditure growth in areas such as employee benefits, special education services, English as a New Language (ENL) programming, and staffing levels necessary to sustain programmatic continuity and regulatory compliance (Galligan & Dragone, 2025; New York State Comptroller, 2023; Rockefeller Institute of Government, 2023).

Problem Statement

Despite operating within the same geographic and economic region, Long Island school districts exhibit significant variation in fiscal capacity and revenue structure. These differences are shaped primarily by overlapping state and federal policy constraints, including New York State's Property Tax Cap, statutory limits on reserve fund growth, and the federal limitation on the state and local tax (SALT) deduction enacted under the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017, along with continued variability in state aid allocations. Within this constrained fiscal environment, districts remain heavily reliant on locally generated property tax revenue while simultaneously managing rising mandate-driven expenditures related to employee benefits, pension contributions, and staffing mandate needs for services such as special education and English as a New Language. As a result, districts operating under similar cost conditions face unequal capacity to sustain quality educational programs and meet regulatory obligations, highlighting the need for a contemporary empirical examination of revenue composition and state aid distribution among suburban school districts.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to analyze the current composition of revenue streams supporting public education on Long Island, with particular attention to district reliance on local property taxes relative to New York State aid. The research study is guided by three research questions:

- How does the proportion of New York State aid relative to locally generated revenue vary across school districts within a single Long Island township for the 2025 fiscal year?
- To what extent is student enrollment associated with differences in total operating revenue and reliance on New York State aid among districts within the same township?
- To what extent does New York State aid per pupil vary among districts operating within a shared geographic and economic regional context?

By examining district-level fiscal data within a single Long Island township, this study investigates structural variations in revenue composition and considers their implications for district leadership and policymakers engaged in long-term educational planning and fiscal sustainability.

Methodology and Instrumentation

Research Design and Data Sources

A quantitative research design was employed using publicly available datasets. Financial data for the 2025 fiscal year were obtained from the Office of the New York State Comptroller, and student enrollment data were retrieved from the New York State Education Department. The use of standardized datasets permits consistent cross-district comparison within a shared regional, geographic and economic context.

Data Collection and Measures

Revenue Composition

Total operating revenue for each district was collected and disaggregated by source to examine the proportional distribution of locally generated revenue and New York State aid. These data are presented in Table 1 and serve as the basis for analyzing differences in district reliance on state versus local funding.

Student Enrollment

Student enrollment figures were collected to contextualize variations in total operating revenue and district fiscal capacity. Enrollment data, presented in Table 2, allow for comparative analysis of revenue scale across

districts within the same township.

Per-Pupil State Aid

New York State aid allocations were calculated on a per-pupil basis to enable direct comparison of state support relative to student population size. These results are presented in Table 3 and provide insight into structural differences in state aid distribution among districts.

Large-District Revenue Composition

To further examine district revenue scale effects, the three largest districts by student enrollment were isolated and analyzed separately. Table 4 presents the proportion of total operating revenue derived from local sources and New York State aid for these districts during the 2025 fiscal year.

Data Handling and Anonymization

District identifiers were anonymized to maintain analytical neutrality and to emphasize structural revenue patterns rather than individual district performance.

Limitations of the Study

The analysis does not account for student-need variables such as poverty rates, disability classifications, or English Language Learner enrollment. Additionally, the study is limited to a single Long Island township and reflects a one-year fiscal snapshot for the 2025 fiscal year. Accordingly, findings should be interpreted as descriptive and comparative rather than causal or longitudinal in nature.

- Total operating revenue varies significantly across districts, ranging from approximately \$6.0 million (District G) to \$684.4 million (District C).
- District C and District D are the only two districts where state aid comprises the majority of total revenue (72% and 62%, respectively).
- The remaining ten districts rely primarily on locally generated revenue, with District G showing the highest local share (93%) despite having the lowest overall revenue.
- Districts with higher local revenue shares are not necessarily the highest in total revenue, indicating disparities in local

wealth and funding capacity.

- Revenue rankings are ordered from highest (1) to lowest (12), while state aid and local revenue ranks reflect the proportion of funding from each source.

Table 1
Total Revenue and Revenue Source Distribution by School District (2025)

School District	Total Revenue (\$)	Revenue Rank	NYS Aid (%)	Aid Rank	Local Revenue (%)	Local Rank
District A	86,612,310	11	21	11	79	3
District B	268,228,844	4	30	4	70	7
District C	684,358,478	1	72	1	28	12
District D	337,948,534	3	62	2	38	11
District E	222,041,263	5	27	5	73	5
District F	127,851,679	8	33	6	67	9
District G	6,006,620	12	7	12	93	1
District H	137,283,537	7	18	10	82	2
District I	385,535,798	2	38	3	62	10
District J	104,244,627	10	31	8	69	8
District K	119,652,961	9	25	9	75	4
District L	142,638,258	6	27	7	73	6

Note. This data was retrieved from the Office of the New York State Comptroller's website at <https://www.osc.ny.gov/open-book-new-york>. Revenue ranks are ordered from highest (1) to lowest (12). Percentages represent the proportion of each district's total 2025 operating revenue derived from New York State aid and locally generated sources; values are rounded.

- Total student enrollment across all 12 districts is 64,657 students.
- Enrollment ranges widely, from a low of 32 students in District G to a high of 17,842 students in District C.
- District C ranks first in enrollment, followed by District I (11,553 students) and District D (7,660 students).
- District G, despite having the lowest enrollment, is a statistical outlier with substantially fewer students than all other districts.
- Several districts (e.g., Districts F, H, K, L) fall into a mid-sized category with enrollments between approximately 2,500 and 3,700 students.

Table 2
Student Enrollment by School District (2025)

School District	Student Enrollment	Enrollment Rank
District A	1748	11
District B	5529	4
District C	17842	1
District D	7660	3
District E	5016	5
District F	3381	7
District G	32	12
District H	3112	8
District I	11553	2
District J	2438	10
District K	2651	9
District L	3695	6

Note. This data was retrieved from the New York State Education Department's website at <https://data.nysed.gov/>. Enrollment ranks are ordered from highest (1) to lowest (12). Total combined enrollment across districts equals 64,657 students.

- Per-pupil aid varies widely, from \$7,946 (District H) to over \$27,000 (Districts C and D).
- Districts with similar enrollment sizes receive substantially different per-pupil aid.
- The table highlights notable disparities in state aid support among districts located in the same geographic region and facing similar economic cost factors.

Table 3
New York State Aid Per-Pupil Allocation by District (2025)

School District	NYS Aid Revenue (\$)	Student Enrollment	NYS Aid per Student (\$)
District A	18,457,747	1748	10,559.35
District B	81,245,767	5529	14,694.48
District C	492,925,275	17842	27,627.24
District D	208,304,184	7660	27,193.76
District E	59,730,506	5016	11,908.00
District F	42,709,970	3381	12,632.35
District G	395,750	32	12,367.19
District H	24,728,963	3112	7,946.32
District I	148,288,622	11553	12,835.51
District J	31,420,057	2438	12,887.64
District K	29,414,062	2651	11,095.46
District L	38,405,057	3695	10,393.79

Note. This data was retrieved from both the Office of the New York State Comptroller's website at <https://www.osc.ny.gov/open-book-new-york> and the New York State Education Department's website at <https://data.nysed.gov/>. District identifiers are anonymized. New York State aid per student was calculated by dividing total New York State aid revenue by total student enrollment for each district.

- Despite similar enrollment levels, these districts show markedly different revenue structures. District C (ranked first in total enrollment) receives 72% of operating revenue from New York State aid; 28% from local sources while District I (ranked second in total enrollment) receives 62% of operating revenue from local sources; 38% from state aid.
- Significant fiscal structure differences persist even among similarly sized districts, underscoring structural inequities in state aid dependence within the same region.

Table 4
Top Three Districts Ranked by Student Enrollment and Revenue Composition (2025)

School District	Student Enrollment	Enrollment Rank	Total Revenue (\$)	Local Revenue (% of Total)	NYS State Aid (\$)	NYS Aid (% of Total)
District C	17,842	1	684,358,478	28%	492,925,275	72%
District I	11,553	2	385,535,798	62%	148,288,622	38%
District D	7,660	3	337,948,534	38%	208,304,184	62%

Note. This data was retrieved from both the Office of the New York State Comptroller’s website at <https://www.osc.ny.gov/open-book-new-york> and the New York State Education Department’s website at <https://data.nysed.gov/>. Table presents the three largest school districts within a single township, ranked by total student enrollment. Percentages reflect the proportion of total district revenue derived from local sources and New York State aid for the 2025 fiscal year. Dollar values are rounded to the nearest whole dollar.

Analysis of the Findings of the Research Questions

This section synthesizes the empirical results across the three research questions, highlighting patterns in revenue composition, enrollment-related scale effects, and per-pupil aid disparities among school districts operating within a shared suburban Long Island context.

Revenue Composition and State Aid Reliance (RQ1).

The analysis reveals substantial heterogeneity in the proportion of New York State aid versus locally generated revenue across districts within the same township. Despite comparable regional cost structures and geographic proximity, districts display markedly different funding profiles, ranging from heavy dependence on state aid to pronounced reliance on local property taxation. This dispersion underscores the persistence of structural inequities embedded

in the state aid system and suggests that formula-driven allocations interact unevenly with local fiscal capacity.

Enrollment, Scale, and Total Revenue Capacity (RQ2).

Findings indicate that student enrollment is associated with differences in total operating revenue, but scale alone does not explain variation in state aid reliance. When revenue composition data are examined alongside district enrollment (see Tables 1, 2, and 4), no consistent relationship emerges between student population size and its allocation of New York State aid. Larger districts tend to command greater total revenues; however, their dependence on state aid varies widely. Some high-enrollment districts receive a substantial share of revenue from state sources, while others rely predominantly on local revenue. This pattern suggests that enrollment size amplifies fiscal capacity without standardizing aid dependence, reflecting the continued influence of historical aid provisions and district-specific fiscal characteristics.

Per-Pupil State Aid Disparities (RQ3).

Per-pupil state aid allocations show considerable variation among districts that serve similar student populations within the same township. These disparities remain even after accounting for enrollment size, indicating that the current state funding formula may not distribute resources equitably on a per-student basis. Such variation brings attention to horizontal equity, as students in neighboring districts with comparable demographic and economic profiles may receive substantially different levels of state financial support. This inconsistency suggests possible structural limitations within the aid allocation formula and underscores the need for a systematic evaluation of how state resources are distributed among districts with shared local economic characteristics.

Findings

The results of this analysis reveal substantial fiscal variation among public school districts within a single Long Island township. This variation is primarily attributable to differences in reliance on state

aid, enrollment-driven revenue capacity, and per-pupil expenditure allocations. Consistent with prior research (Galligan & Annunziato, 2017; Galligan & Dragone, 2025), these findings suggest that policies and funding mechanisms implemented during the post-recession recovery era have produced enduring inequities. These fiscal imbalances continue to constrain districts' capacity to address mandate-driven cost pressures and to sustain equitable, high-quality educational services across communities.

Despite operating within similar cost environments, particularly with respect to mandated service provision, districts exhibit differing capacities to generate revenue. Although total revenue levels are influenced by enrollment size, the composition of revenue sources, including reliance on New York State aid, varies independently of district scale. As shown in Tables 1, 2, and 4, districts differ in both total operating revenue and the proportion of funding derived from state aid across enrollment levels. These patterns indicate that structural and formula-based factors, rather than enrollment size alone, are associated with observed differences in fiscal capacity.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research may examine New York State's Foundation Aid formula, including regional cost indices and the methods used to measure community fiscal capacity, particularly as they relate to mandated district expenditures. Additional comparative analysis of tax cap frameworks in economically similar neighboring states, such as New Jersey and Massachusetts, may further document how differing policy structures correspond with district-level revenue capacity. Such analyses would extend the empirical record on the relationship between state aid formulas, tax limitations, and school district fiscal outcomes.

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Dr. John J. Galligan serves as a Board of Education Trustee for the Miller Place Union Free School District and has more than 25 years of experience in the Sachem Central School District, where he has served as an administrator, instructional coach, classroom teacher, and athletic coach. He earned his Doctor of Education degree from St. John's University, where his dissertation examined the fiscal challenges facing suburban school districts following the 2007–2009 recession, with particular emphasis on the New York State tax levy cap. He also holds a master's degree and professional diplomas in school district leadership from Dowling College and a Bachelor of Arts degree from Wagner College. His research and publications focus on school finance, fiscal policy, and educational governance.

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND GRIT ON THE ACTIONS OF PRINCIPALS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Michael Doria, Ed.D. and Eustace Thompson, Ph.D.
Hofstra University

Abstract

The outcomes are presented from a qualitative study exploring the qualities that make school leaders effective in secondary schools, i.e. transformational leadership and grit, which leads to attrition in their position. A total of thirteen secondary school principals were interviewed regarding grit and transformational leadership. Our findings suggest that leaders that are gritty and transformational have higher instances of retention in their leadership role. These leaders embody vision, trust, and transparency, along with being intrinsically motivated to serve their community

Keywords: transformational leadership, grit, secondary schools, principal retention.

Review of Literature

Previous research has not analyzed transformational leadership and grit together within secondary-level educational leadership, despite the potential synergy between these constructs. Grit, defined as perseverance of effort and consistency of interests, has been linked to long-term achievement and sustained professional commitment (Duckworth, 2007). Transformational leadership promotes trust, collaboration, and vision development, fostering a positive school climate and improving teacher engagement while reducing turnover (Francisco, 2019; Serin & Akkaya, 2019; Urick, 2020).

Research on principal retention highlights that high turnover disrupts school improvement efforts and negatively impacts

student achievement (Beckett, 2018; United States Department of Education, 2018). Transformational leaders who embody grit may be more resilient and committed to sustained leadership roles, potentially reducing attrition rates. Prior studies show that transformational leadership practices: including fostering collaboration, shared decision-making, and transparent communication contribute to organizational stability and staff satisfaction (Browning, 2014; Hoy & Moran, 1999).

The interplay of grit and transformational leadership in secondary education remains underexplored. Duckworth's Grit-O Scale (2007) offers a framework to measure perseverance of effort and consistency of interests. Applying this framework in the context of transformational leadership enables examination of how these traits collectively influence principal effectiveness and retention.

This study addresses a gap in the literature by investigating whether secondary principals with higher grit demonstrate transformational leadership qualities, and whether these characteristics influence their decision to remain in leadership roles. Understanding this relationship can help inform leadership development programs and strategies to reduce principal turnover.

Grit

A popular definition of grit encompasses two subparts to determine success, i.e., consistency of interests and perseverance of passion (Duckworth, 2007). This study used the

Grit-O Scale's questions and analyzed the secondary school leader from a qualitative lens to determine if leaders who engage in transformational leadership practices have higher instances of grit, and have higher instances of principal attrition.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership as a model for leadership promotes a positive school climate, enhances collaboration among staff members, decreases teacher turnover in schools, and enhances engagement/motivation of staff, along with transformational leaders being less likely to leave their school and seek other professional opportunities (Francisco, 2019; Serin & Akkaya, 2019; & Urick, 2020.) This research explored if grit and transformational leadership exists with leaders at the secondary level, along with determining if these leaders are successful because they are transformational and have higher instances of grit in their practice, along with suggesting that these characteristics lead to high instances of principal attrition.

Principal Retention

Principal retention has been a major concern in the field of education. Each new academic school year leaves schools with a new principal replacing the former leaders (United States Department of Education, 2018). Regular turnover of principals is detrimental to student learning, coupled with lack of providing meaningful time for initiatives to occur in an organization (Beckett, 2018).

Transformational Leadership and Grit in Secondary School Leadership

This conceptual frame is specific in analyzing whether the behavioral constructs of grit and transformational leadership coexist and lead school leaders to attribute these characteristics to higher instances of retention as a school leader. This conceptual frame is suggesting that secondary level principals who exhibit higher instances of grit will be more transformational in their leadership style, which will make them an effective leader, along with grit and transformational leadership being factors that influence higher rates of retention.

Figure 1
Conceptual Framework



This study was guided by the following research questions:

- What are the transformational leadership actions of the 7-12 secondary school principal that also embody characteristics of grit?
- How is 7-12 principal retention influenced by aspects of transformational leadership and grit?

Method

Participants

The field settings for this research were public and private 7-12 secondary schools in which the participants are employed. To be a participant in this study, the principals interviewed had to be a secondary level leader in a public or private school with a minimum of having served two years at their current principal position. Utilizing the superintendent, assistant superintendent, and professors of education as a panel of experts allowed for the most qualified principals to be chosen to effectively answer the research questions (Brady, 2015).

Design

Thirteen principals at the secondary level were interviewed. The interview questions

focused on aspects of grit, i.e., perseverance of effort and consistency of interest, under the Duckworth definition of the Grit-O survey instrument (Duckworth, 2007). The interview questions were categorized under theoretical concepts, which are transformational leadership and grit, along with principal attrition, to further categorize themes under these theoretical frameworks, which was analyzed in previous research. (Browning, 2014; Crede, Tynan, & Harms, 2017; Hoy & Moran, 1999).

Results

The subcategories of grit defined by the research of Duckworth, which were consistency of interests and perseverance of passions, were used to classify actions of transformational leadership qualities of the principals interviewed during the study. (Duckworth, 2007).

Grit Definition Subcategory: Consistency of Interests

Decisions Being Made Based on Needs of the Community

When asked about grit, principals focused on their initiatives, and how they focused on the needs of the community during their decision-making process.

Further, Phil uses the feedback from the entire school community to determine the direction of his initiatives. In response to challenging issues, such as race, gun laws, and violence the leader stated, "So in the wake of that, we decided, listening to students who really wanted a chance to talk because they were upset, talking about their concerns about their fears, related to gun violence, we started as Student Centered Forum," so they can be involved in having conversations. 'Initiatives highlighted in this study from the principals also included: social emotional learning, restorative practice, school climate, and college/career readiness.

Equity and Access

Paul's is consistent with his interests based on equity and access. He explained that he wants students to have equitable access to learning opportunities. He explained this idea in his, "schools course catalog," specifically, for an array of elective courses that meet the

needs of his students. Further, he explained that every student regardless of their aptitude should have access to college level and Advanced placement coursework. The leader stated, "I'm not gonna be the principal, that's going to say, we're not gonna give that kid a chance."

Promoting Buy-In

A key interest for the leaders in terms of having successful initiatives is creating buy-in from the team. Ann and Lisa explain their approaches to building buy-in. Lisa explained that her school's advisory initiative took years to be successful, but buy-in from the staff was essential for the initiatives' success. Lisa stated that, "Based on assessment I knew that we needed something to help us connect to students and to connect to each other. So I think the buy-in would be what keeps things going, connecting it to the needs of the building."

Grit Definition Subcategory: Perseverance of Passions

Managing Setbacks

The majority of the leaders identified how they cope with setbacks in their leadership practice. The leader Phil stated, "You've got to weigh your pros and cons and sometimes you retreat on one initiative. It makes you stronger for the next one, because it builds confidence. It builds faith in your leadership."

Hard Work and Diligence

The leaders explained that being a hard worker and being diligent is modeled through their interactions with their team, along with being part of who they are as individuals. Phil explained that he has always been hardworking and diligent since a young boy and these traits are part of his "mindset." He stated, "If you're not hard working, you'll quickly get overwhelmed and swamped. Jack stated that his hard work and diligence is modeled through him showing that he is, "invested in the school before and after school hours."

Other Transformational Leadership Themes of Gritty Leaders

Other transformational leadership themes, that a gritty leader would embody, emerged during research were: vision, trust, collaboration, shared leadership, professional

development, and transparency.

Vision

The leaders explained how they crafted their vision for their schools using two approaches. When explaining how to cultivate a vision for his school the leader Jack stated, "start with a small group, make sure it's the vision of the entire building and not just you." Jack furthered this idea of creating a vision and stated, "whether it's starting in leadership, influential teachers in the building, whatever it is, that's most important, make sure it's not just the vision of you, make sure it's a vision of a large group of people."

Trust

The leader Tina stated that she builds trust by trying, "to be present in every interaction," and allows her team to "be empowered to solve problems." Further, Tina places an emphasis on "being present" and explained, "I really try to let my teachers know that I have their backs and I support them. When you've built that friendship, and relationships, first, they're a little bit more trusting for the other part." Tina explained that, "We've set up community circles within our faculty meetings, and we often just run circles that are fun and joyful where people are sharing good laughs."

Shared Leadership

Jack stated that, "We need staff to take leadership," when explaining the need for shared leadership. Further, Jack stated, "You have to get teachers to be on committees and have them take leadership roles in those committees." Tina explained that she "engages members of the team in various committees." Tina stated, "I really empower my teachers, guidance staff, team members that sit on them and to be part of the decisions that are made for the school community," when discussing the importance of committees.

Professional Development

Ann discussed how professional development is a key aspect of her leadership. Ann stated that, "Every new teacher, every new hire, does four hours of staff development, where we immerse the staff members in the essential elements of middle level focused and middle level education," along with ensuring that, "ed-tech experts are required," to engage in professional development to continue to learn about how learning

applications can be implemented into the classroom.

Transparency

The leader Jerry explained that he is transparent with his staff regarding, "challenges with initiatives from central administration," along with making sure that teachers are given an explanation to how they can be more "effective in the classroom." Jerry stated, "Maybe I'm not going to write that one up, maybe we're going to talk about why it was terrible, and figure out a way to fix it," when he discussed how he behaves in a transparent manner regarding feedback he gives to a teacher.

Transformational Leadership and Grit on Principal Retention

The research question analyzed perceived reasons for lack of principal retention among the secondary-level high school principals in this study by analyzing the leaders' transformational leadership and grit on their capacity to remain in their principal positions. Themes that emerged from the data collection included total years of leadership experience and motivation to serve the community.

Total Years of Leadership Experience

It could be suggested that consistent leadership is a factor that allows a leader to have a higher instance of principal retention. Phil stated that, "my predecessor was here for thirteen years. To have thirteen years, and then fourteen years is remarkable," along with expressing, "without a doubt there are definite benefits to having somebody in place, knowing the history, understanding the families, and having a relationship with families."

Motivation to Serve The Community

The principals highlighted that they remain in the position because they stay motivated, "to serve the kids and community." Jack stated, "The kids are the number one reason that keeps me motivated to do what we do and to continue to improve." In terms of the community, Matt stated, "I find a certain charge of excitement from working with people who teach me about different aspects of their culture, literature, and art."

Discussion

Being able to understand/assess the rationale from these leaders, through interview questions, could allow researchers to understand the definition of grit across different constructs by allowing more themes to arise. This research suggests that principals who have higher retention embody transformational leadership and grit as part of their leadership style. This research showed that the leaders interviewed created school communities that have a clear vision, developed support networks, created opportunities for collaboration, and provided ongoing professional development for staff. This study showed that transformational leaders who embody grit were motivated to serve their school community, ultimately, remaining in their position with higher rates of retention.

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Michael Doria Jr., Ed.D., is a secondary-level special education and science teacher for the New York City Department of Education. His research focuses on the qualities of effective school leaders.

Dr. Eustace Thompson, Ph.D., Hofstra University, Former Director of the EdD in Educational & Policy Leadership Program

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BEYOND BILINGUALISM

Ann Macaluso, Ed.D.
St. John's University

Abstract

In an increasingly interconnected and culturally diverse post-pandemic world, students' capacity to effectively engage across cultures is critical for global citizenship and participation in the global economy. This study explored the relationship between student immigrant generational status, linguistic background, and cultural intelligence, with a specific focus on differences among multilingual, bilingual, and monolingual students. Situated within global education priorities articulated by national and international organizations, the research examined multilingualism relative to a student's cultural intelligence. Employing a non-experimental research design, data were collected from students enrolled in a large, diverse suburban public high school in the northeastern United States. Cultural intelligence (CQ) was measured using Earley and Ang's (2003) Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS). Results reveal that multilingual students demonstrate significantly higher levels of cultural intelligence compared to their bilingual and monolingual peers. These findings suggest that multilingualism, frequently accompanied by sustained cross-cultural engagement via authentic immigrant experiences, supports the development of the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes necessary for meaningful participation in a global society. Moreover, the study challenges deficit-based perspectives of immigrant students by emphasizing their strengths as culturally intelligent individuals well-positioned to contribute to increasingly diverse communities and economies.

Introduction

Global interconnectedness is no longer an aspirational ideal but a defining feature of contemporary life. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this reality by rapidly transforming how individuals work, learn, and meet daily needs (Vyas, 2022). School systems adopted remote learning models (Garlinska et al., 2023), workplaces shifted to virtual collaboration, and everyday activities such as shopping, gift giving, and food access became increasingly mediated through digital platforms (Adibfar et al., 2022). As a result, goods, services, and professional interactions now routinely cross national boundaries with unprecedented ease (International Trade Administration, 2024).

As societies emerged from the pandemic, many of these shifts have endured (Vyas, 2022). Organizations and individuals recognized the benefits of remote work, including increased flexibility and improved work-life balance (Bello et al., 2024). Similarly, e-commerce growth that surged during the pandemic has remained well above pre-pandemic levels (Popescu et al., 2025). These developments have further reduced physical and cultural barriers, enabling individuals to pursue personal and professional opportunities beyond their countries of origin (Reuil, 2022).

Consequently, global migration has reached historically high levels, increasing the frequency and significance of cross-cultural interactions (OECD, 2025). In this context, education systems bear a critical responsibility to prepare students for meaningful engagement in a globally interconnected society. The growing international demand for globally competent

and culturally responsive individuals underscores the need for educational leaders and policymakers to prioritize the development of linguistic and cultural intelligence as central components of twenty-first-century learning (Boix Mansilla & Jackson, 2022; UNESCO, 2025).

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between a student's linguistic proficiency and their level of cultural intelligence. Specifically, this study investigated whether multilingual students (speaking three or more languages) demonstrated higher cultural intelligence than their bilingual and monolingual peers and if these students were more likely to be first-generation immigrants.

Literature Review

Cultural Intelligence and Multilingualism

Cultural Intelligence

Intelligence scales have a long history of use. As stated in Becker (2003), in 1908, Binet and Simon created an instrument designed to measure a child's level of cognitive intelligence compared to their chronological age. This test was modified by Stanford professor Lewis Terman who in 1916 developed what is now known as the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale. This test provides an individual with an intelligence quotient or IQ score (Becker, 2003). In addition to the Stanford-Binet IQ score or quotient, there are other established measures of intelligence. The Social Intelligence Quotient (SQ) measures how an individual understands and interacts with others in social situations (Thorndike & Stein, 1937). The Emotional Intelligence Quotient (EQ) is the ability of an individual to evaluate, express, and manage their own emotions as well as the emotions of others (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). The Adversity Quotient (AQ) measures an individual's resiliency regarding challenges they may face (Effendi & Khairani, 2016). The current research investigates Cultural Intelligence (CQ) which is an individual's capability to interact seamlessly in culturally diverse situations (Earley & Ang, 2003).

As societies become increasingly globalized, the ability to engage effectively

across cultural contexts has emerged as a critical educational outcome. Earley and Ang (2003) provide a useful framework for examining how linguistic experiences shape global competence. CQ is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct encompassing metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral dimensions, all of which may be influenced by sustained multilingual and cross-cultural engagement (Van Dyne et al., 2012).

Metacognitive CQ involves planning, awareness, and checking (Van Dyne et al., 2012). Students with high metacognitive CQ continuously question their own assumptions about individuals who are from a different cultural background than themselves. They are able to quickly adjust their behavior during interactions based upon these assumptions. For example, if a student is participating in a group project with peers they identify as being from a collectivist cultural background, they would adjust their behavior recognizing that these participants may prefer to have full group discussions and come up with an amenable solution for all participants. If the student identified the group members as possibly having individualistic cultural values, they may anticipate that the group may have members working independently and coming up with solutions quickly on their own and not take the time to seek the input of others (Hofstede, 2011; Van Dyne et al., 2012).

Cognitive CQ is the knowledge or the awareness an individual has about different cultural institutions, values, customs, and practices (Van Dyne et al., 2012). Knowledge that students gain in a classroom from text that teach about other cultures and religions would be classified as Cognitive CQ. For example, if a student is participating in an afterschool program with peers that are Muslim, they would be aware that during Ramadan, these peers may be fasting.

Motivational CQ is the desire or interest of an individual to learn about cultural differences. This includes intrinsic and extrinsic motivation as well as self-efficacy to adjust behavior (Van Dyne et al., 2012). For example, during group projects, a student may actively choose to engage with peers from diverse cultural backgrounds and may collaborate with a recently arrived immigrant classmate. The intrinsic value would be to genuinely learn

about that person's cultural traditions, asking thoughtful questions and to learn more about their culture beyond any class assignment. The extrinsic interest would be reflected in the marketability of improving their own interpersonal skills for future college or career purposes. The self-efficacy to adjust is demonstrated in the students ability to communicate effectively despite possible language or cultural barriers. If a misunderstanding occurs, the student would rephrase and adapt their behavior to ensure mutual understanding (Van Dyne et al., 2012).

Behavioral CQ refers to an individual's ability to utilize a wide variety of both verbal and nonverbal behaviors when interacting with individuals from a variety of cultural backgrounds (Van Dyne et al., 2012). Verbal behaviors could include the use of words and nonverbal behaviors including eye gaze, physical contact, and personal space (Busa et al., 2023; Remland et al., 1994). Remland et al. (1994) identified that individuals from certain northern European cultures maintained larger personal space parameters than individuals from other cultures. For example, a new exchange student from Germany is approached by another student and welcomed with a warm embrace. That student may pull away or feel uncomfortable. A student with a high Behavioral CQ would maintain space when welcoming the new student from a country with a larger personal distance zone.

Multilingualism

While bilingual education has been widely studied, there is a gap in the relevant literature when it comes to students who are proficient in three or more languages when compared to those who are bilingual. According to Macaluso (2019), there is a statistically significant difference between how multilingual individuals navigate multicultural norms and practices as measured by the Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS) when compared with bilingual and monolingual individuals.

Linguistic Background and Cultural Intelligence

Empirical studies consistently demonstrate a positive relationship between language

proficiency and cultural intelligence. Cui (2016) examined student teachers using the CQS and found that foreign language proficiency and frequent interaction with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds were significant predictors of CQ. Multilingual participants demonstrated higher overall CQ scores, suggesting that sustained engagement with multiple languages enhances cultural awareness and adaptability.

Similarly, Shannon and Begley (2008) investigated whether multilingualism predicted differences in CQ among undergraduate and graduate business students at a large university in Ireland and found that multilingual individuals scored significantly higher on cognitive CQ, which reflects knowledge of cultural norms, values, and practices. Although multilingualism was not significantly associated with behavioral CQ, the findings indicate that linguistic diversity contributes meaningfully to cultural understanding. These results are echoed by Kurpis and Hunter (2016), who compared international students enrolled in an English as a Second Language (ESL) program with domestic students in an international marketing course. International students, who were more likely to be multilingual, scored significantly higher on cognitive CQ, though differences across other CQ dimensions were not statistically significant.

Multilingual Learning Contexts and Global Competence

Research conducted in language learning environments further supports the relationship between multilingualism and cultural intelligence. Ghonsooly et al. (2013) examined students enrolled in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at institutes in Iran. Students were of varying language ability and the number of languages spoken was not established. Eighty-seven students were administered the Cultural Intelligence Survey (CQS) and the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) exam. The IELTS measures language proficiency based upon listening comprehension. Students with higher listening comprehension scores were associated with higher overall CQ. These students also revealed a significant positive result in the sub-components of metacognitive and motivational CQ.

These findings suggest that multilingual learning environments attract students with greater cultural intelligence as measured by the CQS. These students also had significantly higher scores on the Metacognitive CQ sub-component indicating these students had the ability to not only acquire knowledge, but to develop strategies to appropriately interact when in different cultural environments (Van Dyne et al., 2012). Students also had a statistically significant result in the Motivational CQ sub-component indicating that these students had a genuine desire to learn about cultural differences and to develop the ability to adjust to cultural differences.

This growing body of evidence underscores a need to reconceptualize language education as a strategic investment in cognitive development and intercultural readiness (Banik, 2025). As global citizenship and cultural intelligence become essential competencies for success in diverse societies, the argument for expanding beyond bilingual curricula toward structured multilingual programs becomes increasingly compelling (European Commission, 2025; Macaluso, 2022)

Methodology

This research employed a non-experimental ex post facto research design to examine the relationship between students' immigrant generational status and their levels of global competence as measured by the CQS (Earley & Ang, 2003). Causal-comparative designs are used to compare preexisting groups on an outcome of interest without manipulation of the independent variables (Creswell, 2015). The independent variables in this study were a student's immigrant generational status and the number of languages that the student could speak proficiently.

Generational status included three levels. As defined by the U.S. Census Bureau (2025), first-generation immigrants are students who were born outside of the U.S., second-generation immigrants are students who had at least one foreign-born parent, and third-generation immigrants are students who have both parents born in the United States. The number of languages spoken were categorized into three levels based on self-reported proficiency in one language

(monolingual), two languages (bilingual), or three or more languages (multilingual). The dependent variable was cultural intelligence as measured by the total CQS score and four subscale scores (metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral cultural intelligence). The CQS is a 20 question, 7 point Likert type scale with choices ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Six studies were conducted by Ang et al., (2007) to validate the CQS through generalizability. Shannon and Begley (2008) increased validity by expanding generalizability across countries. Validity of the four sub-components were established through Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFI). As stated in Macaluso (2019):

In establishing a good fit, Hooper, Coughlan and Mullen (2008) suggest the following: $\chi^2 = 0.05$, NNFI ≥ 0.95 , CFI ≥ 0.95 , SRMR ≤ 0.05 , RMSEA < 0.07 . Results demonstrated a good fit indicating the four factors are independent and unrelated ($\chi^2[595 \text{ df}] = 1303.47$, NNFI = 0.95, CFI = 0.96, SRMR = 0.05, RMSEA = 0.05) (Van Dyne et al., 2008) (p62).

Participants were selected through convenience sampling from a large suburban public high school serving grades 10-12 in the northeastern United States. Approximately 92% of students at the school were economically disadvantaged, and 33% were identified as English Language Learners (NYSED, 2019).

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine differences in overall cultural intelligence across levels of immigrant generational status and languages spoken. Post hoc comparisons were performed using Tukey's test to identify specific group differences. Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to examine the relationships between the independent variables and the four CQS subscales (metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral).

Limitations

This study's non-experimental ex post facto design presents inherent threats to internal, external, and statistical conclusion validity. Participation may have been influenced by potential issues related to student and/or parent immigration documentation status. Several participating teachers shared that some of the parent permission forms were not returned. They stated that failure of parents to return the signed forms may have been out of fear of being identified as an undocumented immigrant, potentially limiting sample representativeness (Macaluso, 2019). In addition, the CQS was originally designed for adult populations in the workforce and in management settings rather than for high school students (Ang et al., 2007). Although a review of the literature indicated that the scores obtained in this study were comparable to those reported in prior research, no statistical analysis was conducted to determine whether any differences were significant. Finally, language posed a potential limitation. While the survey was available in English and Spanish, a small number of students spoke a dominant language other than these two. Although the district provided translation dictionaries for a student's native language, some terminology may not have been directly translatable, which could have contributed to student misunderstanding or detachment (Macaluso, 2019).

Results

A total of 809 usable surveys ($n = 809$) were collected, representing a response rate of 34.4% with a mean score for the CQS of $M = 4.59$ ($SD = 0.76$). Assumptions of homogeneity of variance were evaluated using Levene's test for all analyses involving the CQS and its subscales. When Levene's test was significant, which indicated a violation of this assumption, the Brown-Forsythe test was conducted to provide a more robust assessment of mean differences. Homogeneity of covariance matrices for multivariate analysis was assessed using Box's M test. Any violations of statistical

assumptions are noted.

Descriptive statistics identified the mean scores based on the number of languages a student self-reported proficiency in, as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1

Mean Scores Based on the Number of Languages in Which a Student has Self-Reported Proficiency

Proficient Language	n	CQS	
		M	SD
1	136	4.47	.81
2	592	4.58	.74
3 or more	81	4.92	.73

1 Note. $p < .05$

2 Note. Adapted from Macaluso, A. M. (2019). "The relationship of student immigrant generational status on global mindedness and cultural intelligence" (Order No. 13864032). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses A&I. (2268576270)

A chi-square analysis was conducted to assess the association between students' immigrant generational status and the number of languages spoken. Results showed a statistically significant association between these variables, $\chi^2 (4, N = 809) = 155.28, p < .001$, as indicated in Table 2. Students who were 1st or 2nd generation immigrants were more likely to report speaking two or more languages, whereas most 3rd generation students with non-immigrant parents indicated proficiency in only one language.

Table 2

Crosstabulation of Immigrant Generation Status and Number of Languages Spoken

Generation	Languages Spoken			χ^2	p
	1	2	3 or more		
1 st	38 (14.8%)	185 (72.3%)	33 (12.9%)	155.28	.000
2 nd	38 (8.4%)	370 (82%)	43 (9.5%)		
3 rd	60 (58.8%)	37 (36.3%)	5 (4.9%)		

1 Note. Numbers in parentheses indicate row percentages.

2 Note. Reprinted from Macaluso, A. M. (2019). "The relationship of student immigrant generational status on global mindedness and cultural intelligence" (No. 13864032). ProQuest Dissertations & Theses A&I. (2268576270)

A one-way analysis of variance indicated that CQS scores varied significantly as a function of students' language proficiency levels, $F (2, 806) = 9.46, p = .001, \eta^2 = .02$. Post hoc comparisons using Tukey's HSD revealed that students proficient in three or more languages demonstrated significantly higher CQS scores than those proficient in two languages ($p = .001$) and those proficient in a single language ($p < .001$). No significant difference was observed between students proficient in one versus two languages.

To further examine group differences across multiple dimensions of cultural

intelligence, a one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted and yielded a statistically significant effect of language proficiency, (Wilks' Lambda = .967, F = (8, 1606.000) = 3.37, p = .011, η^2 = .03). Descriptive statistics for each proficiency group are presented in Table 3.

Follow-up univariate ANOVAs were conducted for each CQS subscale. Of these, only the Cognitive CQ subscale demonstrated significant differences across language proficiency groups, indicating that variation was limited to this component. Cognitive CQ reflects individuals' awareness of their cultural knowledge and their capacity to apply that knowledge in diverse contexts. The ANOVA for Cognitive CQ was statistically significant (F (2, 806) = 10.84, p < .001). Tukey post hoc tests showed that students proficient in three or more languages scored significantly higher on Cognitive CQ than those proficient in one language (p < .001) or two languages (p < .001).

Table 3

Mean Scores on CQS Subcomponents Based on the Number of Languages in Which a Student has Self-Reported Proficiency

Language Proficiency	n	CQS Subscales			
		Metacognitive	Cognitive	Motivational	Behavioral
1	136	5.04 (1.06)	3.71 (1.18)	5.08 (1.08)	4.30 (1.17)
2	592	4.98 (.99)	3.92 (1.15)	5.18 (1.01)	4.45 (1.13)
3	81	5.23 (1.03)	4.45 (1.08)	5.46 (1.09)	4.68 (1.01)

1 Note. p < .01. Standard deviation in parenthesis

2 Note. Reprinted from Macaluso, A. M. (2019). "The relationship of student immigrant generational status on global mindedness and cultural intelligence" (No. 13864032). ProQuest Dissertations & Theses A&I. (2268576270)

Conclusion

This study found a clear and statistically significant relationship between multilingual proficiency and cultural intelligence (CQ). Students proficient in three or more languages scored significantly higher on overall CQ than those proficient in two languages, who in turn scored higher than students who spoke one language. Most participants proficient in three languages were first-generation or second-generation students, with the strongest group differences observed on the Cognitive CQ subcomponent, which reflects understanding and reflection on cultural norms and practices. These findings are consistent with constructivist and cognitive constructivist theory, which emphasizes learning through experience and reflection

(Dewey, 1963).

The results align with prior research demonstrating positive relationships between language proficiency and CQ. Previous studies have shown that multilingual or foreign language-proficient students score higher on overall CQ (Cui, 2016; Ghonsooly et al., 2013; Kupis & Hunter, 2016), with particularly strong effects on Cognitive CQ (Shannon & Begley, 2008)

These findings have important implications for educational leadership. Cultural intelligence is increasingly viewed as an essential leadership competency in culturally diverse and globalized contexts. International organizations, including the United Nations (United Nations, 2024), the European Union (European Commission, 2025), and the U.S. Department of Education (U.S. Department of Education, 2025), identify multilingualism as a key to global competency. Many European countries require foreign language instruction in two languages, known as The Mother Tongue Plus 2, resulting in graduates with proficiency in at least two languages beyond the native language (European Commission, 2025). In contrast, foreign language requirements in U.S. secondary education remain limited and inconsistent across states (Education Commission of the States, 2018; Pew Research Center, 2015).

Overall, the results suggest that strengthening multilingual education may be an effective strategy for developing students' cultural intelligence. Educational leaders and policy makers should consider expanded language education requirements as part of broader efforts to prepare students for leadership in diverse and interconnected educational environments and to ensure students graduating from schools in the United States are able to compete with the growing number of multilinguals across the globe (World Economic Forum, 2023).

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Ann M. Macaluso, Ed.D. is a retired teacher and educational consultant.

THINK TANK: WE'RE PREPARING FOR A WORLD THAT DOESN'T EXIST YET: STUDENT PERSPECTIVES ON FUTURE-DRIVEN EDUCATION

Gabriella Franza, Ed.D., and Student Authors Morgan Jackson, Brianna Horneck, Bruce Revels III, and Kylee Hopkins
Baldwin UFSD, New York

Abstract

In an era of rapid technological, vocational and societal change, education systems must reorient their priorities to prepare students for careers that do not yet exist. This article presents a collaborative, student-led exploration of future-ready education, grounded in the experiences of participants in the Future Innovators Challenge at a suburban high school. Through the development of potential career prototypes, students critically assessed the extent to which their education equips them with the competencies, mindsets, and opportunities needed for a complex and evolving future workforce. Structured thematically across four reflective student essays, this piece highlights the misalignment between current curricular models and emergent skill demands, the importance of experiential and real-world learning, the inequitable distribution of future-ready resources, and the imperative for student inclusion in educational decision-making. These findings come together in a set of evidence-based recommendations for reimagining secondary education through innovation and student partnership.

Introduction

As educational stakeholders grapple with the implications of automation, climate instability, and an increasingly interconnected digital economy, one truth becomes strikingly evident: we are preparing young people for a world that does not yet exist. Rapid advances

in artificial intelligence, shifting labor market demands, and the accelerating pace of global change create conditions in which the fundamental skills needed for future success are continuously evolving. Reports from international organizations highlight that many of the jobs today's students will hold have not yet been created, underscoring the urgency for schools to cultivate adaptable, creative, and technologically fluent learners (World Economic Forum, 2020). The traditional paradigms that have long shaped K-12 education, rooted in rote memorization and standardized assessment, are increasingly incongruent with the flexible and interdisciplinary problem-solving that tomorrow's careers will require (Noguera, 2007; Nathenson & Henderson, 2018).

This article draws on the experiences of high school students who participated in the Future Innovators Challenge. This is a research-centered competition in which student teams conceptualize an original career field they believe could emerge within the next 10 to 50 years. Participants draw on current technological, societal, and environmental developments to articulate the role's purpose, responsibilities, qualifications, and potential impact on future communities, supported by evidence from reputable sources. Their work is communicated through thoughtfully crafted presentations that may include videos, prototypes, interactive media, or live pitches to a panel of judges. As a hybrid of design thinking and entrepreneurial presentation, the Challenge allowed students

to imagine and begin preparing for what the world of work will look like in the future. Their reflections provide an urgent and authentic perspective on how education can and must transform.

Importantly, this article centers youth voice into the lived disconnects between current schooling and future preparedness.

We're Learning Yesterday's Skills for Tomorrow's Jobs

By Student A

As each school year concludes, students move on to either undergraduate studies or directly into the workforce. Regardless of the path they choose, it ultimately leads to employment. Yet rapid technological innovation, economic shifts, and increased competition have made it more challenging than ever to secure well-paid jobs. Students must therefore be prepared for the obstacles they will face in this evolving landscape. In response to these changes, some schools are shifting their focus to better prepare students for the realities of the American workforce. However, differences in school environments and the growing reliance on artificial intelligence among both students and teachers have sometimes created misunderstandings about what truly benefits students and sets them up for success. As the job market evolves, it is increasingly clear that much of what students learn is still tied to older industries, while the world moves quickly toward fields such as artificial intelligence, climate technology, biotechnology, and data science. Schools need to update their curricula to keep pace. For instance, offering elective courses or after-school programs in coding, renewable energy, or digital business skills could help students graduate with both foundational knowledge and relevant skills for emerging careers. McKinsey and Company highlights this shift, noting that demand for higher cognitive skills such as creativity, critical thinking, decision making, and complex information processing will continue to grow through 2030, by 19 percent in the United States and 14 percent in Europe. Our experience with the Future Innovators Challenge has demonstrated this need. While foundational knowledge in history, math, and science remains important, it must be recontextualized within an interdisciplinary

framework that emphasizes technology and innovation (McKinsey, 2018). Along with technical skills, teamwork and communication are equally essential. During the Challenge, we worked in teams, shared ideas, and solved problems collaboratively, experiences many students do not encounter often enough in regular classes. Schools could strengthen this by introducing more group projects, with grades reflecting both the final product and the quality of collaboration. Teachers might incorporate debates, role-playing activities, or peer reviews to help students develop confidence in teamwork. These “power skills” are highly valued by employers and are critical for workplace success (Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006). According to the Center for American Progress, early career preparation must be holistic, supporting the development of academic knowledge, technical skills, and 21st-century competencies to prepare students for future jobs (Jimenez, 2020). Digital literacy is another crucial area where schools need to devote more attention. In today's world, being able to code, conduct online research, and present virtually is just as important as writing essays or solving math problems.

Schools should make digital skills courses mandatory, teaching students not only how to use technology, but how to use it responsibly. This includes lessons on digital safety, effective online research, and professional presentation skills. Incorporating this instruction into the curriculum would better prepare students for both college and the workforce, where digital tools are ubiquitous. The Challenge also highlighted the importance of creativity and innovation. In school, we often learn to follow rules and avoid mistakes, but in the workplace, employers want people who can think creatively and take strategic risks. Schools can support this by blending subjects such as science, business, and communication into cross-disciplinary projects that address real-world problems. Feedback from industry professionals, not just teachers, can help students understand the practical relevance of their ideas. When schools create opportunities for creative risk-taking, students develop not only as learners, but as innovators prepared for the future. Vocational and technical training also play an important role. While often stigmatized in the United States, countries like Germany, Austria,

and Switzerland have long viewed vocational education as a respected pathway to stable, middle-class careers. Harvard Business Review notes that the United States may be one of the only countries where this stigma persists (Harvard Business Review, 2021). Given that the World Economic Forum projects that 85 million jobs will be displaced by automation and artificial intelligence while 97 million new roles will emerge (WEF, 2021), schools must respond by offering meaningful instruction in rapidly evolving technical fields.

The Future Innovators Challenge demonstrated that school should not be limited to memorizing facts. It should involve creating and applying knowledge in authentic ways. This experience allowed us to solve problems, work in teams, and take creative risks, skills that are essential for success in emerging industries such as artificial intelligence, renewable energy, and biotechnology. It also gave us the opportunity to receive feedback from professionals, making learning feel more connected to real-world contexts. The Challenge emphasized the importance of “power skills,” including teamwork, communication, creative risk-taking, and digital literacy. While technical skills are necessary, the collaborative process of pitching, designing, and iterating reflects future professional environments more closely than traditional instruction. The Chronicle of Higher Education warns that inequality is likely to worsen unless workers are reskilled for new professions. Yet with the right strategies, the so-called robot revolution could create 97 million new jobs. This underscores how urgent education must shift toward a holistic, skills-based model that emphasizes collaboration, co-construction of knowledge, and interdisciplinary thinking through authentic, challenge-based learning. In conclusion, the future of education depends on transforming traditional models to embrace innovation, digital literacy, and collaboration. By realigning curricula to meet the demands of the 21st-century economy, schools can better prepare students to become adaptable, skilled contributors to an ever-changing global workforce.

Where's Real-Life Learning?

By Student B

Traditional models prioritize academics

over experiential learning, which marks the process of learning by doing, allowing students to be hands on in philosophies and experiences that they can apply from the classroom into the real world. Experiential learning is chipping and crafting students allowing them to gear to their future interests, thus the student assumes the role of a constructivist. Hence, it is comprehensible that the employment of traditional models of learning has left students disengaged and uncertain about their post-secondary path. Real-life learning, by contrast, connects theory to lived practice through career exploration, project-based learning, and mentorship (Verma & Nichols, 2022), all of which were central to the Future Innovators Challenge. Experiential learning has shown to increase student engagement and improve their understanding of real-world applications, helping students clarify their postsecondary goals (Kolb, 1984).

In our team, each student contributed uniquely to a hypothetical career that merged with multiple disciplines. Whether creating VR simulations, researching regulatory environments, or designing pitch decks, we operated as professionals with deadlines and a clear purpose. A number of new technical tools, such as the utilization of platforms like VR simulation, have emerged that are crucial to the advancement of teaching and learning methodologies. In light of these advancements, new learning environments are being created with ever-increasing amounts of realism, from the analog world and in-person instruction. This kind of applied learning made the abstract feel tangible, bridging school and life in a way that static curriculum, a predetermined unchanging design of concepts, rarely does (Perez, 2022).

Experiential learning is not merely motivational; it is foundational. Research from the American Student Assistance organization (2021) confirms that students exposed to career-connected learning in middle and high school know more about careers. Yet most students, particularly those in underfunded schools, lack access to structured career exploration and workforce engagement opportunities prior to graduation (Kemple & Willner, 2008). Experiential learning is not merely motivational; it is foundational. Research from the American Student

Assistance organization confirms that students exposed to career-connected learning in middle and high school know more about careers. Yet most students, particularly those in underfunded schools, lack access to structured career exploration and workforce engagement opportunities prior to graduation. To solve this issue, we must change and reimagine learning through programs that intentionally bridge education and workforce demand. Multiple models across the country illustrate how this can be done effectively. For example, Da Vinci Schools in California have implemented DV RISE and DV Connect, which redesign educational architecture through project-based learning, hybrid early college pathways, and strong partnerships with businesses and community organizations. Similarly, the Baldwin School2Career program provides students with structured career immersion experiences, mentorship, and real-world workplace exposure that support informed postsecondary planning and equitable access to professional networks. Together, these initiatives demonstrate how schools can embed career-connected learning into the K–12 ecosystem by centering personalized learning, community engagement, and student voice. As seen in Da Vinci Schools' outcomes, where students reported stronger community involvement and smoother transitions into the workforce. Programs that integrate mentorship, internships, and industry partnerships democratize access to the skills, networks, and mindsets needed for long-term success. By embedding mentorship, internships, and industry partnerships into the curriculum, schools can democratize access to the skills, networks, and mindsets that facilitate successful transitions into the workforce.

Who Gets Future-Ready Opportunities—and Who Doesn't

By Student C

Not all students had the opportunity we did. While our school could support the Future Innovators Challenge with devices, digital platforms, and community partnerships, many schools across the country lack such infrastructure (Ogundari, 2023). The result is a growing “futures gap,” a discrepancy not just in access to current education, but in access

to future opportunity. The futures gap highlights disadvantages that affect students' ability to participate in developing job industries (Shukla et al., 2022).

The inequity of educational resources is well-documented, but future-readiness widens that gap. Students in well-funded districts can explore emerging technologies, work with mentors, and engage in design thinking challenges. In contrast, students in under-resourced schools often remain locked into legacy curricula that emphasize compliance over creativity, testing over tinkering.

Curriculum prompting students to envision their futures has had difficulty gaining traction in an educational policy environment that is focused on preparing students for high-stakes exams such as the SAT and ACT (Burns et al., 2014). This disparity is not simply a matter of devices; it reflects broader systemic inequalities that influence which students are seen as future innovators and which are not. For education to become future-ready, it must also become future-equitable (Chari, 2024). This means prioritizing funding for future-oriented learning in marginalized communities, investing in teacher training for innovation pedagogy, and ensuring all students can access industry mentorship and 21st-century learning environments (Shukla et al., 2022). The support systems ensure underserved students can gain the tools, networks, and experiences to navigate the emerging occupations that will define the workforce in the near future. Additionally, these systems enable students to envision a wide range of future possibilities which is an imperative aspect of closing the future-readiness gap. Students should be enabled to imagine emerging careers and evolving technologies. This is necessary for students to navigate the rapidly changing world (Corres et al., 2024).. Mentorship, training, and innovative learning methods lead to under-resourced students developing the mindset that they can pursue diverse career paths and make meaningful contributions in the future (Dela Peña & Galigao, 2024).

Ask Us What We Need—We Know More Than You Think

By Student D

Participation in the Future Innovators Challenge offered my team and me an opportunity to engage in meaningful collaboration and problem solving that reflected real world expectations. Throughout the competition, we encountered a variety of challenges, including identifying effective presentation strategies, gathering extensive information on emerging career fields, and tailoring our work to capture the interest of a diverse audience. By working collaboratively, we navigated these tasks with persistence and teamwork. Through brainstorming, planning, research, and presentation, my teammates and I demonstrated our ability to work collectively and use our voices to articulate the possibilities of future careers (McWhaw et al., 2003). This experience helped us recognize a broader insight about ourselves. Despite being high school students, we are capable of exercising independence and making informed decisions regarding our learning and long term goals. Too often, educational decisions are made for students rather than with them, which constrains opportunities for genuine student input (Stefanou et al., 2004).

Policies and rules that overlook student voice can unintentionally hinder learning and development, and even when student feedback is requested, it rarely results in meaningful change (Hall & Hord, 2018). Without authentic student involvement, educators and administrators struggle to build environments in which students can truly thrive (Schaefer et al., 2024). Student involvement is complex and cannot be measured by a single factor (Tinto, 2014). Nevertheless, engagement and success can be understood through consideration of students' self efficacy, emotional well being, and sense of belonging (Kahu & Nelson, 2018). With thoughtful preparation, we presented our work in a way that challenged administrative assumptions and provided a fresh perspective. This opportunity gave us a strong sense of accomplishment and allowed us to feel that our insights were genuinely valued. Overall, student engagement is essential, particularly as today's learners will shape and occupy the careers of the future (Senior et al., 2014). To strengthen educational outcomes, students must be actively included in decision making structures such as school boards, curriculum committees, and technology

planning groups (Nathenson & Henderson, 2018).

Participation in these forums allows students to move from passive recipients of instruction to active co-creators of their education. When speaking with administrators about curriculum and programming, we were able to share our perspectives in ways that direct observation alone cannot provide. Ongoing encouragement to innovate and contribute new ideas is crucial, yet this becomes possible only when administrators listen to students and incorporate their feedback into meaningful institutional change (Kahne et al., 2022). Our experience in the competition demonstrated that students can be trusted with real responsibility and are capable of addressing complex challenges. When confronted with obstacles, we analyzed problems, identified relevant factors, and worked together to create solutions. By examining the emerging role of quantum computing, we identified a significant gap in cybersecurity and designed a conceptual response to address this issue. We believe that schools should reflect the evolving identities, goals, and realities of students rather than rely on outdated educational models.

Although society is changing rapidly, the fundamental purpose of education remains constant, and instructional methods must evolve to meet the needs of today's learners (Jabr, 2023). Education should extend beyond test performance. It should foster essential life skills, intellectual curiosity, and a strong sense of purpose (Pellegrino & Hilton, 2012). Student voices are vital in shaping educational practices that support these dimensions. The urgency for student involvement in educational reform is clear. Students must play an active role in shaping a system designed to serve them effectively (Mitra & Gross, 2009). However, the responsibility for improvement does not rest solely on students. Educational leaders must create opportunities for student input and recognize students as genuine contributors to innovation. Young people often possess a clear understanding of their needs and the strategies that help them learn most effectively. Administrators must seek out this knowledge and remain open to adapting their practices (Noguera, 2007). The most significant lesson from the Future Innovators Challenge was the recognition that

students are not only capable of contributing to solutions, they are eager to do so. Educational policies too often exclude those most directly affected: the students themselves. Throughout our project, our decisions regarding strategy, ethics, and feasibility mirrored real world innovation processes. This was evident in our development of a proposed quantum computing cybersecurity specialist, including its potential market impact, responsibilities, and distinctions from existing roles. This responsibility deepened our engagement and affirmed our academic, social, and emotional capabilities. Empirical evidence supports these experiences. Noguera notes that incorporating student perspectives leads to more effective and responsive schools. Including students in curriculum design, technology planning, and policy development is therefore essential. As primary participants in the educational process, students offer insights that are often overlooked in adult centered decision making.

Recommendations for Future-Ready, Student-Centered Education

Drawing from the experiences of students in the Future Innovators Challenge and supported by contemporary research on workforce development, educational psychology, and equitable school reform, we propose the following recommendations for designing a more future ready, student centered secondary education system. These strategies aim to align curriculum, pedagogy, and governance with the demands of a rapidly evolving labor market while ensuring that all students have equitable access to the resources that foster innovation, agency, and long term success.

1) Integrate Emerging Fields into Curriculum

Schools should expand curricular offerings to include emerging fields such as artificial intelligence, sustainable technology, biotechnology, quantum systems, and digital entrepreneurship. These subjects should not be limited to specialized academies or enrichment tracks, but incorporated into the core educational program to ensure broad student access. According to the World Economic Forum (2020), global labor markets will increasingly prioritize competencies related to technological fluency, systems

thinking, and creativity. Integrating future oriented disciplines into mainstream coursework helps students cultivate the adaptable and interdisciplinary skill sets required for these new roles. Research further indicates that early exposure to technologically sophisticated fields increases student confidence and interest in pursuing related careers, particularly for students from historically underrepresented groups (Wang et al., 2017). Through this approach, schools can ensure that learners graduate with both foundational academic knowledge and the future ready competencies required in an innovation centered world.

2) Institutionalize Digital and Ethical Literacy

Digital literacy is now a foundational prerequisite for participation in academic, professional, and civic life. Schools must therefore adopt comprehensive digital learning frameworks that include cybersecurity awareness, online research methodology, media authorship, data interpretation, and ethical technology use. The rapid expansion of artificial intelligence tools has made ethical literacy especially critical. Students must learn to evaluate data privacy concerns, algorithmic bias, and the societal consequences of emerging technologies. The International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE, 2022) notes that effective digital citizenship requires a combination of technical proficiency and ethical reasoning, both of which should be explicitly taught and assessed. Providing structured opportunities for students to practice responsible digital creation and communication can build the discernment and technological confidence needed for the future workforce.

3) Embed Experiential Learning and Mentorship

Experiential learning should become a central feature of high school education rather than an optional or extracurricular opportunity. Internships, capstone projects, community based inquiry, and industry partnerships offer powerful avenues for students to apply academic knowledge in authentic contexts. A substantial body of research demonstrates that experiential learning increases student engagement,

strengthens motivation, and clarifies postsecondary goals (Kolb, 1984; Verma & Nichols, 2022). Structured mentorship is similarly essential. Access to adult professionals who can provide guidance, feedback, and exposure to workplace expectations contributes to improved student confidence and career readiness (Kemple & Willner, 2008). Embedding these experiences within the curriculum rather than relegating them to after school programs promotes equitable participation and ensures that students in under-resourced communities benefit from the same networks and opportunities as those in more affluent districts.

4) Center Student Voice in Governance

Student voice must become a routine and valued component of educational decision making. Authentic participation in governance structures such as curriculum committees, technology planning groups, and school boards empowers students to shape the systems that directly affect their learning. Research confirms that when students co design curriculum and contribute to policy development, engagement increases and learning outcomes improve (Browne & Millar, 2018). These collaborative structures also foster a sense of belonging and agency, which are essential contributors to academic persistence and well being (Kahu & Nelson, 2018). Initiatives such as the Ex Officio student board member role in New York State demonstrate the feasibility and effectiveness of including students in high level conversations about school improvement. Expanding these models nationally would legitimize student perspectives and promote more responsive, student centered educational environments.

5) Close the Futures Gap through Equity Investment

Educational institutions must prioritize equity oriented investment to close the future gap, the disparity in students' access to the tools and opportunities required to participate in emerging career fields. Under-resourced districts often lack modern technology, updated curricula, and access to industry mentorship, all of which contribute to

inequities in career readiness (Ogundari, 2023). Targeted funding for technological infrastructure, innovation oriented teacher professional development, and project based learning environments is essential. Research shows that when schools in marginalized communities receive sustained investment, students gain stronger career identities, improved academic self concept, and greater access to future oriented occupations (Shukla et al., 2022). Ensuring that all students can explore emerging technologies and creative problem solving is not only a matter of workforce development but a matter of educational justice.

6) Cultivate Future-Based Change Leaders through Creative Problem-Solving

Aligned with Dr. Richard Bernato's framework on Future-Based Change Leaders, education systems should foster a problem-solving mindset rooted in design thinking and creativity. According to Bernato, creativity comprises four essential components: fluency, flexibility, elaboration, and originality. Fluency involves generating a wide range of ideas, often through brainstorming techniques. Flexibility encourages evolving and reshaping initial ideas by combining, shortening, expanding, or twisting them into new forms. Elaboration challenges students to fully develop and expand promising ideas. Finally, originality represents the emergence of truly novel concepts that could not have existed without first cultivating fluency, flexibility, and elaboration. Embedding these creative processes into education will prepare students to be innovative, adaptive leaders ready for future challenges (Bernato, 2021).

Conclusion: Students as Partners in Innovation

This article emerges from the belief the students are not merely recipients of educational structures but central stakeholders in shaping their purpose and direction. Our reflections do not diminish the meaningful intentions of current schooling; rather, they illuminate the need for these systems to evolve in response to the accelerating pace of technological, social, and economic change. We urge policymakers, educators, and community leaders to recognize the value of genuinely listening to students, not as a symbolic gesture, but as a

fundamental component of effective and equitable educational design. When students describe their experiences, articulate their aspirations, or identify barriers within existing systems, they offer insights that adults alone cannot generate. Preparing for a world that does not yet exist requires a willingness to embrace uncertainty, question deeply rooted assumptions, and imagine new possibilities for teaching and learning. It also requires honoring student agency, acknowledging that young people possess an acute understanding of the skills, mindsets, and opportunities they will need to navigate an increasingly complex future. Authentic student participation strengthens educational innovation by providing a perspective that reflects lived experience, emerging identities, and rapidly shifting global realities. The future of work and learning cannot be postponed or delegated exclusively to experts. It is already being constructed in classrooms where students experiment with ideas, on laptops where they engage in digital creation, in team discussions where they practice collaboration, and in student-led challenges where they envision the careers and technologies of tomorrow. These moments represent more than isolated academic tasks. They are the early architecture of the world students will soon inherit and help lead. To move forward responsibly, educational systems must engage students as partners in creating that future. When student voice is integrated with professional expertise and community commitment, schools become dynamic environments that prepare young people not only to enter the future, but to shape it with purpose, insight, and integrity. The task before us is not merely to adapt to change, but to cultivate a generation that feels empowered to design the world it wishes to live in.

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This article draws upon student learning from the Future Career Competition hosted by the Baldwin Business Department and features contributions from student writers Morgan Jackson, Brianna Horneck, Bruce Revels III, and Kylee Hopkins. The work was led by Gabriella Franza, Ed.D., Assistant Director of Instructional Programs in the Baldwin School District, Long Island, New York.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR: "ACHIEVE DEI GOALS WITHOUT DEI PROGRAMS" AN ARTICLE REVIEW

Introduction by: Richard Bernato, Ed.D.
Letter By: John Coverdale, Ed.D.

Letter to the Editor: Anyone? Anyone?

I often cringed when I watched *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* in the scene where the history teacher does a lesson about the Hawley - Smoot Tariff Bill, often accused of sparking the Great Depression. If you watch as if you were observing his lesson, you will cringe at the really poor instructional lecture strategy he uses with high school students who are paying zero attention to anything he drones. To make it worse, he slips into the most fruitless strategy of all by asking whether a student can answer the question, "Who can tell me what this law was called? This is followed by deadly silence, then doubly followed by his plaintive "Anyone, Anyone?"

Where the teacher at least opened the opportunity to react to his question, it is possible that we can also leave room for reaction and response by offering a new feature to our Journal for Leadership and Instruction that begins with this 25th anniversary commemorative issue.

Below, please find a Letter to the Editor that Dr. John Coverdale sent us in response to Dr. Robert Manley's review of an article he had read in the Harvard Business Review, authored by Drs. Frank Dobbin and Alexandra Kalev. That article offered an innovative response to matters of diversity, equity, and inclusion with reference to hiring practices that many high-level corporations have begun to use with great effect.

Dr. Coverdale, a nationally recognized expert and spokesperson on matters of Affirmative Action and DEI offered his eloquent thoughts about the themes and issues Dr. Manley's review prompted.

That led us at the JLI Board meeting to establish a new regular feature for future issues where we will consider readers' reaction to articles and reviews that we publish. We will publish responses that are courteous, scholarly, and in alignment with our goals.

And now to Dr. Coverdale's letter to us. Consider it a model you might emulate as you consider our many thoughtful, current, and important leadership and instructional issues you might submit to us.

Richard Bernato, Ed.D.

Editor-In-Chief

Journal for Leadership and Instruction

Dobbin, F. & Kalev, A. (2025, July-August). Achieve DEI goals without DEI programs. *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2025/07/achieve-dei-goals-without-dei-programs>

Manley, R. (2025). Article review: Achieve DEI goals without DEI programs. *Journal for Leadership and Instruction*, 24(2). <https://www.scopeonline.us/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/JLI-Fall-2025-Issue.pdf>

| Letter to the Editor

I read with great interest Dr. Robert Manley's recent review of the Harvard Business Review's July–August 2025 article, "Achieve DEI Goals without DEI Programs." The HBR article observed that DEI programs have been rolled back in both private and public sector organizations, as a result of political and social tensions rooted in history, and at times, a narrow definition of DEI, which is often viewed as an outgrowth of Affirmative Action, or an intersect for race and ethnicity. The broader definition of DEI can be summarized as respect for individuals of all backgrounds. It is in this context that the HBR article offers valuable guidance, advocating a shift away from divisive rhetoric and toward practical, people-centered approaches that foster more inclusive workplaces.

While I appreciate HBR's encouragement for organizations to continue pursuing DEI goals, I believe the article missed a crucial point by failing to assert that reframing DEI, both in theory and practice, is essential to future-focused leadership. Justice Sandra Day O'Connor's 2002 hope that racial preferences would become unnecessary was once seen by some as a "moonshot." Today, while some progress is evident, significant work remains if we are to achieve sustainable inclusivity. I hoped the article would discuss more fully how emotionally intelligent leaders foster stability through civility and purpose, and how these skills are vital to building the organizational trust described in the article. Such competencies also drive creative engagement, deeper understanding, and conflict resolution, all of which are fundamental for actual DEI progress.

It must be acknowledged that for some, the acronym "DEI" causes, as proffered by Socrates, "tension of the mind." However, rather than focusing on conflict, I propose that, as leaders, regardless of whether we are supporters of DEI, we turn our attention to recognizing and addressing the polarization in our society, which also affects our workplaces and I contend, ultimately isn't good for anybody. Instead, by prioritizing trust-building and shared purpose, we better prepare people for an increasingly diverse future that in so many ways is already here.

A key takeaway from the HBR article, in my view, is that investing in people and fostering organizational trust creates a foundation for lasting progress, in organizations and society. Fair-minded, reflective leaders play a pivotal role in this process by modeling inclusive behaviors and initiating cycles of engagement that can transform not just workplaces but also communities. Imagine the impact if we rejected the status quo and intentionally built workplace cultures that are Dynamic, Intuitive, and Engaged. Such progress would benefit everyone, no matter our background or beliefs.

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. John W. Coverdale

BOOK REVIEW:

"A SCHOOL LEADER'S GUIDE TO VITAL COLLABORATION: BUILDING AND SUSTAINING PLC SYSTEMS THAT IMPROVE TEACHING AND LEARNING"

Book by: Kevin Perks, Ed.D.

Review By: Richard Bernato, Ed.D.

In the various and several postgraduate and doctoral classes I have taught I am very aware of the number of words and concepts I use that begin with the letter C. I don't think that there is a mysterious code among them (notice that concepts and code both begin with that letter too). I do enjoy their underlying commonality too (there's another one). Just a few of these words, in no particular order, are,

- Culture
- Communication
- Catalyst
- Collective
- Creativity
- Coaching

And the subject of this book below....

Kevin Perks provides that word, Collaboration. A senior manager for WestEd's Quality Schools spectrum of services, and an author of *A Teacher's Guide to VITAL Collaboration: Facilitating Evidence – Driven Inquiry in PLC's to Improve Teaching and Learning*, adds this companion book to close the circle.

This book uses Collaboration as the engine for an entire system WestEd offers titled VITAL, Visibly Improving Teaching And Learning Through Schoolwide Collaboration.

All those professionals dedicated to the premise of assuring that what we do with systems and stakeholders is focused to aligning students' many needs with the demands of an emerging future, sooner or later, recognize the power to empower that collaboration can generate.

This is where the sum of the whole exceeds the sum of our individual parts.

Perks convincingly argues that the desire for rapid but also both sustainable and effective school improvement is reliant on an array of practices and dispositions where we can all, together, combine to build the Tower of Babel.

Each of this book's ten chapters is validated by sound research and made real, by offering practice based concrete strategies that school leaders might use to achieve VITAL's goals through collaboration.

Its tenth chapter, "Making Time for Collaboration, Strategies for PLC's into Daily Practice," particularly struck me. It reminded me of a Japanese business proverb, "None of us is as smart as all of us." that I use in my own courses. While however, that phrase sounds great it is not always necessarily true.

It is more accurate to realize that none of us is as smart all of us as long as we are all smart together!

That is easier said than done. It speaks to the fact that leaders must co-empower their stakeholders with the skills and dispositions to pool skills and talents to complete that Tower of Babel before it tumbles to the ground absent effective collaboration.

Great book for your professional library, greater book for your planning and implementation!

Perks, K. (2025). *A school leader's guide to vital collaboration: Building and sustaining PLC systems that improve teaching and learning*. Columbia Teachers College Press.



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