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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

MAINTAINING AND IMPROVING ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN THE MIDST
OF SIGNIFICANT DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE: A CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

PROGRAM IN EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION AND SUPERVISION

BY

AARON RAATJES

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

MAY 2017

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Thank you to my wife and parents for their continual support. This dissertation is as much theirs as it is mine. A special thank you to my family and former professor, Dr. Charles Green, for challenging me to seek out, enjoy, and benefit from opinions and experiences different from my own.

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ABSTRACT

The research of Mei Jiun Wu (2013) indicates that demographic change greater than 1% has significant impact on the achievement performance of school districts. This study analyzes a single district that experienced an average of 1.25% demographic change per year consisting of an increase of non-White students from 2002 to 2015. Despite this compounding change, the district was able to maintain and improve academic achievement. This study utilizes Marzano and Waters' (2009) framework for school leadership as well as Lindsey, Nuri-Robins, and Terrell's (2009) Framework for cultural proficiency to better understand how the district was able to maintain and improve academic achievement in the midst of significant demographic change. The study identifies the educational practices suggested by these frameworks as active within the school district and highlights the positive impact of mission oriented collaborative goal setting, data driven needs assessment with corresponding intervention services, overlapping communication structures, and a communal expectation of culturally responsive behavior.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Study

Whether slow and steady or rapid and abrupt, shifting demographics in the racial makeup of school districts is becoming a ubiquitous phenomenon for educational leaders as the U.S. population becomes more diverse (Dougherty, 2011). Given the shifting demographics, most educational leaders will need to respond effectively to demographic change at some point, if not throughout, their career. As such, it is necessary that district superintendents and administrative teams are equipped with a data driven knowledge base, both qualitative and quantitative, to guide them in their decision making process (Bernhardt, 2005; Bernhardt 2009; Park & Datnow, 2009; Pulliam, 2005) as they continually try to improve achievement levels for all students within their district.

The purpose of the study is to explore and analyze the relationship between educational leadership and academic achievement in the context of significant demographic change. Significant change is defined as greater than or equal to a 1% shift in yearly racial demographic makeup (Wu, 2013).

Significance of the Study

In the U.S., significant racial demographic change typically results in a significant decrease in academic achievement (Wu, 2013). This change is especially corrosive to achievement when the change is from predominantly white to non-Asian minority

students. Given the declining percentage of white citizens comprising the population of the United States, this trend is prevailing. Frey (2014) reports that fewer than half the babies born in 2011 were in the U.S. Census category of “non-Hispanic whites.” He goes on to report that in 2017 most Americans under 18 will be “minorities” of one kind or another. The United States is becoming more diverse, but there is little dispute that American schools fail to prepare minority students as well as their white counterparts. This failure has lasting implications for these students as well as American society as a whole. Without access to effective educational systems, the systematic oppression of minority populations will continue to persist (Berliner, 2005; Irizarry, 2011; Lindsey, Graham, Westphal, & Jew, 2008). Access to effective educational systems is a significant factor in dismantling the cycles of oppression that result in racial discrepancies in health, mortality, employment, wages, crime, and incarceration (Grodsky & Pager, 2001; Hayward, Crimmins, Miles, & Yang, 2000; Pampel, 2009; Pettit & Western, 2004; Phillips, 2002).

Despite the trend of downward achievement associated with demographic change, there are schools which have been able to maintain academic achievement in the midst of compounding demographic change at a rate exceeding 1% per year. This result is both unusual and significant. As such, it is appropriate that such cases be given particular attention for their unique attributes.

This study hopes to refine existing knowledge about the relationship between leadership and achievement as well as further identify meaningful insight into effective leadership in the midst of shifting racial demographics. There is a significant body of

literature which defines the attributes essential to effective leadership and links culturally proficient leadership to improved student achievement in diverse schools. What is less known is the extent to which these leadership attributes and cultural proficiency are effective in maintaining and improving academic achievement in the context of significant (greater than 1% per year) racial demographic change. This study hopes to further explicate characteristics of educational leadership that close the achievement gap and promote achievement in the context of significant racial demographic change. In short, this study hopes to clarify what actions such schools are taking that make them successful in an effort to provide insight and guidance to the increasing number of schools experiencing significant racial demographic change.

Conceptual Framework

The study utilizes Lindsey, Nuri Robins, and Terrell's (2009) theoretical framework of cultural proficiency and Waters and Marzano's (2009) framework for effective leadership as initial guides for exploring and explicating the case. Lindsey et al.'s *Culturally Proficiency: A Manual for School Leaders* (2009) proposes five essential elements of cultural competence:

- Assessing cultural knowledge;
- Valuing diversity;
- Managing the dynamics of difference;
- Adapting to diversity;
- Institutionalizing cultural knowledge.

These essential elements are informed by nine guiding principles that foster development toward cultural proficiency:

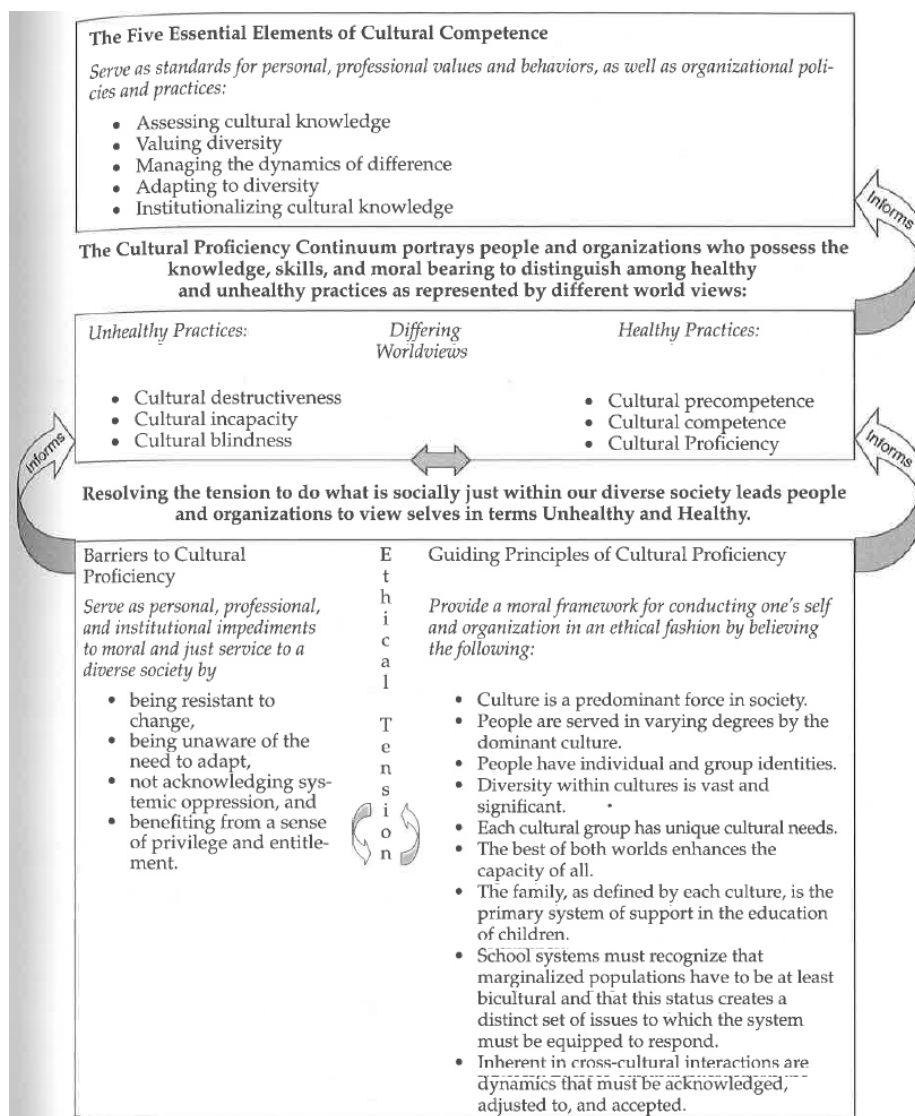
- Culture is the predominant force in society.
- People are served in varying degrees by the dominant culture.
- People have individual and group identities.
- Diversity within cultures is vast and significant.
- Each cultural group has unique cultural needs.
- The best of both worlds enhances the capacity of all.
- The family, as defined by each culture, is the primary system of support in the education of children.
- School systems must recognize that marginalized populations have to be at least bicultural and that this status creates a distinct set of issues to which the system must be equipped to respond.
- Inherent in cross-cultural interactions are dynamics that must be acknowledged, adjusted to, and accepted.

Cultural competence can best be illustrated by the use of the cultural proficiency continuum:

- *Cultural destructiveness*: negating, disparaging, or purging cultures that are different from your own.
- *Cultural incapacity*: elevating the superiority of your own cultural values and beliefs and suppressing cultures that are different from your own.

- *Cultural blindness*: acting as if differences among cultures do not exist and refusing to recognize any differences.
- *Cultural pre-competence*: recognizing that lack of knowledge, experience, and understanding of other cultures limits your ability to effectively interact with them.
- *Cultural competence*: employing any policy, practice, or behavior that uses the Essential Elements of Cultural Proficiency on behalf of the school or the district. Cultural competence is interacting with other cultural groups in ways that recognize and value their differences, motivate you to assess your own skills, expand your knowledge and resources, and, ultimately, cause you to adapt your relational behavior.
- *Cultural proficiency*: advocating in ways that honor the differences among cultures, seeing diversity as a benefit, and interacting knowledgably and respectfully among a variety of cultural groups.

The interplay between the essential elements of cultural competence, the cultural proficiency continuum, and the guiding principles of cultural proficiency as well as barriers to cultural proficiency are illustrated in Figure 1.



Note. Retrieved from Lindsey, R.B., Nuri Robins, K., & Terrell, R.D. (2009), *Culturally proficient school: A manual for school leaders*, 3rd edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Figure 1. The Conceptual Framework for Culturally Proficient Practices

Marzano and Waters' (2009) meta-analysis of studies related to district leadership and student achievement from 1970 until 2005 yielded five distinct leadership behaviors that have a positive and statistically significant ($p < .05$) impact on student achievement. They are:

1. Ensuring collaborative goal setting.
2. Establishing nonnegotiable goals for achievement and instruction.
3. Creating board alignment with and support of district goals.
4. Monitoring student achievement and instruction goals.
5. Allocating resources to support the goals for achievement and instruction.

The framework of cultural proficiency from Lindsey et al. (2009) as well as the framework for effective educational leadership from Marzano and Waters act as lenses through which the data was analyzed and interpreted, while remaining open to emergent themes. It is these theoretical assumptions that were tested within the specific context of the case to further validate their existing theories, challenge theoretical claims based on revelatory circumstance, or expound upon relevant, but insufficient understandings.

Research Questions

The topics of leadership and cultural proficiency are explored in detail in order to provide the appropriate context to answer the following research questions:

1. How has this district been able to maintain or improve its school-wide academic achievement levels in the midst of significant demographic change?
2. What actions has this district taken that reflect existing best practices for effective school leadership as identified by Marzano and Waters (2009)?
3. What actions has this district taken that reflect existing best practices for cultural proficiency as described by Lindsey, Nuri Robins, and Terrell (2009)?

Methodology

Yin (2013) asserts,

Whatever the field of interest, the distinctive need for case study research arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena. In brief, a case study allows investigators to focus on a “case” and retain a holistic and real-world perspective... (p. 4)

Stake (1995) addresses the appropriateness of case study in similar context when he states,

Quantitative researchers regularly treat uniqueness of cases as “error,” outside the system of explained science. Qualitative researchers treat the uniqueness of individual cases and contexts as important to understanding. Particularization is an important aim, coming to know the particularity of the case. (p. 39)

The single case study is particularly adept in ferreting out what unique qualitative factors contribute to a phenomenon. Flyvbjerg (2006) writes,

One can often generalize on the basis of a single case, and the case study may be central to scientific development via generalization as supplement or alternative to other methods. But formal generalization is overvalued as a source of scientific development, whereas “the force of example” is underestimated. (p. 12)

A single case study helps identify the particularities of how and why a district has been able to succeed within its unique circumstances and contribute to existing understandings of effective schools. The intent of the single case study is not to prescribe actions for other districts, but to understand the conditions and relationships within a single complex

system. This can then be reviewed by others and appropriate naturalistic generalization can be made according to individual discretion. Stake (1995) writes, “Naturalistic generalizations are conclusions arrived at through personal engagement in life’s affairs or by vicarious experience so well constructed that the person feels as if it happened to themselves” (p. 85). It is with this in mind that case study was used to identify those factors which contribute to the unusual success at this district.

The Case

Illinois school report card data was used to identify suburban school districts experiencing significant (greater than 1% average per year change for the case years studied) racial demographic change. Stanley Estrada High School (SEHS) (Pseudonym) was purposefully selected for its track record in maintaining academic achievement in the midst of significant racial demographic change. Merriam (2009) writes, “Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 77). SEHS was selected based on its moderate per pupil expenditure compared to its unusual ability to maintain high levels of student achievement in the midst of ongoing significant demographic change from 2003 through 2013.

Methods of Data Collection

The research was conducted by a single researcher for the purposes of a doctoral dissertation. The researcher has some prior knowledge of the district and communities, but no first hand experiences. As such, the research was conducted from the perspective

of an observer, non-participant. Data collection included semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis.

Interviews

Yin (2013) writes that “one of the most important sources of case study information is the interview because most case studies are about human affairs or behavioral events. Well informed interviewees can provide important insights into such affairs or events” (p. 108). Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews of relevant administrators, and the district superintendent.

Observations

This study included observations of training related to diversity or cultural proficiency. The study also included observations of any public or faculty meetings that discussed diversity or cultural proficiency in relation to student success and achievement. Observations allow the observer to notice things that may lead to understanding the context and culture related to the uncommon success of the district in maintaining student achievement in the midst of significant demographic change.

Document Analysis

The district mission statement, School Improvement Plans, School Report Card data, board meeting minutes, professional development records, and any other publically available data related to student achievement or student demographics were reviewed and analyzed to better understand leadership decisions, their rationale, and the relationship between actions and data. These documents were analyzed for evidence of effective leadership (Marzano & Waters, 2009) and cultural proficiency (Lindsey et al., 2009).

Coding

All data was coded using the conceptual framework for leadership from Waters and Marzano (2009) and cultural proficiency from Lindsey et al. (2009). Analysis remained open to emergent themes throughout. In an effort to increase the validity of assertions, data source triangulation between interviews, observations, and documents analysis was employed in an effort to substantiate, refute, or refine possible explanations. Member checking was utilized throughout to reduce the misinterpretation of an interviewees intended meaning, as well as provide for richer explanation. Member checking is the process of presenting those interviewed with the transcripts of the interview as well as initial analysis in an effort to best represent the intended meaning of the individual interviewed. Maxwell (2005) writes,

This is the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective they have on what is going on, as well as being an important way of identifying your own biases and misunderstanding of what you observed” (p. 111).

Interviewees were provided with the transcript of the interview as well as initial analysis. Those interviewed were then given the opportunity to comment, explain, or expound on the transcript and analysis in an effort to best represent their intended meaning.

Both direct interpretation and thick description was embedded in the final report in an effort to best convey context, feeling, and detail. Stake (1995) writes,

The Researcher should try to anticipate what vicarious experiences will do for the reader, should try to organize the manuscript so that naturalistic generalization is

facilitated. By providing information easily assimilated with the readers' existing knowledge, the writer helps readers construct the meanings of the case. (p. 126)

It is with this intent in mind, to help readers construct meaning, that thick description and direct interpretation were utilized to create vicarious experience and support understanding. Data collection in all forms continued until a point of saturation in an effort to comprehensively represent the many potential factors active in SEHS's success in the midst of significant racial demographic change.

Limitations

A potential area for bias necessitating continual reflexivity is the white race of the researcher. As a member of the white majority, reflexivity is crucial in weighing the biased view that accompanies one's race and personal experiences. A reflective journal was maintained by the researcher throughout data collection and analysis. Commenting on the value of reflective journals, Ortlipp (2008) writes,

Creating transparency in the research process was thus an important consideration, on that I engaged with by drawing on my reflective journals at key points in writing my thesis. My aim was to make my decisions, and the thinking, values, and experiences behind those decisions visible, to both myself and to the reader. (p. 697)

The reflective journal serves as a guide in understanding and justifying for the reader and the researcher the decisions made by the researcher throughout the research process.

Richards (2005) reiterates the utility of such a journal when he writes, "Good qualitative research gets much of its claim to validity from the researcher's ability to show

convincingly how they got there, and how they built confidence that this was the best account possible” (p. 143). By describing the thought process, feelings, and bias of the researcher, a reflective journal serves as a tool to reveal the internal, often hidden decision making process of the researcher, thereby bringing transparency and detail to the process. A journal was utilized by the researcher immediately after conducting interviews, during observations and throughout document analysis. The researcher wrote down reflections, questions, and decisions made in regards to problems, issues, or ideas encountered throughout data collection and analysis. This was then utilized to help the researcher identify potential areas of bias and intentionally seek out alternative explanations.

Given limited resources, the study relies on the reporting of a single researcher. The individual’s predilection towards any single explanation or data source will result in a biased data pool. Although data will be generated by a single individual, this limitation is mitigated through extensive literature review and frequent peer consultation and review. This purposeful single case analysis limits the studies ability to generalize findings to other districts. Rather, readers will have to determine for themselves what findings are relevant to their specific contexts through naturalistic generalizations (Stake, 1995).

An additional limitation is inherent in the snowball method utilized to identify potential interview candidates. Initial interviews were arranged based upon pre-determined criteria through the support of district administration. Given that some selections were not random, they could, and likely did, result in some level of bias. In

order to intentionally seek out alternative explanations or viewpoints, all protocols included a question asking interviewees to speculate about what criticisms exist surrounding district initiatives in an effort to uncover alternative perspectives and opinions.

Organization of Dissertation

Chapter II will contain the related review of literature for this study. The main components of this chapter will be as follows:

Introduction

The Achievement Gap

African American Students

Latino Students

SES and Race as Indicators of Achievement

Cultural Factors

Family Structures

Parenting Practices

Stereotype Threat

The Impact of Demographic Change

Summary

Closing the Gap-Best Practices

School SES and Racial Composition

The Role and Responsibilities of District Leadership

Curriculum

Instruction

Curriculum Differentiation

Teacher Quality

School Culture

Professional Development

Accountability

Heightened Awareness of Goals and Gaps Between Student Groups

Discipline

Special Education Referrals

Early Identification

Cultural Proficiency

Summary

Chapter III will review the methodology used in this case study. It will provide the background of SEHS with a detailed description of the criteria used to select the case and an explanation of data collection.

Chapter IV will present the data collected during research. It will also explain the procedures on how the data was analyzed. All data will be analyzed using the framework of effective district leadership developed by Marzano and Waters (2009) as well as the conceptual framework for culturally proficient practice as developed by Lindsey et al. (2009).

Chapter V will conclude the study with a discussion of the research questions, findings, and conclusions. Implications for schools experiencing demographic change will be discussed as well as recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter summarizes the literature surrounding the achievement gap between non-Asian minority students and their white peers. It will specifically focus on the role of the district leadership in closing this gap, as well as best practices known to effectively minimize and eliminate this gap. These topics will be explored in detail in order to provide the appropriate context to answer the following research questions:

1. How has this district been able to maintain or improve its school-wide academic achievement levels in the midst of significant demographic change?
2. What actions has this district taken that reflect existing best practices for effective school leadership as identified by Marzano and Waters (2009).
3. What actions has this district taken that reflect existing best practices for cultural proficiency as described by Lindsey, Nuri Robins, and Terrell (2009).

The factors identified throughout the literature review as influential to student achievement in schools is complex. Figure 2 provides a brief synopsis of both the non-school and school related factors affecting academic achievement as well as best practices identified for improving student achievement. This synopsis is provided in an effort to concisely illustrate the general impacts of these various factors, positive or negative, in relation to academic achievement. Just as a confluence of factors work to

exacerbate the achievement gap, so also must various strategies be simultaneously employed if the achievement gap is to be minimized and eventually eliminated.

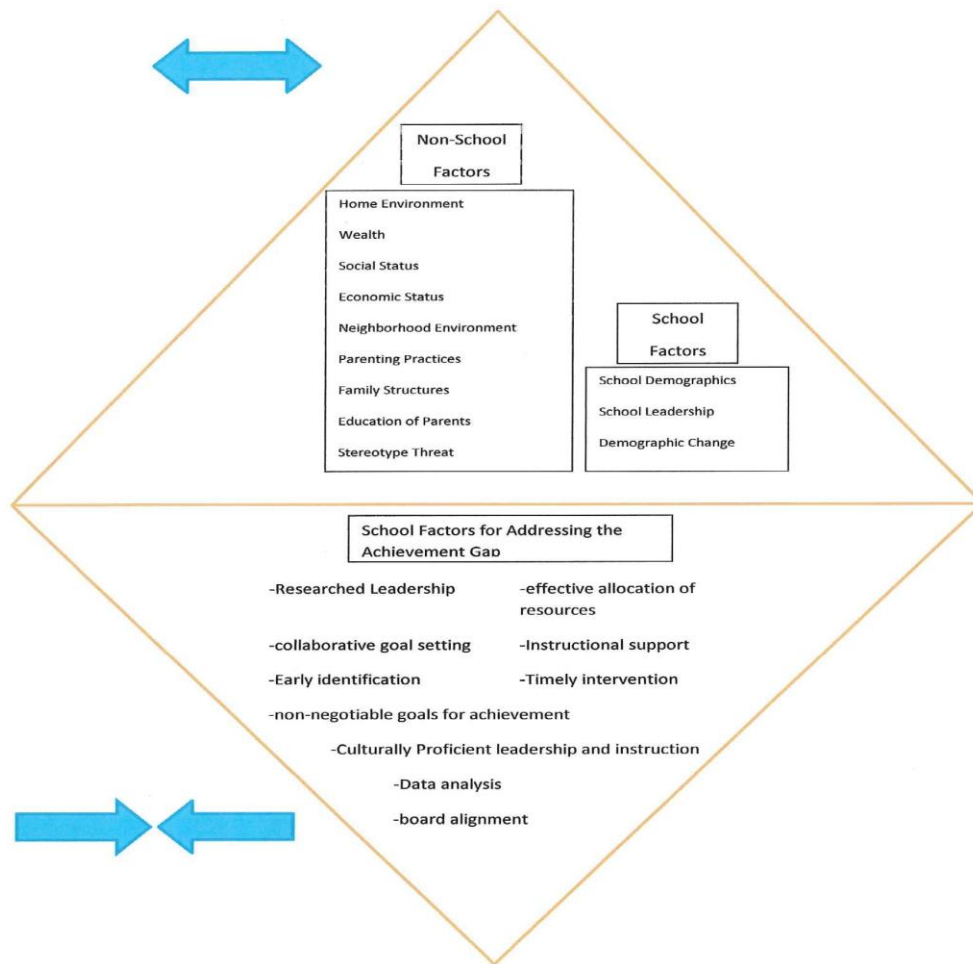


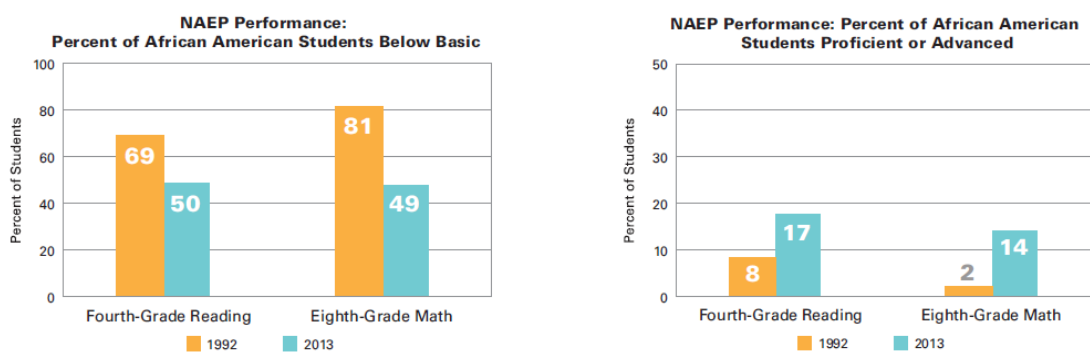
Figure 2. Influential Factors Related to Exacerbating or Reducing the Academic Achievement Gap

The Achievement Gap

African American Students

The Education Trust’s 2014 report on the state of education for African American students indicates that the gaps between African American students and White students have narrowed (p. 4). The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is a test

ordered by Congress and regularly administered to a nationally representative sample of American students in the fourth, eighth, and twelfth grades. As seen in Figure 3, test data reveal a marked increase in the percent of African American students performing at a proficient or advanced level in math and reading in 2013 compared to 1992 (U.S. Department of Education). Additionally, Figure 3 indicates that the same time period has seen a marked decrease in the number of African American students performing below basic achievement standards in these same critical categories. In fourth grade reading and eighth grade math, scores for Black students from 2003 to 2013 have risen faster than White students, narrowing the gap in these areas.



Note. Adapted from The Education Trust (2014), *The state of education for African American students*. Washington DC: The Education Trust.

Figure 3. NAEP Performance of African American Students in 1992 and 2013

Despite this marked improvement, a significant achievement gap between African American students and their White peers continues to persist. The Education Trust (2014) reports, “In both fourth-grade and eighth grade math, African American students are about two and a half times as likely as white students to lack basic skills and only about one third as likely to be proficient or advanced” (p. 6). This pattern of lower achievement is also observed at the high school level. The ACT (2013) reports that one

in 20 African American graduates who took the ACT met all four college-readiness benchmarks. In contrast, one in three White graduates met these same college-readiness benchmarks.

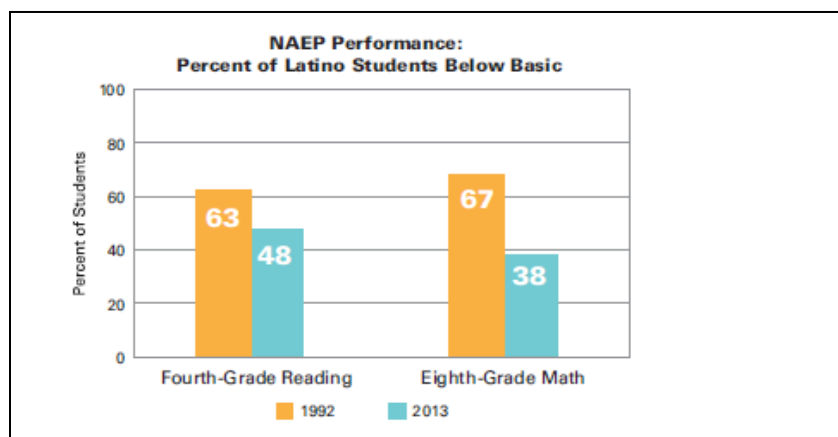
When it comes to high school graduation rates 2012 data reveal that only 69% of African American students graduated in four years, compared to 86% of White students (U.S. Department of Education). It is clear that African American student performance has seen significant improvement over the past two decades. What is also clear is that a significant achievement gap continues to persist between African American students and their White peers.

Latino Students

The Education Trust (2014) reports that Latino students comprise the largest student population in U.S. public schools after White students. The Education Trust also points out that this population is growing faster than any other ethnic group (p. 3). The U.S. Department of Education (2014) reports the Latino population to comprise almost 25% of the U.S. student population. This group also shows the most rapid growth among all ethnic groups, projected to reach 30% by the 2022-23 school year.

As is the case with African American students, there is an achievement gap between Latino students and White students. The Education Trust's 2014 report on the state of education for Latino students indicates that the gaps between Latino students and White students have narrowed (p. 4). NAEP data reveal a marked increase in the percent of Latino students performing at a proficient or advanced level in math and reading in 2013 compared to 1992 (U.S. Department of Education). Additionally, the same time

period has seen a marked decrease in the number of Latino students performing below basic achievement standards in these same critical categories. Figure 4 indicates that the number of Latino students performing below basic in fourth grade reading and eighth grade math has decreased between 1992 and 2013.



Note. Adapted from The Education Trust (2014), *The state of education for Latino students*. Washington DC: The Education Trust.

Figure 4. NAEP Performance of Latino Students

Although much progress has been made, a significant achievement gap between Latino students and their White peers continues to persist. The Education Trust (2014) reports,

Performance for Latino students remains far too low, and Latino students trail behind their White peers. In 2013, 19% of Latino fourth-graders read at a proficient or advanced level on NAEP, compared with 45% of White fourth graders. White eighth-graders were over twice as likely as Latino students to be proficient or advanced in math. (p. 6)

This pattern of lower achievement is also observed at the high school level. The ACT (2013) reports that fewer than half of Latino graduates who took the ACT met any

of the four college-readiness benchmarks. Only one in seven Latino graduates met all four college readiness benchmarks compared with one in three white graduates. When it comes to high school graduation rates, 2012 data reveal that only 73% of Latino students graduated in four years, compared to 86% of White students (U.S. Department of Education).

Socio-economic Status and Race as Indicators of Achievement

Both race and socio-economic-status (SES) are recognized as important indicators for academic achievement (Patterson, Kupersmidt, & Vaden, 1990). Children from low SES households are less ready for school and achieve at a lower level upon entering school than their higher SES peers (Kreisman, 2012; Zill, Collins, West, & Hausken, 1995). Not only does the gap exist prior to children entering kindergarten, but the gap widens by approximately one tenth of a standard deviation per school year for black students (Fryer & Levitt, 2004). The same pattern was not identified for Hispanic students. While the Black-White gap grows as students move through school, the Hispanic-White gap closes (Fryer & Levitt, 2004).

Sutton and Soderstrom's (1999) study of elementary and secondary school predictors for achievement in Illinois schools indicates that the strongest variables associated with academic achievement are the percentage of low-income students and the percentage of White students. The percentage of low income is negatively correlated to achievement, whereas the percentage of White students was positively correlated. Understanding how race and poverty impact the achievement gap is incredibly complex. Dotterer, Iruka, and Pungello (2012) write that over 60% of African American children in

the United States under the age of six live in low-income households compared to 30% of White children (Kreider & Fields, 2005; National Center for Children in Poverty, 2007; Proctor & Dalaker, 2003). The wealth gap between races is paralleled by the achievement gap. This overlap between race and poverty complicates the already complex relationships between achievement, race, and SES. Much research has attempted to clarify these relationships by controlling for SES in any examination of race and achievement. Coleman et al. (1966), Alspaugh (1991), Caldas (1993), Jencks and Phillips (1998), Cook and Evans (2000), Thernstrom and Thernstrom (2003), Farkas (2004), Magnusuon and Duncan (2006), and Yeung and Conley (2008) have all concluded that while income and social status can account for anywhere from one quarter to three-quarters of the achievement gap, they cannot completely explain away the gap. Jencks and Phillips (1998) write, “The number of affluent black families has grown dramatically, but their children’s test scores still lag far behind those of white children from equally affluent families” (p. 26). This conclusion is mirrored in The California Healthy Kids Survey Factsheet (Austin, Hanson, Bono, & Cheng, 2007). The study recognizes that income and social capital certainly contribute to the likelihood of student achievement, but the achievement gap indicates factors that go beyond this combination.

Cultural Factors

Other studies (Bankston & Caldas, 2000; Berends et al., 2008; Coleman et al., 1966; Cook & Evans, 2000; Jencks & Phillips, 2004; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003; Farkas, 2004; Lubienski & Shelley, 2003; Moynihan, 1965; Yeung & Conley, 2008) indicate that this “missing link” is attributable to cultural factors. Culture as a causal

explanation for behavior has long been suspect. Harvard Sociologist Orlando Patterson (2000) defends the use of culture as a causal factor in the achievement gap. He writes,

Often what's most interesting and useful in any analysis is to identify and disentangle the complex explanatory interplay between cultural and non-cultural factors, an interplay in which both sets of factors can be both independent and dependent in one's causal model. Above all, it should be understood that to explain is not to be deterministic. As Goodenough wisely points out, "Biology helps explain human behavior but does not determine it. Similarly, culture helps explain behavior but does not determine it, either. (p. 206)

There is little doubt that the value systems and social norms, or culture, which surrounds us, has an impact on our choices and our behavior. As such, it is appropriate that these value systems and norms be evaluated in the effort to determine their influence, positive or negative, on student achievement. The cultural proficiency framework created by Cross (1989) and the consequent proficiency continuum developed by Lindsey et al. (1999) and further clarified by Lindsey, Roberts, and CampbellJones (2013) defines cultural proficiency as, "Advocating in ways that honor the differences among cultures, seeing diversity as a benefit, and interacting knowledgably and respectfully among a variety of cultural groups" (p. 74). This is not to say that value statements regarding aspects of any culture cannot be made, only that these discussions should be rooted in respectful, inclusive, and informed dialogue. Any discussion regarding the achievement gap in America must be couched in the ongoing context of oppression. Patterson (2000) provides a salient example when he points out the cultural circumstances surrounding the

single-parent, predominantly matriarchal, family structure that more than 60% of Black children grow up in. Patterson asserts that this cultural structure is rooted in the realities of both slavery and the sharecropping lien system. Patterson points out that, as slaves, at least two thirds of biological fathers did not live in the same residence as their children. Additionally, the West African cultural heritage of the majority of slaves in the America's encouraged prolific procreation as a sign of status and masculinity. Similarly, West African cultural heritage emphasized the independence of women, which was reinforced by their full inclusion in the slave workforce. This independence was further reinforced by the economic benefits of maintaining female slaves, while separating and selling male slaves from the family structure. In short, any European cultural standard of a patriarchy where the father provides for the family was discouraged and impractical in the context of slavery. Patterson also notes that regardless of family structure, slaves were limited in their interaction with their children due to realities of slavery.

Although the abolition of slavery in 1865 did create a circumstance where Black families had more determination of their family situation, the realities of sharecropping continued to encourage large families as a source of labor, necessitating early marriage and procreation in a lien system that made education and professional advancement all but impossible. The sudden expectation to fulfill the European model of patriarchal marriage did not, however, erase the decades and centuries of cultural heritage that shape the values of the American Black family. Similarly, 60 plus years of supposed equal access public education cannot erase the centuries of systematic oppression and cultural devaluation which have resulted in the achievement gap.

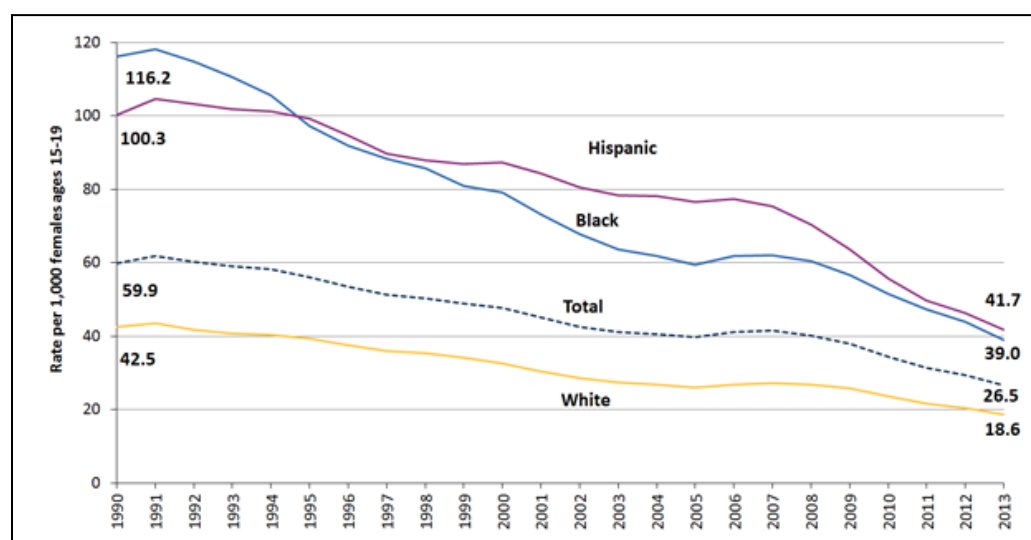
It can be argued that attributing the failures of oppressed demographic groups to cultural norms can quickly regress to an exercise in blaming the victim. Patterson (2000) provocatively relates this to blaming a victim of childhood sexual assault for their later insecurities and self-destructive behaviors. Patterson asks if a sympathetic individual, who recognizes this person's psychological problems and encourages this person to seek therapy, is blaming the victim. He writes,

It would be absurd to accuse that person of blaming the victim. Yet this is exactly what happens when a sympathetic analyst is condemned for even hinting that some Afro-American problems may be the tragic consequences of their cultural adaptation to an abusive past. (p. 206)

Does it honor differences to ignore the individual and corporal realities of various cultures or the history that led to those realities? Cultural proficiency promotes respectful and knowledgeable dialogue, but it requires dialogue. Culture cannot be assessed by one metric alone, but the achievement gap is a well-documented problem with relevant consequences for all of society. If culture is playing a role, the culturally proficient response is to respectfully address the role it is playing with the understanding that all cultures possess both beneficial and detrimental qualities, what is beneficial or detrimental changes based on contextual realities, and systemic oppression is still alive in American society.

Sociologist David Armor (2003) examined data to identify which environmental or cultural factors influence racial differences in cognitive development. Risk factors correlated to cognitive development identified by Armor include low-birth-weight and

birth to a young mother (18 or younger). The study identified low birth weight to be twice as likely for Black newborns as White newborns, with Hispanic newborns percentages close to that of White newborns. The study also found that incidences of teenage pregnancy are much higher among Black mothers than other demographic groups, a trend that continues into the twenty-first century. Thernstrom and Thernstrom (2003) relate that more than a third of Black mothers are 18 or younger, which is two and a half times the proportion for Whites, and approximately 50% above the figure for Hispanics. The National Center for Health Statistics (2015) does not limit their statistics to first birth mothers, but provides more recent percentages for total birth rate by race. Figure 5 shows that non-White and non-Black Hispanic mothers had the highest birth rate in 2013, followed by Black mothers.



Note. Adapted from The National Center for Children in Poverty. (2007), *Who are American's poor children? The official story*. New York: Columbia University, Mailman School of Public Health.

Figure 5. Birth Rates per 1,000 Females Ages 15-19, by Race/Ethnicity, 1990-2013

Although low birth weight could be explained by risk factors associated with poverty including poor nutrition, lack of prenatal care, and stress, it is more difficult to draw direct lines between teenage pregnancy and poverty. The higher birth rate among the higher income non-white Hispanic population indicates that family structure is dictated by more than socio-economic status.

Family structures. The Moynihan Report from the U.S. Department of Labor identified cultural risk factors related to race as early as 1965. The report pointed to the significant number of single-family female-headed families as a significant risk factor impeding progress within Black communities. Mare and Winship (1991) write,

That fewer Black women are marrying has substantially undermined their socioeconomic well-being. The number of women having babies out of wedlock has grown considerably. This in turn has been the main cause of the tripling in the number of Black families headed by women since 1940 and is a major source of the persistently large gap between family incomes of Blacks and Whites. Half of all households headed by women are poor. Children from these families have lower cognitive abilities and fewer years of schooling. They have less desirable jobs and lower incomes and are more likely to be poor as adults. Daughters from such households are more likely to form female-headed households themselves.

(p. 175)

This same family structure is still prevalent within Black families. Thernstrom and Thernstrom (2003) identified 63% of Black families as single-parent homes compared to 23% of White families, 35% of Hispanic families, and 19% of Asian families (p. 132).

This prevalence of single parent homes in conjunction with a larger total average number of children raised by Black families (approximately three children per parent for black families compared to one child per parent in white families) (p.132) often means less individual parental attention for Black children and a greater strain on financial resources compared to White children. Jencks and Phillips (1998), however, disagree that this family structure has much, if any, impact on the achievement gap. They write,

And while children raised by single mothers score lower on most standardized tests than children raised by married couples, this difference almost disappears once we take account of the fact that women who become single mothers come from less advantaged families, have lower test scores, and complete less schooling than women with husbands. (p. 26)

The assertion that parental structure operates as a proxy for socio-economic status means that something else must be influencing children's intellectual growth and the pre-school achievement gap. Davis-Kean (2005) and Lugo-Gil and Tamis-LeMonda (2008) have identified parenting practices as an important mediator for resolving the remaining gap after SES has been controlled.

Parenting practices. Culture, as a meaningful variable, is not limited to family structures. The parenting practices that accompany these structures might be far more influential than the structures themselves. George Farkas (2004) writes, "Child rearing cultures, broadly defined as the skills, knowledge, habits, and behaviors parents, caretakers, and peers teach students, vary strongly by class and race because residential segregation keeps these groups separate" (p. 14). One example of a parenting practice

that affects the achievement gap is family conversational culture. Hart and Risley (1995) underline this class difference in their study of the conversational cultures of families. They concluded that professional, middle, and low income workers verbal interaction with their children varied greatly by measuring the total number of words spoken and total amount of conversation. The study revealed that by the age of three, professional class parents had spoken 35 million words to their children compared to 20 million for the middle income and 10 million for the low income children. Jencks and Phillips (1998) extended the scope of this vein of research to race by analyzing the vocabulary knowledge of children of different races. They conclude that the average black student age 3-6 lags behind the average white child in vocabulary knowledge by about a full year. They explain this gap in terms of parental practice,

A good explanation of why White five year olds have bigger vocabularies than Black five year olds is likely to focus on how much the parents talk to their children, how they deal with their children's questions, and how they react when their children either learn or fail to learn something, not on how much money the parents have. (p. 26)

Rothstein (2004) indicates that parenting practices, like reading to children, and conversational practices, like posing questions rather than giving orders, are positively associated school achievement. Ferguson (2007) expands parenting practices beyond conversational culture to parental expectations about grades, homework, and recreational time. Although parenting practices consist of far more than conversational culture, the

authors contend that it is cultural differences, such as conversational culture, that help account for the remainder of the achievement gap.

Oppositional Culture Theory and Stereotype Threat

Ogbu (1978) and Gibson and Ogbu (1991) argue that limited societal opportunities perceived by minority groups results in resistance to school goals and negatively impacts the “pattern of linguistic, cognitive, motivational, and other school related skills they develop” (p. 5). In short, the perception that the systems of oppression in American society limits educational and career opportunities shapes minority student’s personal characteristics. Ogbu (1978) argues that these perceptions, justified or not, affect students’ motivational levels and create a disconnect between their personal goals and the goals of schooling. As a result, minority students may underperform.

Ainsworth-Darnell and Downey (1998) question Ogbu’s (1978) premise that minority students hold a negative view of school which results in lower motivational levels. Their research indicates that Black students actually have higher pro-school attitudes than their White peers, and these positive attitudes reduce the achievement gap.

Fordham and Ogbu (1986) contend that students, especially adolescents, may underperform out of fear. The argument is that achievement in school among certain minority groups will be perceived as “acting White” resulting in alienation from peers. This assumption is called into question by Ainsworth-Darnell and Downey (1998) who’s research reveals that not only do African-American students report more pro-school attitudes than White students, but are also more likely to be popular and accepted if they are viewed as good students.

Steele and Aronson (1998) argue that Black students suffer from “stereotype vulnerability” where students underperform on tests due to anxiety that they will fulfill the racial stereotypes of underachievement. This phenomenon manifests itself when students are asked to identify their race prior to taking the test or are told that the test measures intellectual ability. Thernstrom and Thernstrom (2003) argue that the theory does not hold up when measured against actual college performance. They write, “Black college students at schools like Stanford don’t do better in their courses than their SATs would predict, they actually do worse” (p. 29). This may indicate a cultural content bias where curriculum is normed to the dominant White culture. Jencks and Phillips (1998) question the validity of these assumptions. Correct or incorrect, the ability to navigate the dominant culture provides access to academic and professional influence and success. Farkas and Vicknair (1996) research reveals that when education levels of Black and White men were held constant, Black men earned 19% less than their White peers. When the unit of measurement became tests of basic skills in math and reading, then Black men earned 9% more than their White peers. Even if these tests contain bias, success in evaluations of academic skill is an indicator of future income. Schooling must be related to the acquisition of skills if the gap is to be narrowed and closed.

Noguera (2008) rejects such broad generalizations of culture made by Ogbu, Patterson and Steele. He claims that theories like oppositional culture are gross generalizations that only serve to reinforce inaccurate stereotypes. Despite this rejection, the author does recognize the consistent and well documented trends associating achievement with race and the importance culture plays in the persistence of the racial

achievement gap. Noguera recommends avoiding broad theoretical claims surrounding culture in favor of identifying specific aspects of culture related to achievement, like parenting practices. Despite the associations between culture and achievement, Noguera cautions that an overreliance on culture as a causal factor in the achievement gap fails to account for the high degree of diversity within racial groups and can serve as a distraction from factors known to have a positive effect on student achievement like reducing poverty and racial segregation, equalizing funding between schools, lowering class size, and hiring effective, highly qualified teachers.

The Impact of Demographic Change

Mei-Jiun Wu's study (2013), "The Effects of Student Demographics and School Resources on California School Performance Gain: A Fixed Effects Panel Model" reviewed and measured the impact of student demographic change on student achievement gains. Using fixed effects regression Wu concluded that the school's academic performance index (API) gains, a local measurement of achievement, appeared very sensitive to changes in all 16 of the variables measured. A 1% change in student demographics at school level was significant enough to change API by an average of -5.0077 to 1.2372. This study indicates that a demographic change of 1% has significant ramifications for student achievement.

School SES and Racial Composition

A significant question raised by many researchers has been whether or not the racial or SES composition of a school affects the performance of its students. Caldas and Bankston (1998) concluded that higher SES at both an individual and school level are

associated with higher test scores. Race, however, also had a measurable effect on achievement, even after SES was controlled. They write, "...there is a point beyond which academic achievement will disproportionately suffer due to high concentrations of minority students" (p. 553). Lee and Bryk (1989) indicate that this point of impact is around a 40% minority population. Conversely, Armor and Rossel (2001) found a trend indicating that black and Hispanic students reading scores significantly improved in an environment with a White population exceeding 80%. The generalizability of these findings is limited due to the limited number of minority students in these predominantly White schools. The numbers were so small that the findings were not statistically significant. This segregation factor is emphasized by Condrón (2009). He asserts that racial segregation is the leading factor in extending the racial achievement gap.

Researchers seem to agree that there is an inverse relationship between the percentage of minority students in a school's population and student achievement. What is unclear are the in-school and district factors that influence this relationship. The extent to which district resources (text books, per-pupil expenditure, materials, technology, etc.), district instructional practices, and district policies play a role in minimizing or enlarging the achievement gap is unknown. Condrón's research identified the impact of segregated schools on learning outcomes, but "...was unable to demonstrate the mechanisms through which segregated schools produce disparate learning outcomes" (p. 700). He goes on to write,

Indeed, the negative impact of segregated minority schools persists even net of other factors that we might expect to mediate this effect such as class

composition, neighborhood disadvantage, and unequal resources. In supplemental analyses, I find that the other school mechanisms in the model explain about 15 percent of the minority segregated school effect initially estimated with no other school measures in the model. What explains the remaining 85 percent? (p. 700)

Even after controlling for SES, neighborhood disadvantage, and resources, the large majority of the segregation effect remains unexplained. Yet, there are examples of highly segregated districts in similar contexts where minority students are meeting and exceeding academic standards (Chonoweth & Theokas, 2011). Reeves (2000) identifies “90/90/90” schools where 90% or more of students are eligible for free or reduced lunch, 90% are members of a minority group, and 90% or more meet district or state standards for reading or another area. While achieving a standard of “basic” on the Wisconsin Reading Comprehension Test may not represent an appropriate bar for high achievement, Reeves research does indicate the impact that curricular focus on achievement, clear curriculum choices, frequent assessment, and an emphasis on improvement and collaboration can have on improving achievement levels for all students, regardless of race, ethnicity, or socio-economic status. While addressing the Black/White gap, Condron (2009) writes, “Accounting for school factors by themselves explains a larger portion of the Black/White gap than does accounting for non-school factors; this suggests that schools play a leading role in producing Black/White inequalities in learning” (p. 699). What is occurring within these districts and their schools that manages to exacerbate or minimize the achievement gap? Despite the impact of non-school factors

(school composition, neighborhood, school SES, family structures, parenting practices, student mobility) there are clearly other discretionary factors at play that impact the achievement of students. These factors are within the control of district and school leadership and are a source of hope in the effort to maximize achievement for all students.

Summary

Untangling and isolating the multitude of variables that contribute to the achievement gap proves incredibly difficult. Despite the scrutiny with which these relationships have been examined, the contributing factors involved are so numerous and linkages so complex that universally accepted understandings regarding these relationships are non-existent. Thus far, non-school factors such as health related factors, family structure, parenting practices, income, and social capital have been reviewed to better understand the before-school achievement gap between non-Asian minorities and White students. Thernstrom and Thernstrom (2003) report that by twelfth grade African American students are a full four years behind their Asian and White counterparts, with Hispanics performing only slightly better than their African American peers. A study by the National Center for Educational Statistics (2002) finds that students, regardless of race, who perform well on standardized reading and math tests went on to succeed in college. Closing the gap is essential if schools are going to prepare all students for college and career, and much can be done to elevate the performance of all students and prepare them for success. There is little doubt that early interventions are essential in these seminal pre-school years. This, however, should not serve to dismiss the actions

that can be taken by schools and their administrations to reduce the achievement gap while elevating standards for all. Cook and Evans' (2000) investigation of the Black-White achievement gap from 1970 to 1988 attributes 75% of the gap reduction to within school changes. It is clear that family and between-school factors affect student achievement. What is also clear is that district and school leaders, their practices, and their policies matter.

Closing the Gap: Best Practices

The Role and Responsibilities of District Leadership

Marzano and Waters' (2009) meta-analysis of studies related to district leadership and student achievement from 1970 until 2005 yielded five distinct leadership behaviors that have a positive and statistically significant ($p < .05$) impact on student achievement.

They are:

1. Ensuring collaborative goal setting
2. Establishing nonnegotiable goals for achievement and instruction
3. Creating board alignment with and support of district goals
4. Monitoring student achievement and instruction goals
5. Allocating resources to support the goals for achievement and instruction.

In addition to these specific actions, the authors also identified a correlation between superintendent tenure and student achievement. The weighted average correlation was .19 ($p < .05$). In short, the tenure of a superintendent has a positive effect on student achievement and can have a measurable impact in as early as two years on the job. It appears that stability in administration is significant when it comes to making

achievement gains for students. Marzano and Waters' study indicates that district leadership has an overall statistically significant correlation of .24 ($p < .05$) to student achievement. In short, effective district leadership has a positive effect on student achievement across a district.

Findings 1 and 4 are underscored by the Education Trust's (2013) recommendations for closing the achievement gap for low-income students and students of color. The report lists four actions for addressing "equity and excellence in our nation's classroom" (p. 13) that reinforce the responsibilities of effective districts identified by Marzano and Waters (2009). They are:

1. Set meaningful goals for students at different levels
2. Raise the bar for all students
3. Mine every source of data for signals
4. Identify and attend to the gaps between groups.

Meaningful objectives and close monitoring are at the heart of both frameworks for student achievement.

Similar models for school improvement specific to closing the achievement gap have been compiled by the Schwartz (2000) and Leithwood (2010). Schwartz breaks her recommendations into eight categories:

1. State and district role
2. Early childhood development initiatives
3. School climate
4. School organization

5. Teaching and learning
6. School management
7. Family supports
8. Resources.

The recommendations for the state and district role align directly with the five point model proposed by Marzano and Waters (2009) including communal goal setting, non-negotiable standards, implementing research-based instructional practices, accountability systems, and allocation of resources including professional development and collaboration time.

After analyzing 31 empirical studies directly related to best practices in closing the achievement gap, Leithwood (2010) provides 10 common traits held by districts that are exceptionally effective at closing the achievement gap:

1. District wide focus on student achievement.
2. Approaches to curriculum and instruction.
3. Use of evidence for planning, organizational learning, and accountability.
4. District-wide sense of efficacy.
5. Building and maintaining good communications and relations, learning communities, district culture.
6. Investing in instructional leadership.
7. Targeted and phased orientation to school improvement (targeting interventions on low performing schools/students).

8. District-wide, job-embedded professional development for leaders and teachers.
9. Strategic engagement with the government's agenda for change and associated resources.
10. Infrastructure alignment.

The degree to which these independent studies' recommendations overlap serves to reinforce the importance of the district leadership's role in establishing uniform district goals, an emphasis on curriculum and instruction, accountability, professional development, and allocation of resources. Interesting additions unique to the three frameworks specific to closing the achievement gap (Leithwood, 2010; Schwartz, 2000; The Education Trust, 2013) were early childhood development initiatives, attention to school climate, family resources, and a heightened awareness of goals and gaps between student groups. Although these four recommendations may be implicit in the Marzano and Waters (2009) framework, they are not explicitly identified.

Curriculum

All four leadership models indicate the importance of effective curriculum. The U.S. Department of Education (2005) writes,

If student achievement is the goal and that goal is measured by standards-based assessments, the curriculum, instruction, and assessments all must be aligned with the standards. If there is a disconnect among these elements, student achievement will not be evident. Alignment is an ongoing process as standards, curriculum, and assessment cycle through improvements. (p. 2)

The heart of any successful school lies in its ability to provide good instruction (Zepeda, 2013). This quality instruction, however, cannot be achieved without the clear, communal, and uniform goals that these frameworks mandate. Good curricular goals unify and direct teachers in their efforts to provide excellent instruction.

This high quality instruction must be provided to all students. Condron (2009) and Oakes, Gamoran, and Page (1992) point out that curricular tracking based on preparedness (often miscategorized as ability) results in a disproportionate number of minority students being placed in low-level classes. Condron (2009) and Hoffer (1992) relate that low-level placements undermine achievement and exacerbates the existing achievement gap. Similarly, schools serving poor and minority populations employ teachers with less experience, less education, and fewer certifications than schools serving more affluent and/or predominantly white populations (Clotfelder, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2005; Kozol, 2005). All Students must be pushed toward challenging curricula at all levels in an effort to eliminate the systemic structures that help to perpetuate the achievement gap.

Instruction

Wenglinsky (2004) confirms that instructional practices have a significant impact on the achievement gap within a school. This finding supports Marzano and Waters' (2009) second recommendation in that it emphasizes the need to set non-negotiable goals not only for achievement, but also for instruction. How teachers employ their craft matters. Marzano and Waters recommend a two prong system for improving instructional practices in a district: recruit, hire, and retain the most highly qualified

teachers and foster pedagogical knowledge. Marzano and Waters cite Wenglinsky (2000) in support of their claim. Writing about Wenglinsky's findings Marzano and Waters (2009) state, "Specifically, teacher experience and involvement in professional development activities accounted for about as much variance in student achievement as did student background" (p. 56). If instructional practices can have the same impact on student achievement as race, ethnicity, family structure, income-level, or any other myriad of background factors, then pedagogy must be a primary focus of any district looking to improve student achievement.

The impact of high quality teachers was emphasized in the early 90s (Ferguson, 1991; Sanders & Horn; 1994) and reaffirmed as the body of literature has grown (Jordan, Mendro, & Weerasinghe, 1997; Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005; Wenglinsky, 2004). The literature indicates that when it comes to in-school factors for year to year student growth, teachers matter.

But what are predictors of teacher effectiveness? The literature indicates that experience (Fetler, 2001; Greenwald, Hedges, & Laine, 1996; Rivkin et al., 2005), education (Darling-Hammond, 1999; Goldhaber & Brewer, 1996) and certification are all significantly correlated to teacher effectiveness (Alexander & Fuller, 2004; Fetler, 1999; Laczko-Kerr & Berliner, 2002). The very indicators that have been identified for quality instruction are the same attributes that teachers in high-minority and high poverty schools consistently lack. Any attempt at minimizing the achievement gap must include a focus on employing, retaining, and developing a highly qualified and experienced work force.

School Culture

Every single point identified in Waters and Marzano's (2006) five recommendations for effective leadership is deeply related to school culture. While discussing the essential components necessary to improving high minority, low-performing schools Chenoweth and Theokas (2011) write,

...Leaders know that their commitment to students requires that they build a climate and culture that supports and requires excellence. They do this in part by respecting students as learners who are worthy of high support and high demand—that is they expect them to work toward excellence in all their work. But they also respect teachers as professionals who are worthy of high support and high demand—that is, they don't just leave it at expectations. They build in systems to monitor how teachers and students are doing and provide the support they need to reach their goals of excellence. (p. 169)

Any number of organizational theorists or curriculum specialists will relate that requiring excellence begins with an aligned vision and mission (Collins, 2001; Fullan, 2015; Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009; Zepeda, 2013). The extent to which this vision and mission are aligned and embraced within the organization is an indicator of the extent to which the organization is making progress towards accomplishing its goals. Zepeda (2013) writes,

In healthy school cultures, principals work with teachers, they have a shared vision and mission, they focus on students learning, and they work under a common set of assumptions about learning for both students and adults. A

positive culture is aligned to goals and objectives about learning for students and adults. (p. 20)

These insights are given voice by Marzano and Waters' (2009) first two goals: ensuring collaborative goal setting and establishing nonnegotiable goals for achievement and instruction. Clear and agreed upon expectations and direction are at the heart of establishing a positive school culture. Direction, however, is not sufficient. Chenoweth and Theokas (2011) indicate that respect is a key element in creating a successful and positive school culture. Respect is predicated upon support and demand. Kruse, Louis, and Bryk (1994) indicate that the conditions necessary for a supportive culture include critical elements of school communities, structural conditions, and social and human factors. The critical elements of school communities are: reflective dialogue, deprivitization of practice, collective focus on student learning, collaboration, and shared norms and values. The structural conditions cited are: time to meet and talk, physical proximity, interdependent teaching roles, communication structures, and teacher empowerment. The social and human factors are openness to improvement, trust and respect, supportive leadership, and socialization of teachers. Key to factors in each category is time. Time is required for reflective dialogue, collaboration, and socialization. According to these recommendations, any system dedicated to supporting its goals must dedicate time to ongoing professional development and professional collaboration. Professional development affords teachers the opportunity to collaboratively set goals, monitor student achievement and instruction goals, as well as share and learn new instructional strategies to better support student learning. Such

professional development fulfills the recommendations set forth by Marzano and Waters (2009) as well as requires the kind of resource allocation that is aligned with district mission and called for in their framework.

Support is provided in the form of time for professional development and professional collaboration. Chenoweth and Theokas (2011), however, charge leaders to provide support and demand. Demand is supplied in the accountability measures that school districts employ to ensure student achievement. No Child Left Behind (2001) created a culture of high-stakes accountability for districts by requiring annual yearly progress (AYP) markers. For the first time, all schools were nationally mandated to analyze and report data by subgroup rather than reporting data in the aggregate. Schools which did not meet AYP were faced with consequences as extreme as school restructuring or closing. This national accountability measure added new ramifications for poor performance and brought added attention to subgroups often ignored or underserved. While NCLB heralded a new atmosphere of accountability, assessment and evaluation of leadership and faculty still rests within the purview of individual states and districts.

Accountability

Reeves (2009) writes,

We should expect no less of policymakers and senior administrators than we require of novice teachers---evaluation, assessment, and feedback that is accurate, specific, and clear. Most important, we must change the fundamental purpose of assessment of leaders, following the pattern of recent changes in the assessment

of students. The purpose of assessment is not to rate, rank, sort, and humiliate.

The purpose of assessment is to improve performance. (p. xi)

Chenoweth and Theokas (2011) recognized respect as the paramount ideal necessary to establishing a rich school culture conducive to learning. The sentiment espoused by Reeves (2009) speaks to this respect by highlighting the importance of improved performance. The framework for evaluation and assessment proposed by Reeves suggests that all supervision, whether leadership, teacher, or student, must be implemented in the spirit of support with the assumption that all can achieve and improve. If this is to be achieved, as Reeves points out, then feedback must be accurate, specific, and clear.

One essential tool for specific feedback highlighted by Marzano and Waters (2009), the Education Trust (2013) and Leithwood (2010) is the use of data and evidence to monitor instructional goals and inform instructional strategies. Part of this process specific to the achievement gap is monitoring school performance for student groups and attending to identified gaps in achievement. Knowledge alone is not enough. The collected data and evidence must prompt specific feedback and action if the accountability process is to be productive.

Common Gaps

Two specific examples of gaps in service identified through the inspection of data which lead to disparity in achievement between student groups are discipline and special education. Losen and Martinez (2013) report that the percentage gap between racial or ethnic minority and White students receiving out of school discipline has widened. This

gap has significant ramifications for minority students. Research shows that students receiving exclusionary discipline have lower levels of achievement (Eitle & Eitle, 2004; Raffaele Mendez, Knoff, & Ferron, 2002). Furthermore, suspension rates have more to do with school factors than individual factors like race, poverty, student demographics, or past behavior (Fabelo et al., 2011). Although harsh discipline does not necessarily cause the low achievement, it also does not take active measures to improve student achievement. Out of school disciplinary action ensures loss of instruction time. Based on their literature review Losen and Martinez (2013) point out:

- Harsh punitive responses do more harm than good.
- Reserving out-of-school suspensions as a measure of last resort can lead to higher achievement and improved graduation rates.
- The ideas that we must kick out the bad kids so the good kids can learn is a myth, because there are many viable alternatives that do not result in chaotic school environments. (p. 2)

Given the identified connection between disciplinary action and poor student achievement, it is absolutely necessary that schools regularly review their disciplinary data to identify any disproportionate trends between student groups. Only after such trends are identified can a district focus their policies, practices, and resources on proactively creating a more just system that holds students to a high standard of conduct and achievement while responding to their individual needs.

The over-identification of minority students, especially Black males, for special education has long been recognized as a problem (Donovan & Cross, 2002; Dunn, 1968;

Harry & Klingner, 2006; Mercer, 1973). The trend has been so prominent that the Office for Civil Rights has twice commissioned studies by the National Academy of Sciences to analyze the problem (Donovan & Cross, 2002; Heller, Holtzman, & Messick, 1982). If one accepts the premise that challenging curricula is a necessary component for high achievement, then the over-identification of minority students into special education programs where their curriculum is tracked according to perceived ability exacerbates and perpetuates the existing racial achievement gap. Harry and Klingner (2006) write,

The disproportionate representation of minorities in special education programs is a result of a series of social processes that, once set in motion, are interpreted as the inevitable outcomes of real conditions within children. These social processes do not occur by happenstance, or by the good or evil intentions of a few individuals. Rather, they reflect a set of societal beliefs and values, political agendas, and historical events that combine to construct identities that will become the official version of who these children are. In special education, the construct of disability has become the overriding metaphor by which differences in students' behavior and school achievement are explained. (p. 7)

This constructed reality referenced by Harry and Klingner is the result of clinical judgements. The difficulty faced by these children is that these labels identified through clinical judgements often become the driving force behind a child's education rather than the child's individual and changing needs.

Cole (1996) asserts that psychological theories of learning often assume that culture is irrelevant to the learning process. This assumption ignores the significant body

of literature indicating cultural differences in the creation of meaning (Gardner 1991; Gay, 2000; Rogoff & Chavajay, 1995). The system of special education that has developed in the United States relies on deficit labels that determine the availability of services. If culture impacts the learning processes of students, then it must be attended to rather than ignored or labeled as a deficit. Harry and Klingner (2006) recommend that educational systems find ways to serve the unique needs of students rather than imposing predetermined deficit labels that pigeon hole a student into programming that may or may not be appropriate to the student's unique needs. The literature indicates that educators must hold high expectations and standards of achievement for all students while, at the same time, meeting students where they are by providing supports and scaffolding to make success feasible.

Early Identification

In discussing the graduation gap for at-risk students Mac Iver (2010) criticizes the current accountability frameworks which have "...led many school districts to narrowly focus on student achievement, and hence, to miss the point entirely" (p. 8). McNeil, Coppola, Radigan, and Heilig (2008) point out that high stakes testing and the accountability push of No Child Left Behind resulted in higher drop-out rates for the lowest performing students. Accountability without a measurement of drop-out rates is skewed at best and manipulative at worst. Mac Iver (2010) writes, "Achievement has become so closely tied to test scores that educators sometimes lose perspective of the larger goal of graduating all students prepared for postsecondary training leading to a career" (p. 8). College and career readiness is the goal of K-12 education, not high test

scores achieved by attrition. Any true estimation of a district's effectiveness and student achievement must evaluate graduation rates in conjunction with test scores if it is to give an appropriate picture of success or failure. Mac Iver writes, "The district office, therefore, has a key role to play in narrowing the graduation gap and ensuring that more students earn their high school diplomas well-equipped for college or career" (p. 13). In an effort to improve graduation rates and ensure prepared graduates Mac Iver recommends a three pronged ABC approach which calls for district leaders to:

- Analyze data to identify and address early warning indicators of dropout as well as policies and practices related to student attendance, behavior, and course failure;
- Build Consensus among school leaders and faculties on the need to implement research-based practices that will help prevent dropout outcomes through reducing absences, suspensions, and course failures, and providing recovery opportunities for students before they drop out;
- Create integrated whole school reforms and school level student support structures, including early warning systems that will ensure appropriate, timely interventions to keep all students on track to on-time graduation. (p. 10)

While reinforcing collaborative goal setting and research based initiatives, the framework explicitly adds the component of early warning systems. While this may be implicit in the existing frameworks under data mining for signals, the identification and attendance of gaps, or monitoring student achievement, Mac Iver exemplifies its importance as a tool specifically essential to at-risk students.

Cultural Proficiency

Lindsey et al. (2013) assert that much of the achievement gap can be explained through inequity in our schooling systems and must be addressed through cultural proficient leadership and instruction. The authors assert that much of the gap is a result of inequity and cultural differences. Gramsci (1971) asserts that cultural hegemony creates a societal system of advantage for the cultural mainstream. The cultural style, beliefs, and practices of the mainstream are pervasive and become valued and privileged above all others. This creates a system of advantage based on culture. In the United States this dominant culture is also correlated with Race. Spindler and Spindler (1990) identify the referent ethnicity and class as Caucasian middle class Americans. Tatum (1992) defines racism as a system of advantage based on race. Given the racial association with the dominant culture in America, Tatum would define all public contexts, including schools, as racist given the cultural advantage afforded the White, middle-class majority. Gay (2000) reiterates the effect of cultural hegemony relating that teachers and schools expect students to conform to the advantaged culture, which may or may not be the predominant culture within the school. Gay advocates for school leadership to adopt “culturally responsive caring” while maintaining unrelenting high expectations for all students. Delpit (1988) recognizes the need to support the cultural identity of students as well as their home language, but also argues in favor of explicitly teaching students the behavioral and academic skills necessary to navigate the privileged culture of power. Students must be affirmed in the value and legitimacy of their cultural

background while afforded access to the various networks of power more readily capable of influencing change.

As such, cultural barriers such as resistance to change, systems of oppression, and entitlements must be addressed if progress in academic achievement is to be made.

Lindsey et al. (2013) write,

The approach we propose is a focused strategy that significantly and persistently addresses the problems of educational inequity. We firmly believe that education leaders must mobilize a sustained and coherent strategy that challenges the dominant deficit and at-risk characterizations of some students. An inclusive, pluralistic, and instructionally powerful learning environment offers the real likelihood that all students will be well-educated and successful learners. (p.11)

Price's (2007) study of five superintendent's emphasis on cultural proficiency and the corresponding reduction of the achievement gap within each of the five districts supports Lindsey et al. (2013) claims that efforts to close the achievement gap and improve district achievement must be rooted in the framework of cultural proficiency.

Lindsey et al. (2008) assert that the achievement gap between demographic groups is more related to racial-ethnic differences than economic differences. They write,

The disturbing fact is that the achievement gap in this country correlates significantly with student racial-ethnic group membership. We have to face the brutal facts of these cultural correlates if we are to get serious about narrowing and closing the educational gaps that matter. We must examine what it is that

affects our ability or inability to provide quality education to certain student groups. (p. 9)

The authors argue that the first step in eliminating these well documented achievement gaps is to create a forum for culturally proficient inquiry where disparities and inequity can be confronted through open, honest, and accurate discourse. The authors contend that gains can only be made through collaborative understanding about these underserved communities and the barriers preventing children from accessing higher levels of achievement. They write, “Perhaps by understanding, we can demystify the complexity of the gaps and begin to take steps to narrow and close them” (Lindsey et al., 2008, p. 10). The authors recognize that any initiative to close the achievement gap between non-Asian minority students and their white peers must be tempered with the understanding that the gap is a confluence of many variables, some of which are documented, others yet to be discovered. In order to reveal these contributing factors in a constructive way that will lead to collaborative problem solving and improved achievement the authors suggest using the continuum of cultural proficiency as a framework for highlighting the inequity within school systems in an effort to promote understanding and close the achievement gap. The continuum of cultural proficiency (Cross, 1989) includes cultural destructiveness, cultural incapacity, cultural blindness, cultural pre-competence, cultural competence, and cultural proficiency. The hierarchical framework uses the five essential elements of cultural competence (Cross, 1989) to assess behaviors, mentalities, and actions in an effort to assign a level of cultural proficiency and create a metric against

which educational leaders can measure themselves in their effort to improve their cultural proficiency and positive impact on student achievement.

Summary

According to the cited literature, most minority high school students enter high school with an academic disadvantage. All schools, however, have the ability to close this gap through exceptional leadership practices that expect an informed, supportive, and culturally responsive culture. The proposed frameworks indicate that performance is improved when schools demand that all stakeholders:

1. involve themselves in the creation of communal, non-negotiable goals
2. use data to inform decision making
3. establish norms of mutual respect which encourages stakeholders to value differences, commit to dialogue, and engage in introspection.

When these components work in alignment toward improved student achievement, schools can change the dynamics of oppression and exclusion so prevalent in today's schools.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Chapter III will review the methodology used in this case study. It will provide a detailed description of the criteria used to select the case. It will include a description of data collected and an explanation of data collection. The purpose of the study is to explore and analyze the relationship between educational leadership and academic achievement in the context of significant demographic change. This research aims to answer the following questions:

1. How has this district been able to maintain or improve its school-wide academic achievement levels in the midst of significant demographic change?
2. What actions has this district taken that reflect existing best practices for effective school leadership as identified by Marzano and Waters (2009)?
3. What actions has this district taken that reflect existing best practices for cultural proficiency as described by Lindsey, Nuri Robins, and Terrell (2009)?

Case Selection

A single case study was utilized to help identify the particularities of how and why a district has been able to succeed within its unique circumstances and contribute to existing understandings of effective schools. Creswell (2007) explains case study as, “An approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in depth data collection involving

multiple sources of information, and reports a case description and case-based themes” (p. 73). The intent of the single case study is not to prescribe actions for other districts, but to understand the conditions and relationships within a single complex system. Readers can review this information and make appropriate naturalistic generalization according to their individual discretion. SEHS was intentionally selected based on a number of criteria. Illinois school report card data was used to identify suburban school districts experiencing significant (greater than 1% per year average racial change for the case years studied) racial demographic change. To increase the validity of the study, the number of schools identified was whittled down by giving preference to schools with the greatest number of consecutive years of demographic change. This sample was further refined by eliminating any schools which had failed to maintain or improve achievement score data throughout the period of demographic change. After applying these criteria, two districts were identified as appropriate cases for study. Of these two districts, one school had a per pupil expenditure exceeding \$26,000. This per pupil expenditure far exceeded the state foundation level and is not reflective of the financial situation of most schools in Illinois. As such, this school was eliminated to improve the likelihood of naturalistic generalization for the majority of interested educators. Stanley Estrada High School thus was selected as the case to be bounded by time from 2003 through 2016.

Table 1 indicates that from 2003 to the most current available data (2015) SEHS has seen a 12.4% drop in White students, a 9.8% increase in Hispanic students, an increase of 1% in Black students, and an increase of 1.6% in its student population comprised of two or more races. The other demographic subgroups have fluctuated in

their percentage of student population from year to year, but remained relatively stable. While each year included within the scope of the case does not exceed the one percent established by Wu (2013) as significant, the average percent of change for SEHS from 2002 through the most current available data is 1.25% annual demographic change (from White to minority).

Table 1

Percent Demographic Composition and Change by Subcategory 2003-2013

Year	White (%)	Black (%)	Hispanic (%)	Asian (%)	American Indian (%)	Pacific Islander (%)	Two or More Races (%)	% Change from previous year (white to minority)
2015	74.9	6	15.9	1.1	0.2	0	1.9	.9
2014	75.8	5.8	15.4	1.3	0.2	0	1.5	.7
2013	75.1	6	15.4	1.5	0.4	0	1.5	.2
2012	75.3	6.3	15.3	1.7	0.3	0.1	1.1	.6
2011	74.7	6.5	15.2	1.8	0.4	0.1	1.4	1.6
2010	76.3	6.4	11.7	1.8	0.7	-	3.1	.7
2009	77	6.7	10.9	1.6	0.7	-	3.1	1.6
2008	78.6	6.1	10.8	1.4	0.8	-	2.3	1.6
2007	80.2	6.1	9.8	1.3	0.7	-	1.9	1.3
2006	81.5	6	9.4	1.1	0.8	-	1.2	2
2005	83.5	5.6	8.7	1.1	0.8	-	0.3	2.4
2004	85.9	5.1	7.2	1.2	0.6	-	-	1.4
2003	87.3	5	6.1	1.2	0.4	-	-	-

Note. Adapted from the Illinois Interactive Report Card (2016). Northern Illinois University, with support from the Illinois State Board of Education. Retrieved from <http://iirc.niu.edu/Classic/Default.aspx>

While SEHS's year to year demographic change slows down from 2009-2015, the average percent change for this period is still .94% with an average percent change for 2003-2015 of 1.25%. SEHS provided the longest identified period of significant change while maintaining academic achievement as measured by the PSAE. Table 2 indicates an average meets and exceeds performance level at SEHS of 62.6% in Reading, 64.3% in Math, and 62.5% in Science over the 12 years of available PSAE data.

Table 2

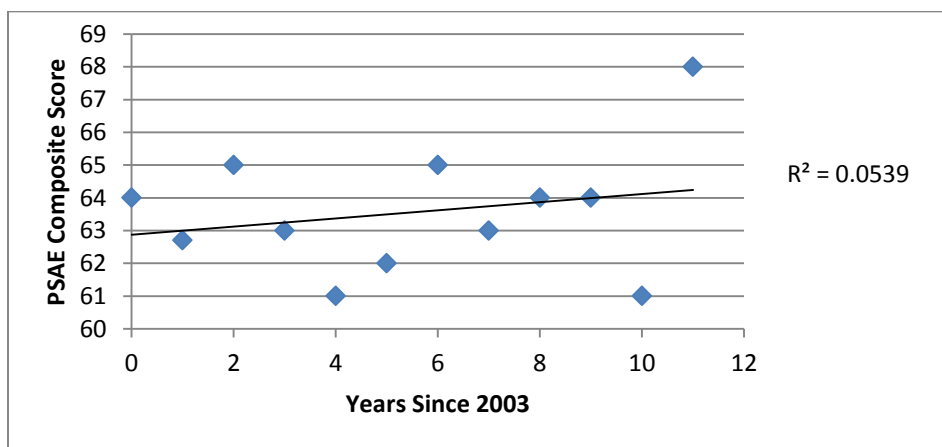
Total Percent of SEHS Student Population Meeting or Exceeding Illinois State Standards, 2003-2014

Year	Reading-% Meets & Exceeds	Math-% Meets & Exceeds	Science-% Meets & Exceeds
2003	61.8	64.6	61.1
2004	59.9	62.7	60.8
2005	64.9	67.2	61.5
2006	63.2	62.4	62.7
2007	58.7	64.6	60.9
2008	61.3	64.3	60.6
2009	66.8	64.8	63.7
2010	62.2	63.2	64.5
2011	61.6	65.3	64.1
2012	61.3	64.8	64.4
2013	62.2	59.5	61.1
2014	67	68.3	64
Average	62.6	64.3	62.5
% Growth from 2003 to 2014	5.2	3.7	2.9

Note. Adapted from the Illinois Interactive Report Card (2016). Northern Illinois University, with support from the Illinois State Board of Education. Retrieved from <http://iirc.niu.edu/Classic/Default.aspx>

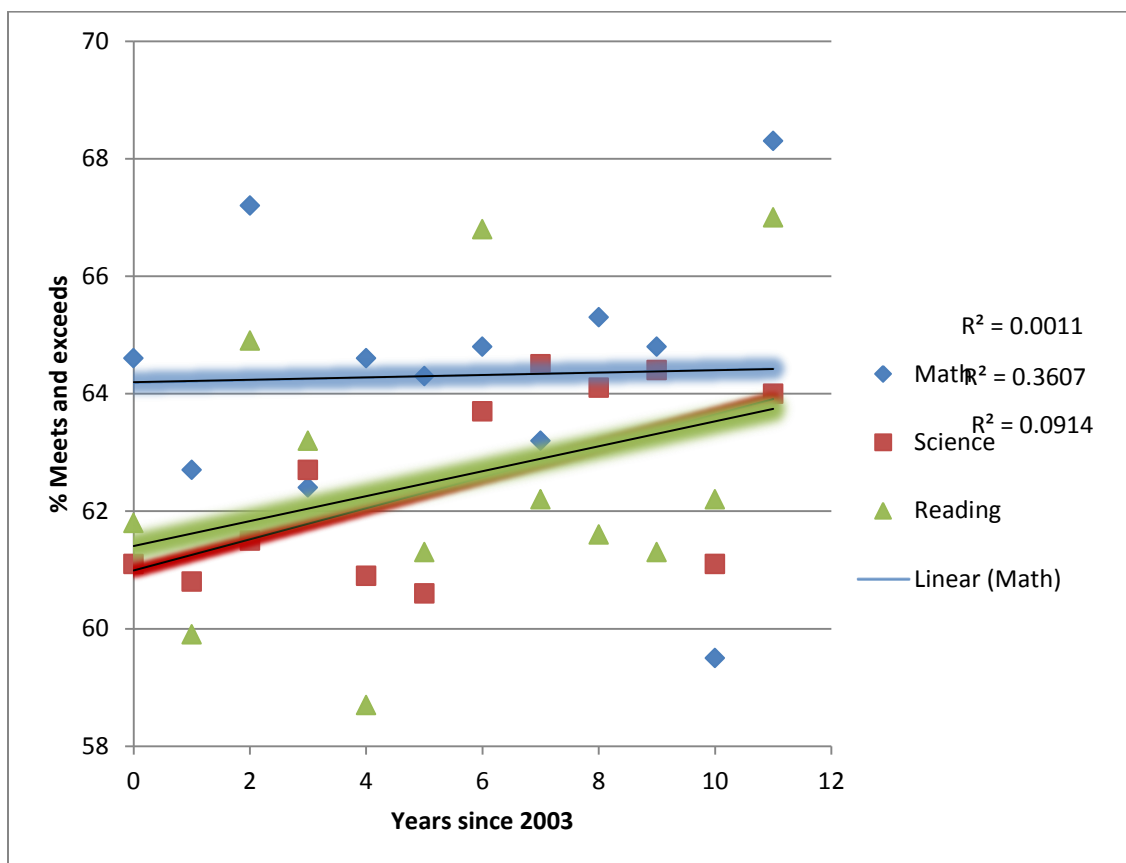
The last line item in Table 2 lists the percent growth between the first year of analysis (2003) and the most recent year of available test scores (2014). The difference between these years in each category (math, reading, and science) shows gains in the percent of the student body meeting and exceeding state standards. This growth,

however, is not reflective of the entire period under study given that 2014 scores were especially strong. A better indicator of growth throughout the period of study is indicated in Figure 6 and Figure 7. When a line of best fit is applied, a positive trend for performance can be identified for composite scores throughout the period (see Figure 6) as well as for each subject area data set (see Figure 7). This is noteworthy, given that this improvement in achievement for the student body occurred during a period of significant demographic change where the average percent year to year increase in minority student population exceeded 1%.



Note. Adapted from the Illinois Interactive Report Card (2016). Northern Illinois University, with support from the Illinois State Board of Education. Retrieved from <http://iirc.niu.edu/Classic/Default.aspx>

Figure 6. Line of Best Fit for PSAE Composite Meets and Exceeds Scores, 2003-2014



Note. Adapted from the Illinois Interactive Report Card (2016). Northern Illinois University, with support from the Illinois State Board of Education. Retrieved from <http://iirc.niu.edu/Classic/Default.aspx>

Figure 7. Line of Best Fit for PSAE by Meets and Exceeds Data by Subcategory, 2003-2014

The Case

The study analyzes actions taken and beliefs espoused by the Stanley Estrada Township High School district administration bounded by time from 2003-2016, with PSAE achievement data only available through 2014 due to the implementation in 2015 of a new state achievement measurement tool. SEHS performs academically in the top 9% of Illinois high schools. The district superintendent has served the district as an administrator in excess of ten years. SEHS is a single high school district. The district, from 2002-03 to 2014-15, has experienced an average annual demographic shift of

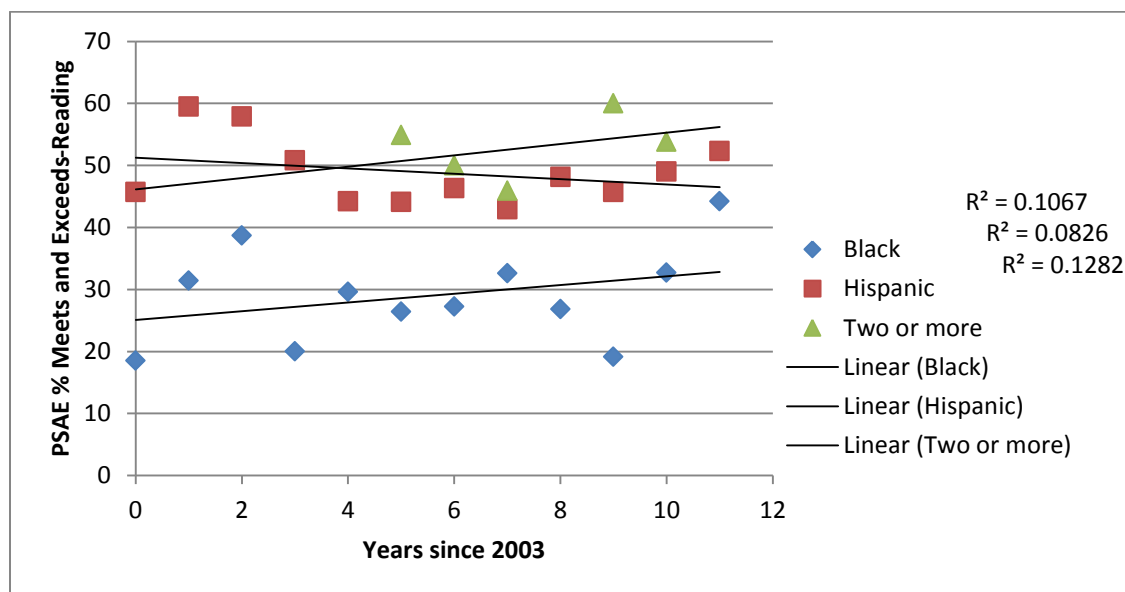
1.25%. This shift is due to a decrease in White students and an increase in minority students, primarily Hispanic. Wu's (2013) research indicates that a single percent of racial change in a year can have drastic impacts on the academic achievement of the district. Despite having an average yearly change of 1.25% from 2003 to 2015, SEHS has maintained a consistently high level of academic achievement, as measured by the Prairie State Achievement Exam (PSAE), throughout the period of demographic shift. Given the demographic trend from 2003-present, the case will mirror this timeline in its analysis of district leadership. As such, the case is comprised of the district bounded in time from 2003-2016.

While the total tested population from 2003-2014 has improved its level of achievement for composite scores (see Figure 6), as well as the subcategories (see Figure 7) as indicated by the lines of best fit, the performance of the minority populations that comprise the student body is less definitive. Tables 3, 4, and 5 and the corresponding Figures 8, 9, and 10 indicate negative achievement trends for Hispanic students in reading and math. This negative trend is also indicated by Black students in math. This negative trend for Black students in math, however reflects only three tenths of a percent of change correlated to actions taken during the period (2003-2014). For all practical purposes, the line of best fit for black students meeting and exceeding in math over the period of study indicates no change. Black students show improved reading scores. Both Hispanic and Black students show achievement gains in science.

Data was not collected for subgroups with fewer than 10 students. As such, achievement levels for students indicating themselves as multiracial (depicted as "Two or

more”) is only present for five out of the 11 years under study. Given the small population size and the lack of consecutive years of data, any trends are prone to outliers and likely to be skewed. While the trends are indicated for multiracial students, the results are not discussed given their lack of reliability and their minimal impact on composite scores due to the small population size.

Tables 3, 4, and 5 indicate growth or decline in scores by content area and demographic subgroup. To give a sense of improvement or decline for each subgroup, the difference in percentage of student population by subgroup meeting and exceeding standards is calculated by taking the average of the last three years of data (2012-2014) and subtracting the first three years of data (2003-2005). While the difference does not indicate growth or decline for the entire period, it does give a sense of improvement or decline from the outset of the study to most recent data.



Note. Adapted from the Illinois Interactive Report Card (2016). Northern Illinois University, with support from the Illinois State Board of Education. Retrieved from <http://iirc.niu.edu/Classic/Default.aspx>

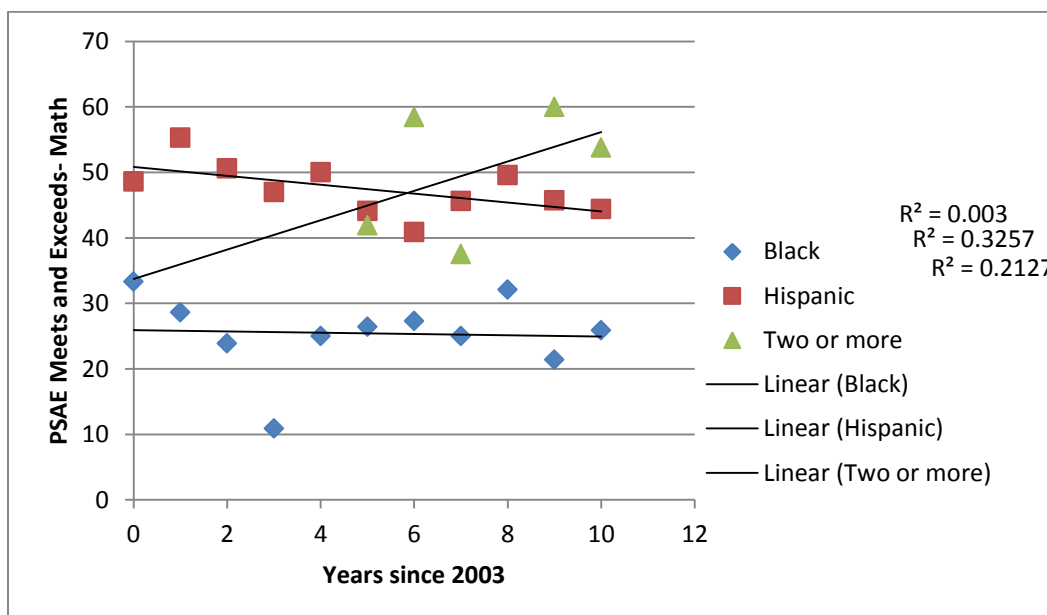
Figure 8. PSAE Meets and Exceeds in Reading by Minority Subgroup, 2003 to 2014

Table 3

PSAE-Reading Meets and Exceeds by Subgroup

Year	All Groups	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	American Indian	Pacific Islander	Two or more
2003	61.8	64.8	18.5	45.7	67.3	n/d	n/d	n/d
2004	67	60.8	31.4	59.5	100	n/d	n/d	n/d
2005	62.2	67.1	38.7	57.9	nd	n/d	n/d	n/d
2006	61.3	68.1	20	50.8	64.3	n/d	n/d	n/d
2007	61.6	62.5	29.6	44.2	36.4	70	n/d	n/d
2008	62.2	65.9	26.4	44.1	81.8	n/d	n/d	54.9
2009	66.8	73	27.2	46.3	75	n/d	n/d	50
2010	61.3	67.6	32.6	42.9	66.6	n/d	n/d	45.9
2011	58.7	66.4	26.8	48.1	82.3	n/d	n/d	n/d
2012	63.2	66.6	19.1	45.7	86.7	n/d	n/d	60
2013	64.9	67.4	32.7	49	76.5	n/d	n/d	53.8
2014	59.9	71.4	44.2	52.3	90	n/d	n/d	n/d
Difference (~03-05 and ~12-14)	-1%	+4.3	+2.5	-5.4	+7	Nd	nd	nd

Note. Adapted from the Illinois Interactive Report Card (2016). Northern Illinois University, with support from the Illinois State Board of Education. Retrieved from <http://iirc.niu.edu/Classic/Default.aspx>



Note. Adapted from the Illinois Interactive Report Card (2016). Northern Illinois University, with support from the Illinois State Board of Education. Retrieved from <http://iirc.niu.edu/Classic/Default.aspx>

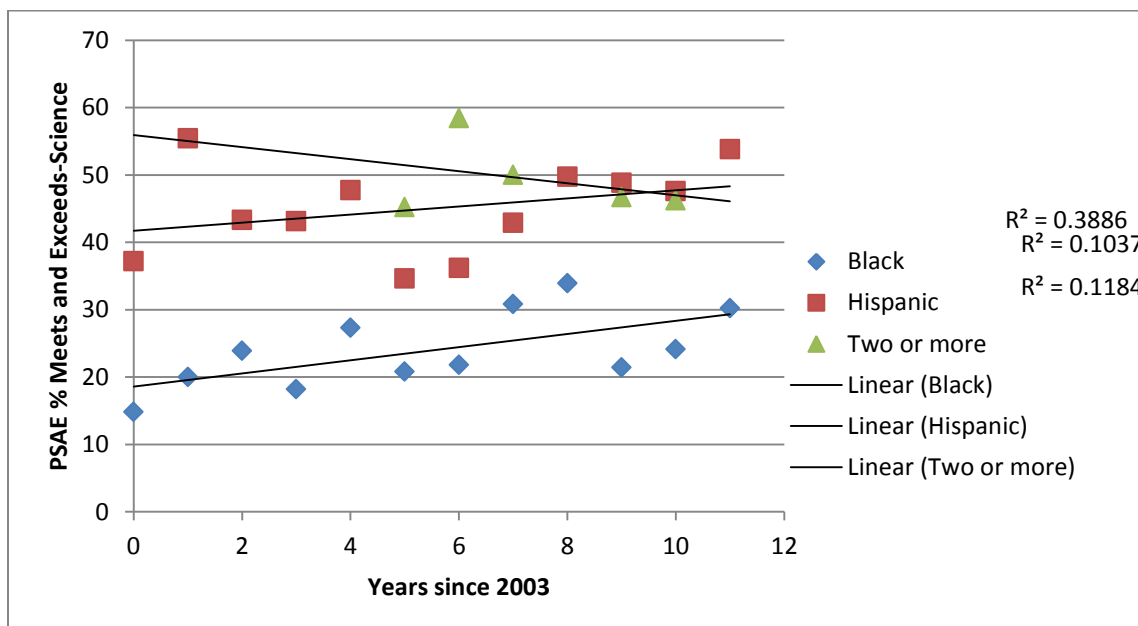
Figure 9. PSAE Meets and Exceeds in Math by Minority Subgroup, 2003 to 2014

Table 4

PSAE-Math Meets and Exceeds by Subgroup

Year	All Groups	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	American Indian	Pacific Islander	Two or more
2003	64.6	66.6	33.3	48.6	81.8	n/d	n/d	n/d
2004	62.7	64.8	28.6	55.3	91	n/d	n/d	n/d
2005	67.2	71.7	23.9	50.6	n/d	n/d	n/d	n/d
2006	62.4	68.3	10.9	47	64.2	n/d	n/d	n/d
2007	64.6	69.1	25	50	54.6	60	n/d	n/d
2008	64.3	70.2	26.4	44.1	81.8	n/d	n/d	41.9
2009	64.8	71.1	27.3	40.9	66.7	n/d	n/d	58.4
2010	63.2	69.7	25	45.6	66.6	n/d	n/d	37.5
2011	65.3	70.3	32.1	49.6	82.3	n/d	n/d	n/d
2012	64.8	71	21.4	45.7	86.6	n/d	n/d	60
2013	59.5	65.4	25.9	44.4	76.4	n/d	n/d	53.8
2014	68.3	72	37.2	57.6	90	n/d	n/d	n/d
Difference ~03-05 and ~12-14	-2.1	+1.7	-.4	-2.3	-2.1	n/d	n/d	n/d

Note. Adapted from the Illinois Interactive Report Card (2016). Northern Illinois University, with support from the Illinois State Board of Education. Retrieved from <http://iirc.niu.edu/Classic/Default.aspx>



Note. Adapted from the Illinois Interactive Report Card (2016). Northern Illinois University, with support from the Illinois State Board of Education. Retrieved from <http://iirc.niu.edu/Classic/Default.aspx>

Figure 10. PSAE Meets and Exceeds by Minority Subgroup, Science 2003-2014

Table 5

PSAE-Science Meets and Exceeds by Subgroup

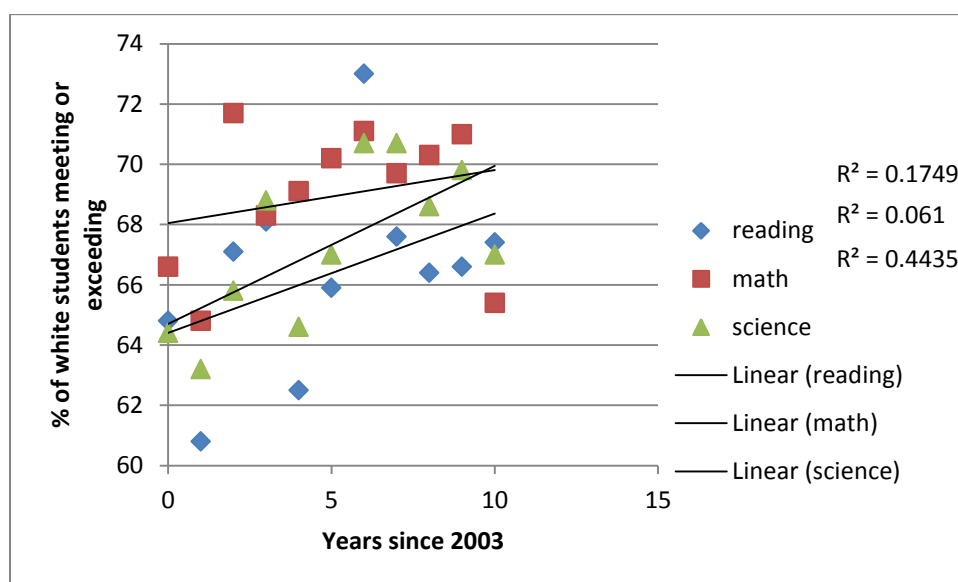
Year	All Groups	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	American Indian	Pacific Islander	Two or more
2003	61.1	64.4	14.8	37.2	72.7	n/d	n/d	n/d
2004	60.8	63.2	20	55.4	90.9	n/d	n/d	n/d
2005	61.5	65.8	23.9	43.3	n/d	n/d	n/d	n/d
2006	62.7	68.8	18.2	43.1	64.2	n/d	n/d	n/d
2007	60.9	64.6	27.3	47.7	72.7	60	n/d	n/d
2008	60.6	67	20.8	34.6	72.7	n/d	n/d	45.2
2009	63.7	70.7	21.8	36.2	75	n/d	n/d	58.4
2010	64.5	70.7	30.8	42.9	71.4	n/d	n/d	50
2011	64.1	68.6	33.9	49.7	82.3	n/d	n/d	n/d
2012	64.4	69.8	21.4	48.8	86.7	n/d	n/d	46.7
2013	61.1	67	24.1	47.6	70.5	n/d	n/d	46.2
2014	64	67.8	30.2	53.8	90	n/d	n/d	n/d
Difference ~03-05 and ~12-14	+2.1	+3.7	+5.6	+4.8	+6	n/d	n/d	n/d

Note. Adapted from the Illinois Interactive Report Card (2016). Northern Illinois University, with support from the Illinois State Board of Education. Retrieved from <http://iirc.niu.edu/Classic/Default.aspx>

While achievement data for minority students indicates mixed results of students meeting or exceeding state standards, white students improve their percentages for all subject areas. Figure 11 indicates the percent of White students meeting or exceeding state standards in all subject areas.

Although SEHS has been unable to improve academic achievement across the board for all tested subject areas for its minority students, it has been able to improve the total percentage of students meeting and exceeding state standards in all content areas for its total population during a period of significant demographic change. Despite the significant influx of minority students over recent years, White students still comprise the

large majority of the student population. As such, gains made by White students have a broader impact on composite scores when measuring the total percentage of students meeting or exceeding state standards. Because of the gains in achievement made by White students in all categories (see Figure 11) and the gains in science achieved by all subgroups (see Table 5) composite scores for SEHS have improved even with mixed results for minority students in reading and math (see Tables 3 and 4).



Note. Adapted from the Illinois Interactive Report Card (2016). Northern Illinois University, with support from the Illinois State Board of Education. Retrieved from <http://iirc.niu.edu/Classic/Default.aspx>

Figure 11. Line of Best Fit for % of White Students Meeting or Exceeding by Subject Area

The student body has improved its overall levels of achievement. Despite the well documented achievement gap between White students and non-Asian minority students, SEHS has made gains in its efforts to improve student achievement where other districts, experiencing similar demographic change, have experienced drops in achievement levels for all student groups. It is clear that the story of achievement is not equal across

demographic groups. Gaps in both achievement and improvement exist between White students and minority students at SEHS. White students have made gains across the board, where Hispanic students have seen losses in the percentage of students meeting and exceeding in both reading and math. It is clear that there is still significant room for growth, but this should not minimize the accomplishments achieved by SEHS. Both Wu's (2013) research and the extremely limited selection of schools qualifying for this study indicate that the demographic change experienced by SEHS routinely results in reduced achievement scores across the student population. SEHS has bucked this trend by improving its composite achievement as measured by percentage of students meeting or exceeding state standards in the PSAE.

SEHS is a suburban school serving the city of Stanley, Stanley Township, Margery Glen, a section of unincorporated Bloom Park, Margery Township, Rightsville, and the city of Peak (pseudonyms). More than 3,800 students are enrolled in grades 9 through 12. Margery Glen has a population that is 95.5% White with 91.7% reporting non-Hispanic White. Margery Glen's website describes itself as, "an upscale suburban gem offering a unique blend of open space, beautiful residential developments and vibrant commercial corridors with significant commercial growth potential. The median income in the Village of Margery Glen is over \$99,000." The 2010 census lists Margery Glen's Median owner-occupied housing Value as \$347,000. In Contrast, Peak has a population comprised of 36.17% White, 53.61% African American and 10.89% Hispanic individuals. The median household income of Peak is \$27,070 with a median home value of \$45,000. Eighteen percent (18.4%) of individuals in Peak at the time of the census

were listed as living below the poverty level. Peak does not have a website. The 2014 school report card data listed 76% of the student population of the Margery Glen elementary district to be meeting or exceeding state standards. Only 33% of The Peak elementary district students met or exceeded state standards. Such data indicate that there exists a great disparity in income and achievement between the feeder communities at SEHS, information which is crucial to understanding the context within which SEHS operates.

SEHS is nestled among communities that are segregated along racial lines. As demographic change has occurred in nearby suburbs, a pattern of White flight, a lowering of property values, and a decrease in state standardized student achievement scores has repeated itself in community after community. The communities serving SEHS are demographically and economically polarized and significantly isolated from each other. This level of isolation between communities is broken, or at least compromised, as community students meet new peers when they feed into SEHS. Despite the exposure of students from varying feeder communities to one another in the context of school, there has been little indication that racial lines within the communities have broken down. Housing and neighborhoods continue to be racially defined.

Instruments

Interviews

Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews of school leaders including administrators, a board member, a committee facilitator, and the district superintendent (see Appendices D-F). Merriam (2009) writes,

A semi-structured interview is: Guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored, and neither the exact wording nor the order of the questions is determined ahead of time. This format allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic. (p. 90)

The semi-structured interview lends itself to probing emerging ideas and seeking out clarification when necessary.

The district superintendent was interviewed in an effort to identify how SEHS has been able to maintain or improve academic achievement in the midst of significant demographic change. Interviews ascertained the extent to which the effective leadership practices extolled by Marzano and Waters (2009) and culturally proficient practices highlighted by Lindsey et al. (2009) have been employed. Other leaders active for more than half of the case (five years from 2003 to present) were identified through the snowball method of data gathering, whereby individuals are identified for an interview based on the recommendation of other relevant stakeholders during the time of the case. Interviews were conducted until a point of saturation in an effort to comprehensively represent the many potential factors active in SEHS's success in the midst of significant racial demographic change

Patton (2002) suggests six types of questions an interviewer can ask to stimulate responses from an interviewee: Experience and behavior questions, opinion and value questions, feeling questions, knowledge questions, sensory questions, and background/demographic questions. Although the interview is semi-structured and intentionally

flexible, the protocol (see Appendix D) will follow a general format intended to establish factual information and build toward personal opinion.

The interview protocol begins with background demographic questions. The intent was to elicit information potentially relevant to the district's impact on student achievement for minority students. For example, Administrators were asked to provide their years of total experience as well the number of years in their current position. This question was included to investigate the impact of experience on student achievement.

Demographic were followed by knowledge questions. The intent behind the knowledge questions was to better understand the extent to which district stakeholders are in alignment with regard to the district mission, various district issues, decision making processes, and initiatives. The crux of both frameworks used for this study is shared goals and knowledge. In order to assess the level to which knowledge is common throughout the district the majority of interview questions were knowledge based.

Knowledge based questions were coupled with experience questions to assess the extent to which district knowledge aligns with district practice. The intent was to underscore whether or not knowledge of district goals, challenges, and initiatives are being supported by prescribed actions.

Feeling questions do not comprise a large component of the administrative interviews because the focus is directed toward knowledge and action. The intent of feeling questions was directed toward style and process in applying knowledge and implementing actions.

All interviews concluded with opinion questions. The intent was not to assess the extent to which district mission and initiative are carried out, but the extent to which stakeholders accept district mandates and ideas as legitimate. Do stakeholders feel as if district decisions are truly collaborative, district initiatives are truly effective, and district culture is truly inclusive? This was followed up with a request for recommendations for further interviews in order to include as many relevant administrative perspectives into the analysis as possible.

Observations

Merriam (2009) writes, “Observation is the best technique to use when an activity, event or situation can be observed firsthand, when a fresh perspective is desired, or when participants are not able or willing to discuss the topic under study” (p. 119). Merriam goes on to extol the benefits of observations as a data source by pointing out that observations allow the researcher to notice those things which have become routine to participants themselves, things that may lead to understanding the context. She observes that observations are particularly adept at providing knowledge of context or specific incidents and behaviors that can be used as reference points in further research, and analysis. Creswell (2003) notes that observations allow the researcher to record information as it is revealed. Observation provides the researcher with an unfiltered experience aiding the researcher in understanding not only the polished opinions and products visible in interviews and artifacts, but also the process and methods by which these opinions and products are developed. Merriam (2009) articulates the importance of observation in creating a more comprehensive representation of the case, “Observation

offers a firsthand account of the situation under study, and when combined with interviewing and document analysis allows for holistic interpretation of the phenomenon being investigated” (p. 136). The researcher utilized an observation form (see Appendix G) to record actions, exchanges, and context relevant to student achievement in the context of demographic change. This observation protocol was developed based on the recommendations of Merriam (2009). All observations were reviewed and analyzed for evidence of effective leadership practices as defined by Marzano and Waters (2009) as well as cultural proficiency as defined by Lindsey et al. (2009).

Document Analysis

Merriam (2009) defines documents as, “Anything in existence prior to the research at hand” (p. 140). Documents play a significant role in understanding the justification and alignment of actions taken by the district to improve or maintain student achievement during this period. The district mission statement, District Improvement Plans (DIP), district report card data, school board minutes, professional development records, and other relevant publically available documents were reviewed and analyzed for evidence of effective leadership practices as defined by Marzano and Waters (2009) as well as cultural proficiency as defined by Lindsey et al. (2009).

Procedure

The district superintendent was interviewed in an effort to identify how SEHS has been able to maintain or improve academic achievement in the midst of significant demographic change. Interviews attempted to ascertain the extent to which the effective leadership practices extolled by Waters and Marzano (2009) and culturally proficient

practices highlighted by Lindsey et al. (2009) have been employed. Other relevant administrators and leaders active for more than half of the case (five years from 2003 to present) were identified through the snowball method of data gathering where individuals are identified for an interview based on the recommendation of other relevant stakeholders during the time of the case. If initial interviews resulted in inconclusive or dissonant results, additional interviews were conducted until a point of saturation in an effort to comprehensively represent the many potential factors active in SEHS's success in the midst of significant racial demographic change. All Interviews were recorded and transcribed. Initial transcripts and understandings ascertained through initial analysis of interviews were presented to those interviewed to verify intended meaning. . Each respondent received a unique identification number and all data was analyzed and coded using the identification number. Individual names and school districts were used in the final writing.

District professional development and/or meetings related to culturally responsive instruction, diversity training, and/or student achievement was observed to better understand actions taken by district administration to improve student achievement in the context of significant demographic change. Relevant meetings and professional development was identified via the district's professional development calendar, master calendar, and based on the recommendation of district leadership throughout the interview process. District calendars were obtained through the superintendent's office and district administrators. The researcher recorded observations using an observation form (see Appendix G) and collected any relevant documents provided during the

observation. The district mission statement, District Improvement Plans (DIP), district report card data, school board minutes, professional development records, and other relevant publically available documents were retrieved from the district website. Any documents which are not readily available through a district website were requested through the superintendent's office. Initial analysis and organization of documents will be managed through a document analysis worksheet (see Appendix C). This worksheet was used to catalogue and manage the organization of the physical documents, as well as facilitate further coding.

Coding

Coding is a system of shorthand designation to data in an effort to organize, access, and manage data throughout analysis (Merriam, 2009). With the intent to better manage data for access and analysis, Interviews were recorded and transcribed by a hired transcriber. All data was coded to the conceptual framework for leadership from Waters and Marzano (2006) and the conceptual framework for cultural proficiency from Lindsey et al. (2009). Although some concepts between the frameworks overlap, all interview questions, survey questions, and documents were assigned codes representing the ten identified themes. Data was sometimes coded to more than one theme given the content of the question and overlapping concepts between frameworks. The ten identified themes are:

1. Ensuring collaborative goal setting.
2. Establishing non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction.
3. Creating board alignment with and support of district goals.

4. Monitoring student achievement and instruction goals.
5. Allocating resources to support the goals for achievement and instruction.
6. Assessing cultural knowledge.
7. Valuing diversity.
8. Managing the dynamics of difference.
9. Adapting to diversity.
10. Institutionalizing cultural knowledge.

Data Analysis

Merriam (2009) writes, “Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (p. 14). Merriam (2009) indicates that is both an inductive and deductive process that relies heavily on established conceptual frameworks, as well as, intuitive understandings gleaned from interviews, documents, and observations. Although inferences were occasionally drawn from single instances of rich data, a process Stake (1995) identifies as direct interpretation. Such inferences were reinforced by categorical aggregation (Stake, 1995) or pattern matching (Yin, 2013). Single instances of rich data necessitated rich description and context to better substantiate the validity of inferences made. All inferences and patterns were analyzed against the predetermined frameworks in an effort to better understand any correlations between effective leadership, cultural proficiency, and student achievement in the midst of demographic change.

It is important that concepts and theories rely on more than a single source in an effort to increase their integrity. Toward this end, the validity and credibility of assertions were supported through data source triangulation. Schwant (2007) defines triangulation as follows,

Triangulation is a means of checking the integrity of the inferences one draws. It can involve the use of multiple data sources and the central point of the procedure is to examine a conclusion from more than one vantage point. (p. 298)

Triangulation was employed to intentionally compare findings from various vantage points in an effort to substantiate, refute, or refine possible explanations. Figure 12 indicates the open and continual process involved in comparing data between observations, interviews, and document analysis. This process is intended to validate findings across data sources and direct research where insufficient findings exist.

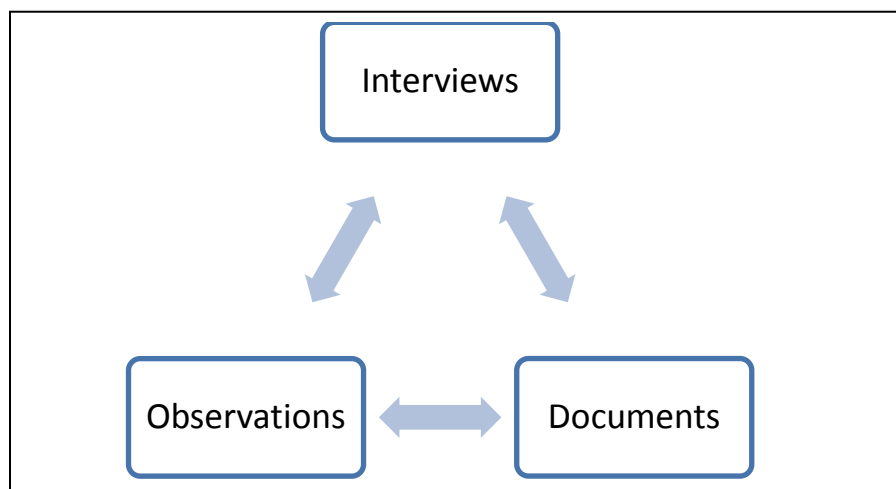


Figure 12. Data Source Triangulation

In an effort to further ensure the internal validity of understandings, member checking was utilized throughout to reduce the misinterpretation of an interviewees

intended meaning, as well as provide for richer explanation. Member checking is the process of presenting those interviewed with the transcripts of the interview as well as initial analysis in an effort to best represent the intended meaning of the individual interviewed. Maxwell (2005) writes,

This is the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective they have on what is going on, as well as being an important way of identifying your own biases and misunderstanding of what you observed. (p. 111)

Both direct interpretation and thick description were embedded in the final report in an effort to best convey context, feeling, and detail. Stake (1995) writes,

The Researcher should try to anticipate what vicarious experiences will do for the reader, should try to organize the manuscript so that naturalistic generalization is facilitated. By providing information easily assimilated with the readers' existing knowledge, the writer helps readers construct the meanings of the case. (p. 126)

It is with this intent in mind, to help readers construct meaning, that thick description and direct interpretation was utilized to create vicarious experience and support understanding. Data collection in all forms continued until a point of saturation in an effort to comprehensively represent the many potential factors active in SEHS's success in the midst of significant racial demographic change. Merriam (2009) points out that qualitative research relies heavily on simultaneous data collection and analysis. This simultaneous process directs the researcher to unforeseen data sources and lines of

inquiry and necessitates that data collection be responsive and flexible based on initial analysis.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Chapter IV will present the findings from data analysis. Findings, corresponding data, and relevant discussion is presented in three sections, each section related to the three questions posed by this study:

1. How has this district been able to maintain or improve its school-wide academic achievement levels in the midst of significant demographic change?
2. What actions has this district taken that reflect existing best practices for effective school leadership as identified by Marzano and Waters (2009)?
3. What actions has this district taken that reflect existing best practices for cultural proficiency as described by Lindsey, Nuri Robins, and Terrell (2009)?

All data was analyzed using the framework of effective district leadership developed by Marzano and Waters (2009) as well as the conceptual framework for culturally proficient practice as developed by Lindsey et al. (2009). The research was conducted by a single researcher for the purposes of a doctoral dissertation. The researcher had some prior knowledge of the district and communities, but no first hand experiences. As such, the research was conducted from the perspective of an observer, non-participant.

The researcher will provide data pertinent to each theme. In conducting the data analysis, there were many cases where the same data element covered more than one research question. In particular, there were many cases of significant overlap between

data that spoke to best practices in educational leadership and data that spoke to culturally responsive leadership. Accordingly, when there is overlap, this will be noted and the reader will be referred to quotations provided in other sections of the chapter.

Question 1: How has this district been able to maintain or improve its school-wide academic achievement levels in the midst of significant demographic change?

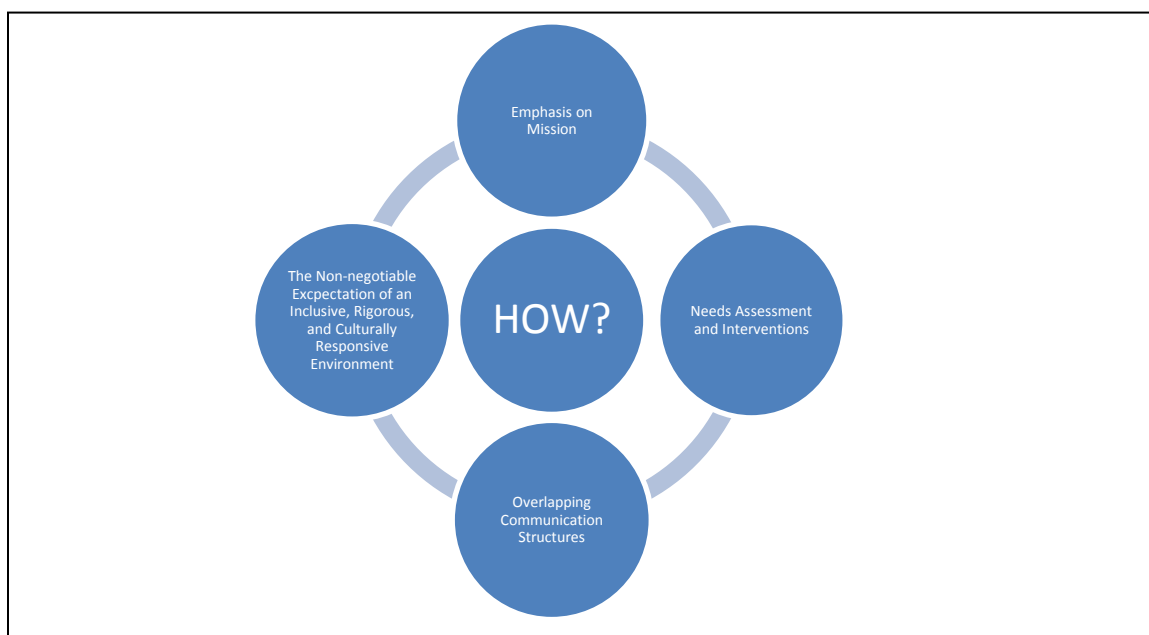


Figure 13. How has this district been able to maintain or improve its school-wide achievement levels in the midst of significant demographic change?

Theme 1: Emphasis on Mission

All data sources indicated the district's mission statement as a clear reference point in justifying the various initiatives and efforts of the district. The fidelity with which the mission statement and district vision statement were cited indicates that these statements went beyond a single district exercise, but are utilized regularly in district decision making and planning. This unified understanding is contextualized by the

continual reiteration of the mission and vision. The superintendent of Stanley Estrada demonstrates the connection between action and vision when he states,

The district's mission statement really directs the work of the administration in the school district on a daily basis. It should be a basis and foundation for the planning and decisions that are made and it becomes the compass on a regular basis and something that, in fact, in our new teacher orientation I speak to the mission statement to our students, our new teachers rather, and speak regularly to our staff about. When I speak I always reference the mission statement in any presentation that I give. Whether it be to a community group, to a business group, at rotary mount which I'm a participant, or to staff, and so it really directs our work.

The superintendent highlights that this work is not rote, it is reflective. It requires introspection to appropriately align mission to practice. This is emphasized when he states,

I do think our programs and our planning are aligned to the mission statement and that is not easy work. I think one of the things you have to do is be cognizant of what those elements are. Sometimes we take pause and say, "How do we interact with our community?" And we sit down and provide for the board all the things that we do with our community through the rental of our CWC, our Community Wellness Center, the rental of our facilities that so many people come in here.

The emphasis that all students would be served was clearly highlighted by all those interviewed, and is reflected by the following quotations from each interview:

The superintendent stated,

The most important word is all. All means all, and that's the most important word in our mission statement. Educate all students and provide them with a comprehensive educational experience. To me, the next important word is comprehensive in there and it's our, my vision, administration's vision, our plan to the Board of Education that we add another word to that and that's premier before comprehensive and how do we define premier and that's up to us to define the word. How we look at our programs, what our expectations are, and how do we define what a premier comprehensive high school is. I feel we are a comprehensive high school at this time offering programs across many spectrums. Certainly we don't have all of them but we are a comprehensive high school. We provide a wealth of opportunities academically, whole curricularly, and socially for our students. It's the challenge to be a premier comprehensive high school, and really, in fairness, it's up to us to define that. Others can judge us from the outside in but I think good organizations should define that for themselves”

This was reiterated by the 10-12 Principal when he said,

Our goal is always to be a premier comprehensive high school, and we identify that by understanding the needs for all students. We pick out different words in the mission statement, but the word, "all" in, "all students" is something we are really focused on as our mission.

The Freshman Center Principal further emphasized the mission to guide all students when she stated,

We're trying to guide them (students). When you talk about the mission. Guiding them in that way here at the Freshman Center and preparing them, like I say, we want to make sure that they're all on the same level field here given the foundation before they go over to East so the Freshman Center, we put in a ton of interventions.

In summarizing the district mission a board member said, "I always say the mission of the school is to make sure that all students are both career- and are job-ready, so provide them whatever tools that they need."

The final example highlighting all students comes from the EAC Facilitator when he put the mission into his own words,

In my words I would say that the mission of the school is all the kids that we serve, all the families that we serve, especially the students, have equal opportunities to be successful in reaching their goals. I think, yeah, in many ways the district provides those opportunities for students to be very successful, regardless of who they are as individuals, or probably including who they are as individuals, in both respects.

The recurring emphasis of all students reflects an active discussion and application of the district's mission statement. The district mission statement was displayed in the superintendent's office as well as the principal's conference room where all three diversity trainings were held. The mission and vision statement are listed on all newsletters, on district improvement plans, and on district goal statements. The vision, "guiding, preparing, and inspiring all students to become lifelong learners" is

prominently displayed across the top of the district's website and the mission statement is available via a link. The mission statement was referenced at the beginning of the first diversity training and cited as the reason for the training. The facilitator noted, "We have our nice big mission statement proudly displayed, but that is why we are here, to make sure we have the skills and information to care and provide for all of our students." This continual referencing makes the mission more than a statement on paper displayed on a wall; it has become an ingrained litmus test actively applied to district policies, practices, and actions.

Theme 2: Needs Assessment and Interventions

All methods for data collection reflected an emphasis on continual needs-assessment and corresponding interventions. Both internal and external processes are built into the district's calendar and operational structure to encourage continual assessment and improvement. These processes are as broad as state level feedback from federally mandated testing and regular board review of district goals for improvement and as specific as weekly review of individual student progress within teacher teams. While these continual assessment processes are evident in both interview and document data, a culture of reflection was also evident in discussions and observations. The superintendent reflects this culture when he remarked, "Always examine the work that we're doing and what our plan of work is on this." An understanding that assessment must inform action was evident in all interviews and readily apparent in document analysis. The Freshman Center Principal reflected this understanding when she stated,

You know what, our district is phenomenal because if there is a need, that's obviously the first thing you have to do, you have to identify the need and kind of make sure that, okay, how do we need to attack this need? Is it a group need? It's kind of the MTSS, the RTI, is it a tier one need that we need to do a blanket or is it an individual need, group. What would the case be? Within our district, if we identify a need, if we see an issue, then we take a look at what resources we have and what resources we need to add.

The superintendent highlighted using diverse assessments to determine need and consequent action when he stated, "I think the key thing is metrics and using multiple metrics to assess." This reflects an appreciation for both the strengths and weaknesses of singular assessments and the importance of verifying conclusions through multiple data sources.

Needs assessment was viewed by all interviewees as something that encompasses more than academic indicators. Each individual emphasized the importance of getting input from all stakeholders, not just formalized tests. The 10-12 grade principal emphasized the importance of assessing student and parent opinions by relating the numerous surveys the district utilizes:

I mean there's been a school climate survey, 5 essentials, that's been given every other year. We do make sure that there might be surveys that are given to our students as well throughout. We had an elemental youth survey, there's other surveys involving technology, we just did a quick survey the other day about Haiku and the usage of it, and technology. We even did another survey through

Haiku I should say, about a student planner, the need of a student planner which is the book over there that I can ... It has a calendar, and kids write in it. We thought we might start getting away from that but the survey, the sample size of the survey showed that, Well, the kids still use it.

He went on to point out the inclusion of parent input when he stated,

A lot of students are placed into that (high school reading 1) based on the benchmarks that they're not meeting off the explore test years ago when they took it during their 8th grade year, before they came to Stanley Estrada. We would have a registration process and sit with parents and discuss those things. If a student per say, came from, let's say a low performing middles school, and they needed to be in reading, we would make sure that they had reading

The importance of stakeholder inclusion in the assessment and intervention process was further highlighted by the Freshman Center Principal when she stated,

Then when we talk about the emotional support, we also send out our social workers to all of our feeder schools and talk about kids who have had RTI plans. Those RTI plans can be the emotional piece of it as well so that we have some background knowledge on kids because what we don't want to do is ... A lot of our feeder schools do a phenomenal job of working with these families, we don't want to drop off what they're doing and then have to start from scratch and waste two to three months figuring out what the issues are and then trying to put something in place, and you have an entire quarter lost for this child. We actually work on transition plans, helping these kids come into the high school so that we

already have things put in place and then even if we see these issues or if new issues arise, the teams are catching them. These teams of teachers that are meeting every day, they spend a majority of their time in team talking about students.

That's a huge intervention.

The Equity Action Committee facilitator pointed out that the EAC, itself, was a response to data analysis in pursuit of more information to determine district needs.

It (the EAC) was formed in 2009 and 2010, that school year.... I do believe that it was in direct response to looking at data, standardized test data, where there might have been some patterns where maybe certain groups were not performing as well as other groups, so the charge of that particular committee was to do that, to take a look at how we can provide more equitable opportunities for all students who attend the school.

Assessing student progress based on district benchmarks for progress was a theme identified by each administrator as essential to identifying and creating appropriate interventions. This process was cited as key to improving graduation rates and performance. The value placed on benchmarking can be seen through the words of each administrator. The superintendent stated,

We always are providing interventions for students over there (Freshman Center) and we've also put in intense supports such as credit recovery, so students that were at the first semester that failed first semester math and English immediately went into a credit recovery program in January to get their credit whole because the focus being is once that kid gets behind track after ninth grade, it's difficult for

that student's success to continue to grow because they're always going to have that deficit, especially in math and English. We're really focused on interventions at the ninth grade center.

He went on to elaborate,

We're developing our plan of work right now where we're going to monitor kids- 9th, 10th, 11th grades, students on track. In June, how many kids are not on track of graduation and what do we get by September? Or vice versa, how many are not on track at the first semester and how many we got on track now?

The freshman principal highlighted benchmarking when she said,

We kind of have benchmarks set and identified for different interventions in college readiness so when a parent comes in in January and we say, "This is where your child is at. This is where they should be at. What can we do to help your child?" We're going to put this intervention in place.

Similarly, the 10-12 Principal highlighted the importance of keeping students on track,

Our guidance department has worked through a process where we set up parameters related to how many credits should a freshman have when they're finished over there their first year? Semester 1 and semester 2, they should have so many credits before they're able to move over here.....On track is very important to us. After each high school year, how many freshmen are on track? How many sophomores are on track? How many juniors are on track? This directly relates to obviously graduation rate.

The drive to earnestly identify and address district inadequacies was apparent in the superintendent interview. The superintendent was often very straightforward in critically analyzing district performance. This is apparent when he comments,

When I came in here, one of the things we've talked about students with differences, but the one we really focus on is students with disabilities. We're behind there. I recognize that. We instituted an intensive co-teaching program with students with disabilities to get them into the curriculum, and that's an expensive program, putting two folks in the classroom. Our students with disabilities were under-performing terribly. We do a comparison metric of all the schools around here. We say here's what they're doing. Where are we at? What about that? What about this?

This same blunt honesty is readily seen when he comments on the state of English language learners within the district, “Yeah. Well I'll just tell you what we know now. We have to look at our ELL population. They're doing terribly.” When asked about how this weakness was identified the superintendent cited data analysis:

Well a combination of semester failures and performance on achievement test. We have a program but our new assistant principal's been directed, has a background in that, to look at that program and find ways that we can look to improve the program.

Theme 3: Overlapping Communication Structures

Overlapping organizational structures within the district were observed in documents through meeting minutes, team and committee membership, data management

software, and professional development calendars. What became apparent was that the dissemination of information intentionally overlapped in a way where district stakeholders heard the same message in multiple ways and from multiple people. Attempts at consistent presentation of information, however, were made through administrative representation and written communication. This representation and written communication is referenced by the EAC Facilitator when he states,

The initiatives are thought of among the committee members that attend the meetings, and then they're executed by that same group of people with the support of administration. We do have an assistant superintendent for personnel who participates in the committee meetings, and then the administration is made aware of the information through minutes, meeting minutes, and things like that.

This overlap is also evidenced when the 10-12 Principal relates the importance of team structures within the district,

We have several teams in place here at Stanley Estrada High School. We do have, led by our superintendent, our executive council team that meets once a week up in his area. That's the principals and many of the directors in the district. With that being said then too, we also have our department chair council. We meet once a month with them, led by our assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction, and the building administration is there along with the department chairs as well, so we also meet as a team there. We also have Central and East team too, which are both building administration, at both campuses. We have two administrators at central, and we have three here at east, so we meet also. All

right. Then there's different teams that fork or branch off from that too, like central has certain teams of building leadership team, we might have an East team that meets here about facility and things like that. When you think about all the teams, they're all connected per say.... With executive council, with administrative council, with our C&E team, our department chair council, there's so much collaboration that goes on that there always should be an interconnection about our goals.

The Freshman Center Principal reiterated the importance of teams when she discussed their prevalence in her schedule.

The nice thing about our set up here is we have a building leadership team so it's all the facilitators who run the teams and then the deans, the nurse and the building leadership team meets once a month and we go over building issues. Then I also meet once a month with just the facilitators. The people that are running the teams and in there, we talk more about kids. When you're talking about meetings, then I also meet with the Freshman Center managers from the main core area so I meet with math, English, science and actually PE has been thrown in there.

These same intertwined levels of communication were evidenced as the 10-12 Principal discussed tracking and communicating student absences for all stakeholders,

We do monthly attendance reports, and it is done by one of our assistant principals and shared with our board of education at the board meetings every month. We are, like I said, with our teams that are going on, like I said earlier in

the interview here, we have our C&E which is Central and East team, we have department chair council, we have our student management systems, we have Tableau which are workbooks, created more and more leaders in our district are now being able to look at data more than what we used to be able to do... Yeah, there are pockets of linkage.

In addition to the “linkages” identified via written and interpersonal communication, both principals emphasized the importance of time for collaboration. For example, the Freshman Center Principal stated,

In our CT time, the common collaboration time really lends to us having conversations about kids. That's huge. That's in both buildings. We have counselors talking to deans, deans talking to counselors. Formally or informally, whatever the case might be. Those conversations go a long way.

The 10-12 Principal said,

I think there's a lot of collaboration that takes place at Stanley Estrada High School. We have gone to, the last several years, of everyday at 7:30 to 8:10 in the morning, we have what we call, common time, and that is teachers only, and they are to work within their professional leadership teams to design curriculum, to communicate about assessments, to talk about effective teaching, and this is what's done every day here at Stanley Estrada before our students even show up at 8:25. As a union and as an administration, together we thought that that would bring value to our students, that gives us a piece of collaboration every day. Now, there's times where we might have a building meeting or a district meeting where

we all gather in one room and send messages forward related to the cause for our school of well-being, but pretty much on a daily basis, each department, within their department chairs, and the teachers within those departments work within their areas.

This collaboration time, however, was questioned by district teachers during one of the observed diversity training sessions. Teachers related that collaboration was a good idea, but the implementation took away from daily preparation time. Teachers questioned the extent to which the common time actually improved instruction because of the time restrictions it placed on teachers to prepare and plan for their daily lessons. They stated that no time was added to the contractual day and no time was taken from student instructional time. Instead, individual preparation time was re-purposed as mandatory common time with a calendar developed by district administration.

The structure of the EAC committee meeting that was observed reinforced opportunities for communication and clarification. The meeting was previewed for committee members via an emailed agenda. At several points during the meeting questions regarding approval from the district office came up. At these times members directed the question to the Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources. In each case he was able to provide immediate and definitive responses to the committee. It was apparent to the researcher that the committee has decision-making power. It was also clear that having administrative presence in the room allows for clear and immediate communication and facilitates decision making. At the conclusion of the meeting the facilitator reviewed the topics that were covered, the decisions that were made, and

previews the topics for the upcoming meeting. The opportunity to correct or revise the summary is given by stating, “Does that sound right? Did I miss anything?” A copy of the mornings meeting minutes was distributed via email to all members (those in attendance as well as those that were missing) later that same day. The organization and overlapping presence of administration within the meeting streamlined the decision making process seemingly without hindering constructive dialogue. Furthermore, the overlap of faculty and administration allowed for clarification of message and intent between the groups.

Theme 4: The Non-Negotiable Expectation of an Inclusive, Rigorous, and Culturally Responsive Culture

The message of inclusion is clearly expressed and expected by the district superintendent and embraced by district administration. This message is supported by the board of education as evidenced by district academic goals for improvement and the declaration within the mission statement that all students will receive a nurturing and challenging environment:

Stanley Estrada High School will create a nurturing and challenging environment in which all students achieve success, develop personal responsibility, and become lifelong learners. We will promote a partnership with students, parents, businesses and community; utilize effective teaching methods and current technology; and provide quality, comprehensive academic and extracurricular experiences.

This declaration is emphasized by the superintendent when he states, “All means all, and that's the most important word in our mission statement. Educate all students and provide them with a comprehensive educational experience.” The superintendent recognizes that the school community must be provided the tools and resources to respond to cultural differences and support this expectation if it is to be fulfilled with fidelity. The superintendent acknowledged this when he stated,

You're looking at sub-groups now for the first time under NCLB and you're being tracked for your performance of your sub-groups, maybe you need to look at this. Well I'll go hire some minority teachers. That ain't going to change anything. That ain't going to move the needle. You need to look at the individuals who are interacting with your students and try to make your climate conducive for learning for all students. To me, that is one I believe in as an educator. I will say that. I do believe in that. I do believe in education. That's why I say all means all that you have that responsibility to acknowledge difference and provide for your teachers resources and things to respond to difference.

The principal of the 10th-12th grade high school expressed this support in terms of understanding the needs of all students. He stated,

Our goal is always to be a premier comprehensive high school, and we identify that by understanding the needs for all students. We pick out different words in the mission statement, but the word, "All" in, "All students" is something we are really focused on as our mission.

He goes on to discuss the diversity of the district and the consequent necessity for cultural responsiveness when considering district opportunities:

I know that all students have different homes, and we respect that immensely, and our school district, we are spread out, 64 square miles of students come from different cities.... Everyone's proud of where they're from and there are so many different feeder schools. I think the opportunities are what we cherish for our students, curricular and social. I mean we want students to develop academically and socially. I mean, that's really important to us and getting involved is important. Understanding the needs of all of our students, like going back to our mission, is really what we hold on to... Sometimes when students, they walk into school today, they don't even think about learning because of what just happened the night before. We need to pay attention to that and recognize, do we understand the readiness of our students? Opportunity's there though, we have a very enriched curriculum, teachers have really taken the initiative over the years.

All administrators emphasized preparing students to meet the expectations of the curriculum and providing supports when students fell short of this expectation. The focus was continually on raising student performance despite diverse skill levels and experiences, rather than lowering expectations. The Freshman Center Principal highlights this sentiment when she stated,

One of things here, we're a little bit different and you know, if you look at the demographics of our community and how we are set up, we are one high school with seven public and two private feeder schools within our district boundaries.

With that, we actually have kids coming in from nine different entities which can be tough in itself. Some high schools just have two junior highs that feed in. We have all these entities so what we've done is, we really have ... The reason we've set up the Freshman Center this way, is we're trying to bring all the kids in, acclimate them to our expectations, our goals and kind of introduce them to the Stanley Estrada way and give them a foundation so that they can go be successful in a traditional setting.

The EAC Facilitator underscores this same message when he discusses how the district reflects on its student populations as it designs academic and social opportunities. So often I think educators are challenged by students in their class who they don't understand and there's a really disengagement and misunderstanding because of maybe cultural differences that creates a wall for that student to achieve. I think the opportunities we offer here are awesome. I think the other concern I would have is just because this district, being 60 square miles that we're servicing so many different communities and so many different cultures that are produced by the feeder schools that feed this district. I think there are 9 different feeder schools that empty into here. I think that's the other big concern, is making sure that we're being mindful that not every kid's going to need the same thing and that there are different experiences that are preparing these kids for this high school experience, and we need to be mindful of that.

The expectation that the district be an inclusive and responsive culture is further evidenced by the existence of the Equity Action Committee. While discussing

reinforcing the inclusive culture within Stanley Estrada, the facilitator commented at a committee meeting, “Inclusivity must be a non-negotiable goal for the district; how do we set the standard that the district expectation is an inclusive culture. When it comes to educating kids, it has got to be positive and inclusive.” This comment expresses the ongoing conversation that exists within the organization regarding their mandate to be inclusive, rigorous, and culturally responsive. This mandate is further supported by the diversity training that is mandatory for new teachers. This mandatory training is reinforced by extended diversity training workshops offered to all staff members as professional development opportunities.

Question 2: What actions has this district taken that reflect existing best practices for effective school leadership as identified by Marzano and Waters (2009)?



Figure 14. What actions has this district taken that reflect existing best practices for effective school leadership as identified by Marzano and Waters (2009)?

Ensuring Collaborative Goal Setting

The district board member emphasized the collaborative and inclusive nature of goal setting when asked about how district goals are created, communicated, and implemented. The board member stated,

Several years ago, in fact I was on the board because I participated in it, we did a strategic plan where we brought in members of the community to participate, to get a idea of what they thought that the school needed to do and what were some of the issues. From that, we formulated some board goals, and every year the board reviews their goals and if need be, based on what's going on, we tweak them. Then administration takes those goals and develops an action item, which they bring to the board to show how the goals are going to be met. Then from those action items, the board votes on them.

Discussing the role of the board and superintendent in this process she went on to state,

The role of the board is to set policy and goals in order for the school district to be successful. The board only has one employee, which is the superintendent, and his job is to make sure that the policies and goals are enforced.

From the board members perspective, the board in conjunction with community stakeholders design broad goals, and the superintendent is charged with design a planning, presenting, and ultimately implementing a plan of action in pursuit of these communally set goals.

This culture of collaborative goal setting was reiterated in comments from district administration. These comments, however, were accompanied by statements crediting

the superintendent as a significant driver in the goal setting process. The 10th-12th grade principal reflects this when he was asked where district goals come from. He responded, "The superintendent a few years ago, and we are all a part of that process." Similarly, when asked about the success of district achievement in the midst of significant demographic change, the freshman principal cited the superintendent as a primary factor. She stated,

Honestly, I attribute a lot to our district office. I'm going to say this. I attribute a lot to our superintendent. Honestly, he's the one who, when you talk about the equity action, he's the one who brought this to us and said, "We need to do this". It wasn't that we had an issue or a problem, but it was something that he knew would make us even stronger. That's the characteristic of a true leader. To bring forward programs even when there's not an issue to make us stronger, but it's something he's passionate about and it's something that ... He started it as the assistance superintendent and then in becoming the superintendent now, it's part of the culture. It's ingrained in what we do.

The various statements seem to indicate a dichotomy where direction is suggested by the superintendent, but discussion and collaboration are expected to determine value and feasibility and encourage ownership. This dichotomy is apparent when the superintendent states,

We meet through our team structures so I give them ideas. It's like, hey ... I suggest it. These are ideas. I'm not saying you run with them. I'm saying you vet them. Hey, is this a good idea? What do you think? What about this? Can we get

these kids here? Can we get these kids in? ... We plan. I participate in the planning but I don't actually draw the plan up but when we meet, we have different meetings, when we meet with the instructional team, which are the five building leaders, my assistant sup, and myself, it's like we got to get kids on track.

The culture of assessment and intervention referenced in question one begins with questioning. The superintendent sets the direction for questioning while indicating that the process is collaborative:

A couple years ago I was sitting here, our graduation rate is 86%. I said, "I don't know what that number means." If that's the best we can do, we'll live with it. If it's not, it's going to grow. Our graduation rate now is 93% and we're going to set a district goal of 96%."

The use of the inclusive "we" indicates that no one individual decides what is possible or necessary; rather, it is an open and ongoing discussion. This same use of inclusive pronouns can be seen when the superintendent discusses district planning and goal setting with the board of education:

I have a terrific board that's fair, they challenge me, but they allow us to come forward and align a plan of work to the district goals and show what our priorities are, what we see the priorities are and where we need to go. We align all our plan of work to one of the five district goals. The board supports that.

Effective collaboration requires review, discussion, and criticism. The statement that the board challenges administrative plans reflects an appropriate tension as ideas and plans are vetted and tested against the district mission.

A culture of collaborative goal setting was observed not only at the district administration level, but also at the department and committee level. Departmentally, this emphasis on collaboration was reflected in the common time monthly calendars and discussed by each administrator in their respective interviews and cited under question one under overlapping communication structures. The Equity Action Committee meeting observed on October 21 indicated that the power for setting committee direction, planning, and decision making power was shared. All members participated in discussions, and it was observed that the facilitator restated opinions to ensure understanding. Decisions were made by general consensus. Task delegation seemed to be evenly distributed. As tasks come up, individuals offered their help voluntarily without any singular individual taking a disproportionate amount of the workload. While this process for setting direction, goals, and assigning work was not discussed, it was apparent that each individual contributed to discussion, decision making, and implementation. When discussing the practical operation of the committee, the facilitator stated,

The committee of staff members that meet once a month is on a voluntary basis.

It's no longer you have to be selected to be on the committee. The direction that we go in is completely up to that group. We're really autonomous...The initiatives are thought of among the committee members that attend the meetings, and then they're executed by that same group of people with the support of administration.

The facilitator went on to elaborate on how decisions and direction is informed. He cited student input in the collaborative process when he stated, "We've included students in our

discussions about the school experience and are they feeling welcome, do they feel like their needs are being met, do they see discrimination in the classroom or within the culture?” While all stakeholders may not have the same level of opportunities to contribute to goal setting, efforts to elicit various voices in goal setting were present.

Establishing Non-Negotiable Goals for Achievement and Instruction

All data collection methods reflected an alignment between district mission, goals, and programs. The district goal number one for the 2014-15 school year was to “Increase and maximize student achievement and growth.” While this goal is broad, it served as the justification for several sub-goals including: student achievement, student growth, special programs and interventions, and school environment. Discussing this goal, the executive summary of the district goals statement reads,

The performance of a high school can be assessed in many ways. Different metrics should be identified and selected in order to accurately gauge a school district’s performance. The newly designed State Report card follows this concept and for the first time this year provides a variety of metrics for each school. Utilizing our District Mission Statement as a screen, we have identified performance indicators to measure both our status and progress. These indicators are separated into four distinct categories: Student Achievement, Student Growth, Special Programs and Interventions, and School Environment.

The following table included in the 2014-15 District Goals statement highlights the various metrics used to assess past student growth and achievement and strategies and

measurement tools used to improve student growth and achievement for the 2014-2015 school year.

Table 6

Stanley Estrada District Goals, 2014-2015

Board of Education District Goals 2014-15		
Mission Statement: “Stanley Estrada High School will create a nurturing and challenging environment in which all students achieve success, develop personal responsibility, and become lifelong learners. We will promote a partnership with students, parents, businesses and community; utilize effective teaching methods and current technology; and provide quality, comprehensive academic and extracurricular experiences.”		
Goal 1: To increase and maximize student achievement and growth		
Target	Strategy	Measurement Tool
<p>Achievement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> PSAE (meets/exceeds) ACT (College & Career Readiness) <p>Growth:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> EPAS (Explore, Plan, Pre-ACT, ACT) Internal Assessments 	<p>Math Enrichment @ 9th grade Reading 1, 2, & 3</p> <p>Reading Pilot (Summer 2013 and 2014)</p> <p>Develop summer Math Pilot (2014)</p> <p>RTI strategies- Goal 2)</p> <p>Develop Common Interim & Summative Assessments to inform instruction and measure student growth</p>	<p>SEHS Achievement Metric-Grid ECRA</p> <p>Suburban Conference comparison grid (internal)</p> <p>Achieve 3000 Lexile data</p> <p>Advanced Placement performance</p> <p>Common Interim & Summative Assessments</p> <p>PERA compliance 2016-17 student growth</p>
<p>Instruction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase access to general education curriculum- IEP students Instructional Technology 	<p>Enhance, expand, and support Co-teaching to provide IEP students with rigorous academic opportunities.</p> <p>Implementation of a comprehensive Technology Plan that provides staff & students “Anywhere, Anytime, Teaching & Learning.”</p>	<p>SEHS Achievement Metric Grid ECRA reports (IEP subgroup)</p> <p>Suburban Conference comparison grid (internal)</p> <p>Student mastery of learning standards</p> <p>Technology Plan objectives and timeline 2014-15</p>

While discussing student growth and achievement, the superintendent wrote, As identified in Board Goal #1, increasing and maximizing student achievement and growth remains our top priority. Through the Educational Planning and

Assessment System (EPAS) tests, the EXPLORE, PLAN, RETIRED ACT, and ACT, students are provided rich information to assist with college and career planning. Unlike the sun setting PSAE, data from EPAS provides a metric to evaluate the growth a student has attained from the prior year and, if they are on target, for post-high school plans. Through EPAS we are able to make informed determinations regarding a student's academic growth while at SEHS. As a result of having several years of EPAS performance growth data, the administration utilizes ECRA, a data consultant, to provide analysis of these data. ECRA evaluates student, subgroup, class, and subject area data to determine if growth expectations have been met. Has a student met personal growth expectations: Did the class of 2014 meet typical and expected district growth levels? These are just some of the questions that ECRA assisted us with. Individual student academic growth projection profiles are proved to families at the time of ninth grade registration to assist with academic planning and course selection.

The superintendent's comments and the board goals table indicates that the district looks at neighboring districts, national standards, internal assessments, and individual student achievement when determining appropriate growth levels. These growth expectations correlate directly with the "on-track" expectations discussed in question one under needs assessment and interventions. The benchmarks are clearly marked, and when they are not met, the data reflects that action is taken. This transition to data informed intervention is highlighted when a board member commented on how the district has progressed,

We have went to more of a data-driven based system, where we let the data tell us some of the things that we need to do. One thing that I like, that it took a while to get there, but we're there now, is we track the students individually and we develop curriculum around what the student needed, the individual student. A lot of schools, some odd years ago, had a curriculum or program, like the one-size-fits-all kind of mentality, so if we have students come in to the school that have gaps, we try to have those students fill those gaps. Because we have like seven feeder schools coming into us, and each school has different ... The students come in with different learning skills, so we have to try to bring the kids all to a common level.

This is further reiterated by the Freshman Center Principal when she remarked,

We kind of have benchmarks set and identified for different interventions in college readiness so when a parent comes in in January and we say, “This is where your child is at. This is where they should be at. What can we do to help your child?” We're going to put this intervention in place.

The permeation of shared goals throughout SEHS and accompanying accountability structures built in to ensure the adherence to these goals stood out as especially consistent and powerful throughout data analysis. Evidence for these two practices (non-negotiable goal setting and corresponding monitoring) was especially prevalent and have been depicted in Figure 14 with a contrasting color to emphasize their prevalence throughout data analysis.

Creating Board Alignment With and Support of District Goals

Communication was readily visible as a key component to creating and maintaining board alignment with and support of district goals. This communication is seen throughout board minutes in yearly goal presentations, informational reports specific to individual goals, and a yearly mid-year update on district progress toward goals. This communication is mentioned when the board member comments on how the Board of Education is kept informed:

We receive data which reinforces the goals, all kind of statistics. In fact, we just received a report card, and with that school report card, the administration shows us the data behind why the report card is what it is. We do get information, and then we get monthly reports from the superintendent, from the business office, from the principals, the building superintendent. We get a lot of monthly reports to keep us informed, and these are things that relate to the goals.

The superintendent commented on his relationship with the district board of education stating,

I have a terrific board that's fair, they challenge me, but they allow us to come forward and align a plan of work to the district goals and show what our priorities are, what we see the priorities are and where we need to go. We align all our plan of work to one of the five district goals. The board supports that.

An example of a regular informational report created for the board is the attendance report. The 10th-12th principal notes this regular communication with the board when he commented, "We do monthly attendance reports, and it is done by one of

our assistant principals and shared with our board of education at the board meetings every month.” This kind of regular communication helps to clarify district needs and justifies the alignment and necessity of recommended programming. The Freshman Center principal highlights the necessity for information in creating alignment and support when she states,

You know what, our district is phenomenal because if there is a need, that's obviously the first thing you have to do, you have to identify the need and kind of make sure that, okay, how do we need to attack this need? Is it a group need? It's kind of the MTSS, the RTI, is it a tier one need that we need to do a blanket or is it an individual need, group. What would the case be? Within our district, if we identify a need, if we see an issue, then we take a look at what resources we have and what resources we need to add.... That's kind of how we evolved with the math enrichment, the math plan and so we saw a need, we did the research and there's plenty of research out there that a double period of math really does strengthen and we know that the ninth grade is the most important year for a kid in high school because it sets a foundation and it's directly related to their high school graduation rate. There's a direct correlation. Taking a look at the research, identifying the need, taking a look at the options, taking a look at the research that's out there and then is it the right decision for us as an organization. Do we have the ability which within our district? And our school board is phenomenal. If it's good for kids, we'll try to find a way to make it work.

The principal highlights the willingness of the board to address student and district needs, but predicates this support on the responsible identification of needs accompanied by a plan well informed by research and district context. This support justified by diligent information gathering and review is further evidenced by the EAC facilitator when he stated,

Then there's a major investment by the administration of the board of education to allow the training to take place. That takes me out of my office, depending on how often they offer it, for a couple of days every year. Then on top of that it takes teachers out of their classroom and they're paying for substitutes to be in the classroom while these teachers go through the training that takes place during the school day. I know that one board member actually participated in the training and thought it was an overwhelming experience, a very powerful, valuable experience.

The invitation for the board to participate in an early iteration of the diversity training speaks to the committee's confidence in the value of the training, but also to their desire to keep the board abreast of committee endeavors. This commitment to communication is further evidenced by the superintendent when he commented, "They (the EAC) present to the board every June all their training, and then the surveys of teachers." The financial commitment by the board to support this training is informed by annual presentations as well as personal participation from a board member. The Freshmen Center principal reiterated this enthusiasm from the board to support initiatives aligned to district goals when she stated,

I've always felt the support of our superintendent and the school board and honestly, our school board is, "What else can we do for kids?" That's kind of the mentality that they have. What more can we do? We also are fiscally responsible when it comes to those things, so how can we do these things and be creative with the resources that we have? If there is something that we can justify and really need to make a difference, for the most part, they're very open and willing to try to make it work one way or another.

This statement indicates the board's eagerness to support district initiatives, but this eagerness is accompanied by a need for justification. Data indicates the administration understands this need as it conceives, plans, and presents district initiatives to the board of education.

Monitoring Student Achievement and Instruction Goals

Much of what is done to monitor student achievement was addressed in question one under theme 2, "Needs assessment and interventions." This includes state mandated testing, annual achievement comparison at the local, state, and national level, regular review of board achievement and instructional goals, weekly review of individual student progress within teacher teams, achievement based benchmarking through EPAS and ECRA, and a culture of data driven needs assessment supported by professional learning teams. When discussing monitoring student achievement a board member highlighted attending to low performing students in the effort to meet the needs of all students when she stated,

I also look at that bottom third, because that's what people need to look at. You have the top third, you have the middle third, and then that bottom third. Make sure that the bottom third are the students, which is more than just minority students, are progressing, so by the time that they hit their senior year, they're able to function in society.

The board members attentiveness to consistent monitoring of student achievement speaks to the importance that is placed on student achievement within the district.

In addition to these structures and practices highlighted in question one, administration also indicated a new effort to monitor student achievement more accurately across the district through common standards based assessments. The 10th-12th grade principal highlighted this initiative when he stated, “So we're really within the last one or two years we've created some common assessments at the end of each semester for every department for our students to take, that ties into our curriculum.” The superintendent expounded on the importance of these common assessments in relation to monitoring student progress and instructional goals when he commented,

One of the things we have to do is better use of our time through teams, teams that are better organized and use data that comes from our own assessments that we've been developing the last two years and subsequent formative assessments that are maybe common between common teachers, math, things like that, and use that data to affect instruction. That's where we're heading right now.

He reemphasized the importance of these assessments as a data source when he stated,

We have to put the structures in place to make sure that teachers can access the data and now we're making sure that the structures of teams are functioning correctly and then subsequently teachers know how to use data to improve instruction. The focus is, our core, is this - Professional practice, our teaching practices, assessment in our curriculum, and all our PD goes into those three things. That's it. It's a broad thing.

This emphasis on using highly functioning teams to monitor achievement and instruction was further evidenced by the district decision to bring in a consultant to improve professional learning teams. This was highlighted by the 10th-12th grade Principal when he stated,

We brought in another person, a consultant, about setting norms, setting expectations in the teams, looking at data, in addition to. Not just showing up and working in silos, we don't want to work in silos ever again, for anyone.

The freshman center principal clarified the importance of team structures in monitoring achievement and instructional goals when she commented,

With all of these groups (various district teams), when things come up or issues come up, we always ... My biggest thing is I say I'm going to give you the toddler mentality. But why? But why? When an issue comes up, why is the issue coming up? Let's look at the reasons behind it. I talked about the freshman managers. If we have this number of kids failing, then tell me why? Why is it happening? If somebody brings up a kid at the facilitator meeting, this kid has been absent 30 days. Why is he absent? We need to find out the reasons why and get to the

bottom of that and maybe there's a solution within. If a kid is just refusing to do work, well why? Is it defiance or is it a disability? Finding out the reasons why, I think really help us to get to the heart of what's the next step.

As with ensuring non-negotiable goals, achievement monitoring has been depicted using a contrasting color in Figure 14 to emphasize its prevalence throughout data analysis.

Allocating Resources to Support the Goals for Achievement and Instruction

A clear connection was drawn by the superintendent and evidenced in yearly district goals, updates, and action plans (see goals statement in theme 2) between information via district data collection, research, feedback, and resource allocation. All interviews indicated that administration and the board of education enthusiastically supported goals for achievement and instruction, but this support was predicated upon evidence of need and the effective utility of the resource. In explaining the rationale for expanding the math curriculum to include a specific course, the superintendent demonstrates this connection between need, utility, and support:

We continue to look at changing our curriculum, revising our curriculum to benefit our students, as an example. We know our number one school attended after SEHS is, through StudentTracker, is the local junior college. With that regarding, we want to provide as many dual credit offerings as we can. Here's a perfect example. You look at data. The local Junior College, the frustrations we have with the junior college admission program, you can go to Illinois State with a 22 in math on your ACT but if you don't have a 25 you're in remedial math at our local community college. So we looked at the number of students that were

starting in 099 math, and we're not starting on a level playing field, and these are potential hurdles, so what have we done the last two years? We have now developed and implemented an 099 senior math class here so students still could be solid students, because they go to the junior college, and their gate is, "Well, you got to take 099." If they take that course as a senior and pass that course, ace their course, their curriculum integrated with ours, but our teacher and our credentials, then that student starts on an even base.

The course was developed and supported, but this support was justified by data indicating significant benefit to district students and district goals.

As part of district goal 1, "Increase and maximize student achievement and growth" and its accompanying technology plan, the district has implemented a 1 to 1 plan where each district student has been issued a Chromebook to enhance instruction and learning. Significant in this plan is not only what the district chooses to do with the instructional technology but also what the district chooses not to do. When discussing credit recovery options to help maximize achievement and growth for all students the superintendent explained why computer based credit recovery would not be supported by the district. He states,

You can't just ask kids to do it (credit recovery) online because the research clearly shows kids who struggle, give them a computer, they're going to struggle more. They need somebody to interface with them. You can't just say hey, credit recovery is, go do this online course. That doesn't work.

Online credit recovery is more affordable and more easily implemented, especially in a 1 to 1 environment. The superintendent's remarks provide insight into the extent to which research and information is relied upon to decide where support should be allocated.

While discussions and board goals reflected that fiscal responsibility and efficiency were valued, in this circumstance they did not trump the research on effectiveness. The Freshman Center principal made a comment during her interview that reflected the culture displayed throughout observations, interviews, and documents, "Within our district, if we identify a need, if we see an issue, then we take a look at what resources we have and what resources we need to add." The mission is to serve all students. Data suggests that the district actively seeks to identify students who are not being served, works to understand how they can be better served, and then acts to better support those students.

Enthusiasm for interventions and programming was apparent in the board member interview. The board member stated,

If you're low in reading and math, they can put you into another class at the freshman level, where they can give you a lot more attention to focus on those skills that you need to develop. If you have reading issues, they have classes, additional help for reading. Now what we've done recently is we have moved that over to the East campus, where we follow those students. If they're still not where they need to be, we can give them additional help. We have put in a lot of tutoring. We have tutoring at lunchtime, tutoring at study hall, before school tutoring, after school tutoring. We have tutoring, tutoring, tutoring.

It is clear that the board member believes there is a need for these interventions and believes in their effectiveness as evidenced by the board members enthusiasm for the expansion of reading and tutoring programs from the Central campus to also include the East campus.

Question 3: What actions has this district taken that reflect existing best practices for cultural proficiency as described by Lindsey, Nuri Robins, and Terrell (2009)?

Embedded Feature	District Practice
Assessing Culture	Diversity training, Equity Action Committee, Freshmen Center, keen awareness of diverse feeder environments, cultures, and opportunities.
Valuing Diversity	Acknowledging difference, gay-straight alliance, appreciation for diverse board membership, mission statement, character education program promoting the value of tolerance and open-mindedness.
Manage the dynamics of difference	Equity audit, EAC, diversity training modules, ongoing revision activities for a culturally responsive curriculum, Freshmen Center, promotion of a shared district identity.
Adapting to diversity	Profession development of administration, faculty, and staff, achievement through inclusive practice, ongoing needs assessment accompanied by appropriate action. A organizational understanding that different circumstances require different approaches.
Institutionalizing cultural knowledge	Diversity training modules, EAC led professional development.

Figure 15. Embedded Elements of Cultural Competence Active within SEHS

Assessing Culture: The ability to describe your own culture and norms. The ability to recognize how culture affects others. Understanding how culture of the organization affects those whose culture is different

This theme was primarily evidenced in interview data. While programming such as the district professional development for diversity training and the Equity Action Committee as well as the existence of the freshman center evidence a response to, and understanding of, cultural difference, it was interview data that best conveyed valuable commentary on and awareness of the impact of difference. The superintendent wrote his doctoral dissertation on developing cultural competence in school leaders. Because of the procedure and criteria used to identify possible case study schools, this was not information the researcher had prior to selecting the district. The superintendent used an earlier iteration of the same framework of cultural competence developed by Lindsey et al. (2009) as utilized for this study. Consequently, the superintendent reflected much of the language utilized by the researchers and promoted the ideals espoused by the Lindsey et al. framework. The ability of the district to assess culture in pursuit of developing cultural competence is reflected in the superintendent's discussion of understanding environment through the lens of race. He states, "Whether or not you know it, every decision you make is processed through the race lens. There needs to be a development of your level of cultural competence to interact and work in that (diverse) environment." He elaborates on this by commenting on how the idea of difference is approached in the district's diversity training,

Organizations that go into training that way (reactively) as compared to our organization that went into it like, “we need to recognize difference” and when you are able to recognize and understand that difference is equal and how to have a comfort level with the fact, that you are uncomfortable in those situations, how you can meet the needs of the students that are culturally different in your class?

You can't ignore them. You have got to acknowledge their difference.

The superintendent reflects that awareness is essential to healthy interaction and growth, both social and curricular.

The 10th-12th Principal echoed this sentiment when he highlighted the multiple environments and experiences the students are coming from. He noted the number of feeder districts to Stanley Estrada High School, “Our students come from seven different public feeder schools, and two parochial feeder schools, so that's nine different schools and they're all different districts, obviously. We're not a unit district of course, we're a single high school district.” This keen awareness that not all students have had the same preparation, cultural environment, or opportunities is displayed when the board member commented on the various feeder schools to the high school,

We have seven feeder schools coming in, so the poor high school, who sits in the middle, now when the kids get to high school you only got four years to try to play catch-up. You got to teach them what they need to know in high school, plus you need to fill the gaps. Some kids never get the gaps. If you go down to the grade schools and look at it, the kids have issues with their reading and their math. I see a lot of kids, basic math skills, they just don't have.

Commenting on how the district responds to these various cultural and environmental differences the 10th-12th Principal displayed cultural awareness of how these differences impact students and how the district can positively respond,

Everyone's proud of where they're from and there are so many different feeder schools. I think the opportunities are what we cherish for our students, curricular and social. I mean, we want students to develop academically and socially. I mean, that's really important to us, and getting involved is important.

Understanding the needs of all of our students, like going back to our mission, is really what we hold on to.

He describes how the district hopes to value students individual differences while creating a shared culture within the high school when he describes the positive impact of the freshman center,

Our freshman can come in and learn our culture and our climate of being in one building, all in the same building with our curriculum offerings, and our participation- hopes that they get involved. It kind of gets them to know each other better, so by the time when they walk in in August, they're all from different schools, by the time they leave in May; they're all members of the Stanley Estrada family. They understand our system. They really were able to gain a lot of, I guess, attention as freshman. No one else is there but them.

This sentiment is echoed by the Freshman Center principal when she explains how the Freshman Center is a result of assessing culture and realizing the need to respect difference while creating a unified school culture,

One of the things here, we're a little bit different and you know, if you look at the demographics of our community and how we are set up, we are one high school with seven public and two private feeder schools within our district boundaries. With that, we actually have kids coming in from nine different entities which can be tough in itself. Some high schools just have two junior highs that feed in. We have all these entities so what we've done is, we really have ... The reason we've set up the Freshman Center this way, is we're trying to bring all the kids in, acclimate them to our expectations, our goals and kind of introduce them to the Stanley Estrada way and give them a foundation so that they can go be successful in a traditional setting.

This awareness of the various experiences and cultures that feed into one building was shared universally across all interviews. The EAC facilitator expressed this same awareness and the necessity for awareness when he stated,

So often I think educators are challenged by students in their class who they don't understand and there's a really disengagement and misunderstanding because of maybe cultural differences that creates a wall for that student to achieve. I think the opportunities we offer here are awesome. I think the other concern I would have is just because this district, being 60 square miles that we're servicing... so many different communities and so many different cultures that are produced by the feeder schools that feed this district. I think there are 9 different feeder schools that empty into here. I think that's the other big concern, is making sure that we're being mindful about that not every kid's going to need the same thing and that

there are different experiences that are preparing these kids for this high school experience and we need to be mindful of that.

He went on to elaborate by stating,

We need to really be aware of the culture we're creating and the atmosphere. We also need to be aware of ourselves and what attitudes, biases, beliefs, habits, values we're bringing to the experience that may vary from other students and how we can bridge the gap between what we deem as valuable and what the kids see as valuable.

Valuing Diversity: Celebrating and encouraging a variety of people in the organization. Recognizing differences as diversity rather than inappropriate responses to the environment. Accepting that each culture finds some values and behaviors more important than others

The superintendent spoke to the challenge and need for establishing a culture where difference was valued as opposed to ignored or disparaged when he discussed his early experiences within the district,

I think a lot of the practices here, of our teachers, was safely being able to say, "I treat everybody the same. I'm colorblind. I don't care if you're white, purple, black, whatever." I'd be like, "Oh, okay. Do you treat your kids the same?" "Oh no. Jimmy's different. Suzy's different. Billy's different. They all have different needs." Kids of difference have different needs to. That to me was the biggest issue here that there is a lack of whether it just be simply the safety. You would never be able to say that at my former district, "I'm colorblind", because you were

then disrespecting somebody of difference when you say you don't recognize who they are, but people don't see that.

The superintendent's awareness of this school culture seems to have led him to be especially proactive in creating a culture of support for all students where difference is valued as diversity. This is evidenced in the creation of a gay straight alliance within the district despite opposition. The superintendent stated,

I recommended my first year as superintendent and we brought on the Gay-Straight Alliance Club here. That's a big step. That was 4-3 vote. 4-3 vote. From that standpoint, that's walking the walk and recognizing and giving students a sense that they're valued.

This commitment to the advantages of diversity is further evidenced by the superintendent's appreciation for his diverse board. He spoke to this when he stated, "I've got a Hispanic board member, two African American board members which to me is critical...people of difference now have a voice." It seems that the superintendent not only understands the importance of meeting the needs of all students, but also recognizes the benefit of diverse perspectives and leadership in creating strong institutions intended to serve all.

This appreciation for diversity is another demonstration of how the district mission statement permeates all district initiatives. The 10th-12th Principal restated the inclusiveness of the district,

Our goal is always to be a premier comprehensive high school, and we identify that by understanding the needs for all students. We pick out different words in

the mission statement, but the word, “all” in, “all students” is something we are really focused on as our mission.

Similarly, the Freshman Principal reflected on how an earnest appreciation for difference promotes an enhanced curriculum where positive civil and social-emotional skills are promoted, “When you create a culture of respect for everyone's differences, whether it be racial, cultural, sexual, when you create a culture of respect, it just brings a whole other level to the school.” She cited two specific ways in which the district had explicitly taught and promoted an appreciation for diversity. The first was the humanities week being planned by the EAC. She stated,

They're (the Equity Action Committee) putting together the humanities week that's coming up for us so it's, “Well, what do we need? What do we need here and what are your thoughts?” Bringing in people so that we realize, “Hey, we're all different and we need to respect each other's individuality,” and it's the same thing with the kids in the class, whether you're talking about academics or behavioral. Every kid is different, so how are we going to tell the story for every kid?

The second reference she made was to a recent speaker who had visited the freshman center,

We just brought in an officer from the police department who was kind of on the cyber team, to come in and talk to these kids about cyber bullying and about respecting other people and just bringing that awareness about and respecting each other's differences. It is diversity, but it's not when you're actually talking

about the true sense of diversity, but that whole idea of respecting everyone for their differences, because we have a very eclectic student body here. It's awesome.

The exclamation, "It's awesome" speaks directly to the administrator and district's view that differences should be valued and celebrated as opportunities for introspection and growth.

This intentional focus on valuing diversity is further evidenced within the district's character education program active within the freshman center. The district utilizes the six pillars of character education. The pillars of respect and fairness are intentionally utilized to emphasize tolerance and open-mindedness. The two initiatives cited by the FC Principal take the ideal of tolerance and extend it to appreciation and valuation. Commenting on the character curriculum in place at the freshman center, the EAC facilitator stated,

There's a much stronger wraparound environment here at the freshman center to kind of catch kids that maybe could get lost in a traditional high school setting. Then also at the freshman center by administrative mandate, the teams of staff members conduct two different character education assemblies based on whatever color their house is affiliated with, so the red house, and the 6 pillars of character they're caring, so they put on two rallies about caring. The gold house has two rallies about respect. The kids are getting that kind of exposure and experience through their homeroom's twice a month on the different character pillars. I think it's much more warm and purposeful and personal here.

Manage Dynamics of Difference: Learning effective strategies for resolving conflict among people whose cultural backgrounds and values are different. Understanding the effect that historic mistrust has on present day interactions. Realizing that you may misjudge others' actions based on learned experiences

Current and past initiatives to effectively manage difference in positive ways was evident in board minutes, board reports, independent consultant reports, all observations, and all interviews. The resolve to proactively encourage communication and understanding within the district was apparent throughout analysis. What was also apparent was the tension, discomfort, and occasional mistrust present amongst minority populations within the district despite these well intentioned and positive initiatives. Much of these negative feelings were evidenced in an equity audit conducted in 2007. An independent equity audit and corresponding report was conducted by the Kaleidoscope Group. This report consisted of twelve leadership interviews including the Superintendent, two Assistant Superintendents, and three Directors. Seven focus groups were conducted as depicted in Table 7.

The equity audit identified six unique environmental challenges. These included: Based on these unique environmental challenges and identified themes, the auditors made seven recommendations depicted in Table 8.

Table 7

Kaleidoscope Equity Audit Data Collection

12 Leadership Interviews	Building Level Leaders Focus Group	Department Chairs Focus Group	Teachers, Counselors, Social Workers from various disciplines and programs Focus Groups	Support Staff Focus Groups
Superintendent	5 Principals and Assistant Principals	10 Members with experience ranging from 1 to 30 years	2 White Focus Groups	1 White Focus Group
2 Assistant Superintendents			1 African American Focus Group	1 African American Focus Group
3 Directors			1 Latino Focus Group	1 Latino Focus Group

While analysis of interviews, observations, and document yielded no evidence of an external cultural audit or support staff team building, the remaining five recommendations resulted in some form of district action. Commenting on this process and the district's response, the Superintendent stated,

Kaleidoscope Group came in. They came in and interviewed the board, interviewed administrators, interviewed teachers, different personnel and then they said hey, do this, do this, do that, do this. We don't have money to go in to a bunch of training with an outside consultant, so the goal was for ourselves as teachers to take ownership of it. We started a committee, Equity Action Committee, and the idea behind that is not just to have ethnic days, but a way to have training built in to provide for our teachers to get them to recognize and understand difference.

Table 8

Kaleidoscope Challenges and Recommendations

Unique Environmental Challenges	Recommendations
Impacts of diverse student academic and social successes.	Conduct an external cultural audit to assess those served by the district
Many white students come from communities with a lack of diverse experiences.	Incorporate diversity and inclusion education at all levels. Integrate multiculturalism throughout the curriculum to affirm all cultures, history, and contributions.
Many feeder schools lack individual achievement plans.	Increased parent involvement and outreach.
Many feeder schools lack professional development in diversity.	Institute support staff team building.
125-150 new students each year from diverse backgrounds.	Further assessment of disciplinary actions and achievement gaps by demographics.
Slow progress in providing diverse role models to reflect the growing diversity of the student body.	Increase focus on recruitment of staff of color through outreach of diverse staff, community, organizations, and colleges.

The diversity training professional development workshops and the Equity Action Committee were direct responses to the first recommendation identifying diversity and inclusion education as an urgent need. While other responses such as increased parent involvement, further assessment of disciplinary action and achievement gaps, and curricular integration of multiculturalism have developed over time, the district acted decisively in addressing the need for diversity training and the data indicates that these

initiative have been promoted and expanded ever since. These initial actions resulted in a foundation upon which the district could build to further address the needs identified within the audit, such as parent outreach. The continual effort to improve communication is evidenced when the 10th-12th Principal stated,

I think really good families that enter our school district, I really think the communication can always improve, there's no doubt about it. What we're saying is one thing, and what people are hearing are another thing, but yet it's the same thing for everybody. If you pay attention to that you're going to always try to communicate even better. If you pay attention to that, of people listening and/or speaking to you or with you, and then vice versa, you have a partnership there, you've obtained a partnership. Why we are a school, and why the biggest goal is for our students is to learn and gain knowledge, they can achieve differently but there's an opportunity to achieve, there's an opportunity to maybe relearn something if that's the case because it might take a little time for some of our students too.

In addition to the equity audit and resulting Equity Action Committee and diversity training, several interviews identified the Freshman Center as an intentional and effective tool for managing the dynamics of difference. This awareness of the Freshman Center as a useful tool is seen when the Superintendent states,

I think one of the things that helps us is the Freshman Center. Everybody gets in there; they get them all on the same train. Everybody's a member of Stanley Estrada, everybody's here, all the feeder districts integrate. We are one, we are

together, and it gives everybody a chance to get a foundation together as compared to that regard here.

While administration promotes the value of diversity, they simultaneously promote a unifying shared culture, often metaphorically identified as the “Stanley Estrada family.” The Freshman Center Principal extolled the benefits of this unifying culture when she said,

One of my first years as principal and I hosted a character breakfast, you know, students with a quarter breakfast and the kids stood up the first quarter and, “I’m so and so from so and so junior high.” It kind of followed suit and I said, “Hold on a second, guys. We’re all Stanley Estrada.” That kind of predicated the first day assembly. Telling the kids, it doesn’t matter where you came from. It doesn’t matter what you’ve accomplished in the past, what you have or haven’t accomplished. I tell the kids, “If you accomplish great things. Great, we’re going to give you more opportunities to keep you on that path, but if you haven’t had the road you want, this is your opportunity for a fresh start and a new beginning.” I tell them, “You have all walked through the doors. You’ve now entered into the Stanley Estrada family.”

Promoting a shared identity and culture while recognizing the students’ individual identities and cultures was deeply recognized as crucial to managing conflict and encouraging individual and communal achievement. The EAC facilitator highlighted the importance of connecting with students when he stated,

I think that we've discovered, as I think most educators do, that in order to really impact student's achievement scores they have to feel connected, they have to feel invested. I think in many ways, whether it's related to this committee or not, as an educator you have to be concerned about the social emotional aspects of the educational system for kids to achieve.

This statement recognizes that promoting social emotional health in the form of relationships where students feel involved as a member as opposed to outsiders helps positively direct and manage the dynamics of difference.

Adapting to Diversity: Changing the way things are done to acknowledge the differences that are present in the staff, parents, and community. Developing skills for cross-cultural communication. Adapting cultural interventions for conflicts and confusion caused by the dynamics of difference

The superintendent expressed the challenges of creating second order change within a district to promote skills necessary for adapting to diversity. He expressed the determination and time required to develop a culturally competent administration that is both aware of cultural context, but also willing to proactively adapt for the benefit of all. This is apparent when the superintendent stated,

You've got to build the capacity of your leaders, and the biggest disconnect is you can get a team of leaders in here. Your principal is going to say this and that, yeah this, this, yeah, and this is a good idea. I really need to care for all my kids. What's next? Are you going to publicly say that? Are you going to talk to teachers about that as a White teacher? Are you going to talk to your staff about that? Do we

recognize difference and we need to make sure that we serve all our populations? That's tough. That's second order change. That's the key. You got to be able to do more than talk the talk. You've got to be able to walk it. You've got to be able to speak and articulate on those issues and martial and champion them.

While the superintendent did express the difficulty in promoting these changes, he also highlighted areas where the organization has developed. Both the Superintendent and the Freshman Center Principal cited an example involving organizational adaptation to accommodate students. The superintendent recalled,

I'll give you an example. Muslim prayer. We had students two years ago, a year and a half ago, wanted to start praying at lunch and stuff like that. It's a situation that I had to handle. I had to step in and deal with that. I met with the two students and set up some procedures for that and student prayer and things like that. That population is only going to grow, you're better off making them feel valued, respected, integrated into your school than try and make them feel, no you can't do it.

Recalling the same situation the Freshman Center Principal said,

I have had Arab students come to me and say, 'We need a place to pray', and we worked through that with them. It was, wow, what that opened up. Seeing those kids in the hall. I even see them in the neighborhood. I live in the neighborhood and they're so excited to see me and it was like, "Wow. All I did was help them find a place to pray", but that respect for them and their culture went a long way in their eyes.

The emphasis on needs assessment and interventions cited in question one as well as the monitoring of student achievement and instruction goals combined with the allocation of resources to support goals for achievement and instruction noted under question two reflect an adaptive culture that understands that achievement is connected to inclusion, and inclusion requires adaptation. When asked about low achievement among Black and Hispanic students the Freshman Center Principal state,

I think sometimes our kids don't have or aren't exposed to some of the same opportunities and resources. One of the things that we're trying to do is see if we can do more at parent universities or provide opportunities for resources.

By monitoring student achievement and student, parent, and community needs and addressing these needs through interventions and programming, the district is demonstrating an ability to adapt to culture. The 10-12 Principal demonstrates this understanding when he, in a matter of fact way, points out that the district intentionally reflects on the cultural differences within the broader school community when planning curriculum and instruction. "We make sure that we communicate regarding the demographics of our school district in relationship to the delivery and the understanding of our curriculum." This adaptation is a manifestation of the awareness that different circumstances require different approaches. Awareness and understanding through analysis come first, planning and action follow. The Freshman Center Principal notes this when discussing how student needs are addressed in both an effective and culturally competent manner:

When an issue comes up, why is the issue coming up? Let's look at the reasons behind it. I talked about the freshman managers. If we have this number of kids failing, then tell me why? Why is it happening? If somebody brings up a kid at the facilitator meeting, this kid has been absent 30 days. Why is he absent? We need to find out the reasons why and get to the bottom of that and maybe there's a solution within. If a kid is just refusing to do work, well why? Is it defiance or is it a disability? Finding out the reasons why, I think really help us to get to the heart of what's the next step and I think we try to do that with most of our kids here.

With all of our kids.”

Institutionalizing Cultural Knowledge: Integrating into your systems for staff development and education, information and skills that enable all to interact effectively in a variety of cross cultural knowledge into the mainstream of the organization; teaching origins of stereotypes and prejudices

The most apparent way in which this theme was evidenced was the diversity training workshop mandated for all new employees as part of their new teacher four year professional development requirements. When discussing the importance of professional development for cultural competence to the district mission, the Superintendent stated, “That's why I say all means all that you have that responsibility to acknowledge difference and provide for your teachers resources and things to respond to difference.” Also critical to the diversity training workshops is the understanding that they must be continually revised and updated. The superintendent stated, “We want to continue to refine it, upgrade it.” This responsiveness to changing social and academic environments

is reflected by the EAC facilitator's comments while discussing communication between the EAC, administration, and the outside professor who facilitates part of the training,

There were two concerns that the equity action committee came up with that we expressed to him (outside consultant for diversity training) that if he could touch on those it would be helpful. One was the whole transgender issue. Now that's become such a hot topic, and the whole LGBTQ community- to kind of address what we need to be aware of in regard to that as our whole culture shifts. The other one was that we do seem to see that there is a higher percentage of minority students in detention. You asked a really good question, we're asking the same thing. We're hoping that maybe we can start exploring that a little bit more.

What was especially interesting to the researcher was the presence of faculty members in the observed diversity training session that had completed the workshop more than four years ago. When asked why they chose to participate again, they indicated that the workshop was always updated and that the information was always good, and that they need to better understand their students if they are going to effectively connect with them and effectively teach them. The consistent updating of the workshop reflects the growing vision the Superintendent shared for expanding the workshop from an awareness of the impact and value of difference to a more inclusive curriculum:

I think ultimately, I would like to eventually see it grow into a little bit more of the instructional practices in the classroom and those types of things, but I think that takes a real skilled individual that really would lead that. Really, we're

dealing with the recognition of difference right now and comfort level with it and getting people to understand that this is part of it. This is part of it.

The superintendent's comments reflect an understanding that creating institutional knowledge is a process, and that it requires steps to build up institutional knowledge in pursuit of institutional understanding.

This vision is further supported by presentations from the Equity Action Committee during all staff institute days. During the observed EAC meeting the committee discussed the importance of incorporating the use of LGBTQ inclusive language into the broader school curriculum, highlighting the specific need for a change within the health and physical education curriculum. During the meeting the committee mentioned potentially planning an in-service highlighting ways teachers can effectively update current curricula to incorporate inclusive resources and language.

Summary

The data in Chapter IV provides evidence for each of the recommendations for best practice for leadership related to improving achievement for students as presented by Marzano and Waters (2009) and Lindsey et al. (2009). Overlapping aspects of these themes were identified when addressing question one (how has this district been able to maintain or improve its school-wide academic achievement levels in the midst of significant demographic change?). Data analysis revealed four primary themes explaining the success of Stanley Estrada High School. These themes are: emphasis on mission, needs assessment and interventions, overlapping communication structures, and the non-negotiable expectation of an inclusive, rigorous, and culturally responsive

culture. Emphasis on mission as well as needs assessment and interventions relate directly to Marzano and Waters (2009) Framework for effective district leadership. Needs assessment and interventions and the expectation of an inclusive, rigorous, and culturally responsive culture are thematically linked to Lindsey et al.'s (2009) framework for cultural proficient leadership in schools. The addition of overlapping communication structures may be implicit in both frameworks, but is not explicitly listed. This theme most reflects the recommendations of Kruse et al. (1994) in providing the factors essential for supportive cultures.

Analysis of question two [What actions has this district taken that reflect existing best practices for effective school leadership as identified by Marzano and Waters (2009)?] revealed each of the five best practices named by Marzano and Waters as present and active within the school culture. While all five themes were present, themes two (establishing non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction) and four (monitoring student achievement and instruction goals) were especially prevalent in data analysis. These themes were ever-present throughout data sources and indicated an aggressive focus on improving student achievement and district instructional practices through curricular alignment, analysis of institutional and individual data, and extensive intervention services.

Analysis of question three [What actions has this district taken that reflect existing best practices for cultural proficiency as described by Lindsey, Nuri Robins, and Terrell (2009)?] identified each of the five best practices named by Lindsey et al. as present and active within the school culture. Assessing cultural knowledge, valuing diversity, and

institutionalizing cultural knowledge represent initial steps toward making Stanley Estrada High School a more culturally aware and competent institution. The steps taken, including an equity audit, establishment of diversity training workshops, and creation of an Equity Action Committee, indicate a commitment to engaging with issues of difference. While these initiatives, themselves, could be identified as efforts to manage the dynamics of difference and adapt to diversity, they more strongly align with initial steps necessary to begin the process of assessing current views and creating a support system and culture to promote and value diversity as an institutional expectation.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Chapter V will discuss the findings reported in Chapter IV as they relate to the research questions and the related literature discussed in Chapter II. The purpose of the study is to explore and analyze the relationship between educational leadership and academic achievement in the context of significant demographic change. The research questions are:

1. How has this district been able to maintain or improve its school-wide academic achievement levels in the midst of significant demographic change?
2. What actions has this district taken that reflect existing best practices for effective school leadership as identified by Marzano and Waters (2009)?
3. What actions has this district taken that reflect existing best practices for cultural proficiency as described by Lindsey, Nuri Robins, and Terrell (2009)?

Implications for further research as well as implications and recommendations for applied practice will follow this discussion followed by a summary of the research.

Summary of Findings

The data in Chapter IV provided evidence for each of the recommendations for best practices for leadership related to improving achievement for students as presented by Marzano and Waters (2009) and Lindsey et al. (2009). Aspects of these themes were identified when addressing question one (how has this district been able to maintain or

improve its school-wide academic achievement levels in the midst of significant demographic change?). Data analysis revealed four primary themes explaining the success of Stanley Estrada High School. These themes are: emphasis on mission, needs assessment and interventions, overlapping communication structures, and the non-negotiable expectation of an inclusive, rigorous, and culturally responsive culture. While worded differently, the themes include a significant amount of overlap in both theoretical understanding and applied practice as the existing frameworks utilized by this study. Question one incorporates aspects from both frameworks as well as themes independent from these frameworks in addressing how the district has maintained and improved academic achievement in the midst of significant demographic change

Analysis of question two [What actions has this district taken that reflect existing best practices for effective school leadership as identified by Marzano and Waters (2009)?] revealed each of the five best practices named by Marzano and Waters as present and active within the school culture. While all five themes were present, themes two (establishing non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction) and four (monitoring student achievement and instruction goals) were especially prevalent in data analysis. These themes were ever-present throughout data sources and indicated an aggressive focus on improving student achievement and district instructional practices through curricular alignment, analysis of institutional and individual data, and extensive intervention services.

Analysis of question three [What actions has this district taken that reflect existing best practices for cultural proficiency as described by Lindsey, Nuri Robins, and Terrell

(2009)?] identified each of the five best practices named by Lindsey et al. as present and active within the school culture. Assessing cultural knowledge, valuing diversity, and institutionalizing cultural knowledge represent initial steps toward making Stanley Estrada High School a more culturally aware and competent institution. The steps taken, including an equity audit, establishment of diversity training workshops, and creation of an Equity Action Committee, indicate a commitment to engaging with issues of difference. While these initiatives, themselves, should be identified as efforts to manage the dynamics of difference and adapt to diversity, they more strongly align with initial steps necessary to begin the process of assessing current views and creating a support system and culture to promote and value diversity as an institutional expectation.

The Role and Responsibilities of District Leadership

The frameworks for effective district leadership discussed in Chapter II (Leithwood, 2010; Marzano & Waters, 2009; Schwartz, 2000; The Education Trust, 2013) included overlapping recommendations. The degree to which the these independent studies' recommendations overlap serves to reinforce the importance of the district leadership's role in establishing uniform district goals, an emphasis on curriculum and instruction, accountability, professional development, and allocation of resources. Current SEHS district goals address these overlapping themes identified within the applicable literature aligned as follows:

Goal 1. Increase and maximize student achievement and growth. (Emphasis on curriculum and instruction/allocation of resources)

Goal 2. Design, develop, implement, and evaluate strategies to support academic and social and emotional development of students. (Emphasis on curriculum and instruction/accountability/allocation of resources)

Goal 3. Enhance and support administrator, teacher, and staff's knowledge and skills in support of district goals. (Emphasis on curriculum and instruction/professional development/allocation of resources)

Goal 4. Increase awareness of the district's mission and practices for all district stakeholders. (Professional development/allocation of resources)

Goal 5. To maintain a fiscally conservative budget while supporting academic success for all students. (Allocation of resources)

Interesting additions unique to the three frameworks specific to closing the achievement gap (Leithwood, 2010; Schwartz, 2000; The Education Trust, 2013) were early childhood development initiatives, attention to school climate, family resources, and a heightened awareness of goals and gaps between student groups. Evidence for addressing these themes was identified throughout data analysis.

Early Childhood Development Initiatives

While the district has increased its outreach to district feeder schools and continually works to align curriculum and maximize academic opportunities and resources for feeder districts, a common complaint was the variation of student skill level based on feeder district. It was clear that there was a common belief that much more could be done in terms of earlier intervention services to address the gaps the district aggressively engages with at the high school level. This harkens back to the research of

Hart and Risley (1995), Jencks and Phillips (1998), Rothstein (2004) and Ferguson (2007) discussing the early-age vocabulary gap present between white students and minority students. While the control of the high school over early intervention services and feeder district curriculum, instruction, and intervention services is limited, it is clear that there is a desire to minimize and eliminate achievement gaps as early as possible.

The Board member related this when she stated,

The issue is not all grade schools have equal resources, you know?Because we know that those kids, the school can't afford to do it (offer algebra) at the school. We're offering that at the high school level, and again, also what our curriculum superintendent does is he meets with the different feeder schools and tries to ... explain that gaps that we have saying, 'These are the gaps that your kids have coming in,' and try to work with them and see how we can fill those gaps, because if we help them, then that helps us.

It was evident within interviews and observations that district administrators and faculty feel that disparate resources available between the nine feeder schools within the district correlates directly with the preparedness of the students coming from those districts. Students from wealthier, more diverse districts perform better than those from poorer districts.

School Climate and Culture

School climate was a significant focus within the district. Organizational theorists (Collins, 2001; Fullan, 2015; Heifetz et al., 2009; Zepeda, 2013) assert that culture and

climate stem directly from leadership practices and must be rooted in an aligned vision and mission. Zepeda (2013) writes,

In healthy school cultures, principals work with teachers, they have a shared vision and mission, they focus on students learning, and they work under a common set of assumptions about learning for both students and adults. A positive culture is aligned to goals and objectives about learning for students and adults. (p. 20)

The shared focal point within the district mission was the emphasis on “all students.” The first sentence of the statement reads, “Stanley Estrada High School will create a nurturing and challenging environment in which all students achieve success, develop personal responsibility, and become lifelong learners.” This ever-present focus on the well-being of all students seems to have been a major factor in promoting the conditions necessary to maintain and improve achievement within the district in the context of significant demographic change. By mandating a “nurturing environment” as well as “a challenging environment” the district is promoting social-emotional goals in addition to academic goals. From the outset, the district makes it clear that success includes academic achievement, but is also measured and aided by these broader social-emotional initiatives. This understanding creates a foundation for justifying programming that mandates relationship building as an essential component of every district employee’s job. Instruction is not enough, the relationships and programming must extend to nurturing and challenging, which is predicated upon a mutual respect.

The role of respect in promoting a healthy school climate conducive to learning reflects the dynamic promoted as essential by Chenoweth and Theokas (2011). They write,

...Leaders know that their commitment to students requires that they build a climate and culture that supports and requires excellence. They do this in part by respecting students as learners who are worthy of high support and high demand—that is they expect them to work toward excellence in all their work. But they also respect teachers as professionals who are worthy of high support and high demand—that is, they don't just leave it at expectations. They build in systems to monitor how teachers and students are doing and provide the support they need to reach their goals of excellence. (p. 169)

By incorporating the understanding that academic and social-emotional success are not only independently worthy goals, but also interrelated, the district creates an essential understanding that manifests itself throughout district policy, programming, and practice.

Chenoweth and Theokas (2011) indicate that respect is a key element in creating a successful and positive school culture. Respect is predicated upon support and demand. Kruse et al. (1994) indicate that the conditions necessary for a supportive culture include critical elements of school communities, structural conditions, and social and human factors. The critical elements of school communities are: reflective dialogue, deprivitization of practice, collective focus on student learning, collaboration, and shared norms and values. The structural conditions cited are: time to meet and talk, physical proximity, interdependent teaching roles, communication structures, and teacher

empowerment. The social and human factors are openness to improvement, trust and respect, supportive leadership, and socialization of teachers. The “common time” established district wide serves to meet the structural conditions necessary to promote reflective dialogue, deprivitization of practice, a collective focus on student learning, and shared norms and values. Interdependent teaching roles continue to develop as the district transitions to collaboratively develop common assessments aligned to state and communally developed standards. Teachers can no longer be accountable to their personal standards; they are now accountable to collaboratively established local and state standards. The district has created structural parameters that align with the recommendations of Kruse et al. (1994) where teachers must work together to look at their student data from common assessments and discuss student data in an effort to improve individual instruction, communal instruction, assessments, broader curriculum goals, identify needs, and design and implement appropriate intervention services.

These structural conditions are further reinforced through the team structures built into the Freshman Center, East campus, and district administration. The Freshman Center incorporates members from all content areas into each team to promote cross-curricular discussion of individual students to better understand each student’s individual needs and create a situation conducive to productive dialogue. The East campus is organized by academic departments to create a situation conducive to curricular review, discussion, and creation. The Freshman Center was often identified as an intervention center promoting extended and focused attention on each individual student whereas the East campus is organized to promote extended and focused attention on departmental

curriculum. While both situations encourage discussion of individual students and curriculum, they each have a specific focus designed to promote district improvement in different ways. The district's collaboratively established goals and team oriented organizational structures create the opportunity for student focused discussion and collaboration in pursuit of improved student achievement.

Family Resources

The existing leadership research of Leithwood (2010) indicate that creating family support resources is effective in minimizing achievement gaps. Evidence of family supports within the district was identified in the form of the parent universities discussed by the Freshman Center principal, free summer school programming including free transportation for incoming freshmen discussed by the school board member, and scholarship options for extra intervention services and programming. The parent universities intended to inform parents of important information regarding specific topics and resources and tuition free summer school were formally communicated and clear. A formal process for procuring funds or excusing cost for individual students to participate in programming was not identified or discussed. It seemed this was determined on a case by case basis. While some supports for families were apparent, in-school initiatives to improve achievement were far more prevalent.

Heightened Awareness of Goals and Gaps between Student Groups

All four leadership frameworks discussed in the literature review (Leithwood, 2010; Marzano & Waters, 2009; Schwartz, 2000; The Education Trust, 2013) emphasized the importance of improving student achievement through consistent monitoring of

student data. The Education Trust (2013) extended this recommendation to include a specific focus on achievement levels between student groups to inform decision making and interventions. The attention to data, corresponding goals, and evidence of action was extremely prevalent in all interviews and documents. The comments of district leadership fully embraced data-informed instruction and action was evidenced in the revision of math and reading curriculum, individual and group achievement tracking, the extension of special education services, the addition of extensive tutoring options, the creation of math coursework to align with the local community college standards, the current review of English Learner services, the on-going creation of district-wide common assessments, as well as the creation of administrator and teacher teams and common time to facilitate conversations and take action based on compiled data. All interviews reflected reliance on multiple data sources, quantitative and qualitative, in designing and implementing new programming to improve student achievement. While no causation between any individual intervention and achievement can be asserted, the most recently compiled ACT data (see Table 8), the same metric utilized for the expired Prairie State Achievement Exam, indicates that White student performance at Stanley Estrada High School has maintained while minority performance continues to improve. It seems that the communal expectations, goals, and corresponding data based interventions occurring at SEHS are effective and correlate with a reduction of achievement gap between student groups.

Table 9

Composite ACT Scores by NCLB Demographic Subgroups

Composite Score by NCLB Demographics	Class of 2013	Class of 2014	Class of 2015	Class of 2016
Black	16.8 (n=35)	17.8 (n=53)	18.0 (n=38)	18.9 (n=40)
Hispanic	19.6 (n=126)	19.9 (n=146)	20.5 (n=123)	20.4 (n=131)
White	22.6 (n=637)	22.4 (n=628)	22.4 (n=604)	22.5 (n=606)
Sped/IEP	15.1 (n=105)	15.5 (n=108)	16.1 (n=106)	16.1 (n=102)

Note. Adapted from the Illinois Interactive Report Card (2016). Northern Illinois University, with support from the Illinois State Board of Education. Retrieved from <http://iirc.niu.edu/Classic/Default.aspx>

Curriculum and Instruction

All four leadership models indicate the importance of effective curriculum. This emphasis on the importance of effective curriculum and instruction aligned to standards in support of district goals was prevalent in document analysis and interviews. What was especially apparent was the desire to push the entire student population towards more challenging curriculum. This desire was emphasized by a board member when she stated, "... I want the district to challenge more students to take AP classes. I think a lot more students could take AP classes, but they just don't want to be challenged, you know?" This clear desire to push students towards more challenging curriculum could be an important factor in the success SEHS has had in improving its achievement scores for minority students. Condrón (2009) and Oakes et al. (1992) point out that curricular tracking based on preparedness (often miscategorized as ability) results in a disproportionate number of minority students being placed in low-level classes. Condrón

(2009) and Hoffer (1992) relate that low-level placements undermine achievement and exacerbates the existing achievement gap. This is reiterated by Harry and Klingner (2006) and Lindsey et al. (2013). Instead of accepting the achievement performance of incoming freshman and tracking low performing students into remedial level coursework with low demand of its instructors and students, the district embrace the support and demand dichotomy recommended by Chenoweth and Theokas (2011) by demanding improvement through expanded curriculum options for low performing students and focused interventions. This is especially evident in math and reading services, skills which were identified as especially low for minority students in state report card data. Acting on this information, the district expanded the curriculum in a way where low performing students are enrolled in the college preparatory coursework as well as an additional math class and an intervention based math study hall monitored by a certified math instructor. This study hall intervention can be accompanied by before and after school tutoring. This curriculum design attempts to fill in the curriculum gaps through remedial catch-up work, concurrent college preparatory work, and supports students in both endeavors through student specific monitoring and tutoring. By addressing curriculum gaps while maintaining grade level instruction, the students are embodying the recommendations of Chenoweth and Theokas and Mac Iver (2010) where students are challenged, but also supported. This same tactic is utilized with students with low reading performance. All students with low reading scores take an additional reading class to build up their skill level. This course is in addition to their regular curriculum in an effort to keep the students on track to maximize opportunities and achievement.

While these curricular interventions eliminate elective options for students, they address the most prevalent gaps identified through data analysis. The district understands that all students must be pushed toward challenging curricula at all levels in an effort to eliminate the systemic structures that help to perpetuate the achievement gap.

Curriculum and instruction are inextricably related and work in conjunction to improve achievement outcomes. Quality instruction, however, cannot be achieved without the clear, communal, and uniform goals that these frameworks mandate. Good curricular goals unify and direct teachers in their efforts to provide excellent instruction. The clear alignment of district goals with district practice supports and focuses the efforts of teachers in their pursuit of quality instructional practices. Wenglinsky (2004) confirms that instructional practices have a significant impact on the achievement gap within a school. This finding supports Marzano and Waters (2009) second recommendation in that it emphasizes the need to set non-negotiable goals not only for achievement, but also for instruction. The 10th-12th Principal highlighted the extent to which student centered instruction was emphasized within the district when he stated,

I think that's the key for all of us because we always know that effective teaching, it's really about what are the students doing. When I walk into a classroom, what do I hear, what do I see, what are the students doing, how is that being facilitated through teaching? That whole relationship of shifts needing to take place about culture, about why are students not learning? Shifts in focus, shifts in different parameters of purpose. The one way to get to all students is effective teaching

through the curriculum and the delivery is really important of how and why students should learn.

The recognition and corresponding allocation of time and professional development for instructional practices clarifies the district's emphasis on instructional practice as key to student success.

Accountability

Accountability within Stanley Estrada High School was most evident in the monitoring of student progress. The collaborative evaluation of student progress, especially prevalent within the teacher teams at the Freshmen Center, created a dynamic where student achievement data was no longer assessed by the individual content area teacher. This information was now shared. Teachers were now accountable to each other in ensuring that their instruction was effective, and if student data lacked progress, this required explanation.

This accountability was evident beyond the team and department level. The district administration was keenly aware of their state achievement data, and weaknesses were readily identified. This awareness of achievement data was identified in interview and document data as a driving force behind the math and reading programs as well as the extra resources being directed to special needs student and students with limited English proficiency. The culture was aware that their student data was under earnest scrutiny. The culture, however, recognized this scrutiny as communal, where emphasis was less focused on blame, and more focused on opportunity for improvement. Understanding deficits was continually emphasized. This emphasis on individual and

corporal improvement rather than blame reflected the school culture of accountability recommended by Reeves (2009). The framework for evaluation and assessment proposed by Reeves suggests that all supervision, whether leadership, teacher, or student, must be implemented in the spirit of support with the assumption that all can achieve and improve. This is highlighted when Reeves writes, “The purpose of assessment is not to rate, rank, sort, and humiliate. The purpose of assessment is to improve performance” (p. xi). While some data indicated teachers did not agree with the way common time was allocated, teachers did indicate that collaboration in support of accountability and improvement was time well spent.

Cultural Proficiency

Lindsey et al. (2013) assert that much of the achievement gap between White students and minority groups is a result of inequity and cultural differences. Gramsci (1971) asserts that cultural hegemony creates a societal system of advantage for the cultural mainstream. The cultural style, beliefs, and practices of the mainstream are pervasive and become valued and privileged above all others. This creates a system of advantage based on culture. Tatum (1992) defines racism as a system of advantage based on race. Given the racial association with the dominant culture in America, Tatum would define all public contexts, including schools, as racist given the cultural advantage afforded the White, middle-class majority. Gay (2000) reiterates the effect of cultural hegemony relaying that teachers and schools expect students to conform to the advantaged culture, which may or may not be the predominant culture within the school. Gay advocates for school leadership to adopt “culturally responsive caring” while

maintaining unrelenting high expectations for all students. Delpit (1988) recognizes the need to support the cultural identity of students as well as their home language, but also argues in favor of explicitly teaching students the behavioral and academic skills necessary to navigate the privileged culture of power. Expounding on the work of Lindsey et al. (2009), Lindsey et al. (2013) promote the framework of cultural proficiency as a tool for combining the culturally responsive caring espoused by Gay (2000) and the skills necessary for effectively navigating and understanding the culture of power promoted by Delpit (1988). Lindsey et al. (2013) write,

The approach we propose is a focused strategy that significantly and persistently addresses the problems of educational inequity. We firmly believe that education leaders must mobilize a sustained and coherent strategy that challenges the dominant deficit and at-risk characterizations of some students. An inclusive, pluralistic, and instructionally powerful learning environment offers the real likelihood that all students will be well-educated and successful learners. (p. 11)

These sentiments are embraced and put into practice through the tracking and corresponding intervention services that seem to permeate the district. School leaders and district documents indicate an effort at consistent and on-going monitoring of student achievement and consistent and ongoing monitoring of interventions. These processes, accompanied by mandatory professional development which promotes the value of diversity as well as optional supplemental professional development on inclusive and culturally responsive behavior, seem to indicate that the district is actively addressing the inequity that exists within American school systems.

The tenants of cultural proficiency are fully embraced by district leadership. Document analysis revealed that the framework for culturally proficiency was utilized to assess early iterations of cultural training initiatives at SEHS. Additionally, the elements of cultural competence developed by Lindsey et al. (2005) were utilized to assess professional development training. The Superintendent who implemented these initial trainings while serving as the Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources wrote,

Culturally competent school leaders understand that effective leadership in a diverse environment is about changing the manner in which they work with those who are culturally different. Personal transformation that facilitates organizational change is the goal of cultural competence. School leaders have the moral responsibility to set a positive tone for valuing diversity in their schools. Turning a blind eye to the different experiences students have in our school is too often the status quo. School leaders can create a constructive and instructive environment for diversity within their schools. Valuing diversity is essential to that. An educational leader who values diversity utilizes the position to provide others with the information and skills that inform and transform their instructional practices.

The Superintendent's words indicate a knowledge that belief systems are not enough, belief systems must translate into action. Fullan (2003) writes, "The principal with a moral imperative can help realize it only by developing leadership in others" (p. xv). The superintendent initiatives seem to have helped the administration work through and evaluate their personal values and beliefs in promotion of the tenants of cultural

proficiency. This process is now implemented at the faculty level in the form of professional development and ongoing committee discussion. The voluntary Equity Action Committee is a manifestation of the second order change within the district where a leader's vision has been embraced and expanded by the organization itself. This is not to say that the entire organization fully embraces and values diversity. It would, however, seem that the change process has transitioned from the leader to the organization and a significant and persistent conversation is active and productive. Evidence of this is the EAC's request to create new professional development opportunities related directly to LGBTQ inclusive language, programming, and curriculum review and a renewed focus on the equity of school discipline practices.

There is no doubt that achievement is the number one priority for the district as evidenced by district goal 1: Increase and maximize student achievement and growth. This achievement, however, is couched in district goal number 2: Design, develop, implement, and evaluate strategies to support academic and social and emotional development of students. In order to improve achievement for all students, the district reflects an understanding that it must recognize and value the various backgrounds, cultures, belief systems, and experiences its student body and communities offer. A rigorous curriculum and corresponding interventions are couched in this culturally proficient understanding. While the impact of this climate is difficult to assess, its prevalence throughout the district as represented by the leadership interviews and district documents was clear.

Early Identification

Any true estimation of a district's effectiveness and student achievement must evaluate graduation rates in conjunction with test scores if it is to give an appropriate picture of success or failure. Mac Iver (2010) writes, "The district office, therefore, has a key role to play in narrowing the graduation gap and ensuring that more students earn their high school diplomas well-equipped for college or career." In an effort to improve graduation rates and ensure prepared graduates Mac Iver recommends a three pronged ABC approach which calls for district leaders to:

- Analyze data to identify and address early warning indicators of dropout as well as policies and practices related to student attendance, behavior, and course failure;
- Build Consensus among school leaders and faculties on the need to implement research-based practices that will help prevent dropout outcomes through reducing absences, suspensions, and course failures, and providing recovery opportunities for students before they drop out;
- Create integrated whole school reforms and school level student support structures, including early warning systems that will ensure appropriate, timely interventions to keep all students on track to on-time graduation. (p. 11)

While reinforcing collaborative goal setting and research based initiatives, the framework explicitly adds the component of early warning systems. While this may be implicit in the existing frameworks under data mining for signals, the identification and attendance of gaps, or monitoring student achievement, Mac Iver (2010) exemplifies its

importance as a tool specifically essential to at-risk students. The data indicates that SEHS fully embraces the idea of early warning systems and timely interventions in its effort to help its students achieve and succeed. The extensive data mining employed by the district and corresponding analysis, including attendance reports, weekly grade reports, the expansion of student data information software, and weekly student centered team meetings, are examples of how Mac Iver's recommendations have been embraced.

Race and Composition of Demographic Change

Mei-Jiun Wu's study (2013), "The Effects of Student Demographics and School Resources on California School Performance Gain: A Fixed Effects Panel Model" indicates that a demographic change of 1% has significant ramifications for student achievement. Other studies indicate that racial composition also plays a role in student achievement. Caldas and Bankston (1998) assert that the number of minority students impacts school-wide achievement, even after SES is controlled. They write, "...there is a point beyond which academic achievement will disproportionately suffer due to high concentrations of minority students" (p. 553). Lee and Bryk (1989) indicate that this point of impact is around a 40% minority population. Conversely, Armor and Rossel (2001) found a trend indicating that black and Hispanic students reading scores significantly improved in an environment with a white population exceeding 80%. The generalizability of these findings is limited due to the limited number of minority students in these predominantly white schools. These studies, however, may provide insight into SEHS's success in the midst of significant demographic change. Since 2008 SEHS has had a White population less than 80%. The 2016 school report card data

identifies the White population at 73.4%. Student achievement has continued to maintain or improve. The rate of change hovering year to year right around 1%, while still significant in impact, may help to limit the compounding impact of demographic change. The district had enough data to identify necessary programming and services and implement them at a manageable rate. Such a manageable response may not have been possible with higher rates of change. This steady rate combined with a student body composition that is still far from 40% the minority population indicated by Lee and Bryk (1989) could indicate that the conditions of SEHS are conducive to improving minority achievement without having a detrimental impact on White student performance.

Administrative Experience and Tenure

Marzano and Waters (2009) identified a correlation between superintendent tenure and student achievement. The weighted average correlation was .19 ($p < .05$). In short, the tenure of a superintendent has a positive effect on student achievement and can have a measurable impact in as early as two years on the job. While this impact was only analyzed for superintendent tenure, the experience of administration within the district, superintendent and other, during the course of this study was significant. The Superintendent served within the district for as an administrator for 14 years. The 10th-12th Principal served as an administrator within the district for 10 years and the Freshmen Center Principal served as an administrator within the district for 13 years. It is likely that the tenure of administration and corresponding consistency of message and leadership that accompanies this tenure has played a role in the success of SEHS in the midst of significant demographic change.

Implications for Further Research

The scope of this case study was limited to the perspectives of school leaders. Further research eliciting and analyzing the perspectives of students, parents, families, and other community members could better explicate the context surrounding school improvement and lead to further insights about what works and what doesn't when it comes to maintaining and improving academic achievement in the midst of significant demographic change.

Both case study data and existing literature indicate a correlation between leadership and achievement outcomes. This correlation, however, is likely only one component of an extremely complex confluence of conditions either contributing to or working in opposition to improved student achievement. The research of Lee and Bryk (1989), Caldas and Bankston (1998), and Armor and Rossel (2001) indicate that there is an inverse relationship between the percentage of minority students in a school's population and student achievement. The generalizability of these findings is limited due to the limited number of minority students in these predominantly white schools. The numbers in these studies were so small that the findings were not statistically significant. This segregation factor is reiterated by Condrón (2009). He asserts that racial segregation is the leading factor in extending the racial achievement gap. Given the potential impact of school composition on extending the achievement gap, more extensive research on the impact of minority population on achievement and the factors contributing to this impact could be significant in efforts to close achievement gaps and promote improved achievement for all students.

Another area for potential study could be the specific impact of Arab students' achievement levels within districts. While the number of Arab students within SEHS is unknown, anecdotal observation and interview data indicate that the Arab population has significantly grown within the district. The impact of this demographic change cannot be analyzed given existing sub-group designations. Currently, it is impossible to track Arab students as a sub-group based on state test data. The district is unaware of how this population is performing in the aggregate because Arab students typically identify as White-non Hispanic on achievement tests, and, consequently, are not tracked as a unique demographic group. Although identifying as Caucasian or White non-Hispanic is an accurate way of self-identifying, many of these students come from families who have recently immigrated to the United States and have unique cultures, values, and experiences. Although the classification of Arab is imperfect as an identifier due to its broad application, it would help make some generalizations about the relative achievement of this group of students, and provide some insight into the needs and performance of this population of students.

Many district stakeholders attribute much of the success of SEHS in maintaining and improving student achievement in the midst of significant demographic change to the Freshmen Campus and the corresponding team structures and interventions in place there. Research specific to comprehensive freshmen programming could clarify the impact of this program and potentially substantiate freshmen programming as effective beyond the specific context of SEHS.

Implications for Practice and Recommendations

The literature applicable to in-school factors involved in improving achievement for all students cited in chapter two was summarized into three general principles:

Leaders must

1. involve themselves in the creation of communal, non-negotiable goals;
2. use data to inform decision making;
3. establish norms of mutual respect which encourages stakeholders to value differences, commit to dialogue, and engage in introspection.

Analysis of SEHS data indicates that the district was able to maintain and improve student achievement in the midst of significant demographic change through an emphasis on mission, needs assessment and interventions, overlapping communication structures, and the non-negotiable expectation of an inclusive, rigorous, and culturally responsive culture. These results match perfectly with the common themes found in existing literature, with the exception of overlapping communication structures. This communication facilitated by the time and team structures implemented by leadership at the faculty and administrative levels stood out as essential to maintaining and improving student achievement. While this element might be considered inherent to the recommendations common to existing research, and is explicitly addressed by the research of Kruse et al. (1994), it is not explicitly addressed by the framework for effective district leadership from Marzano and Waters (2009) or the framework for cultural proficiency from Lindsey et al. (2009). The explicit creation of common time and team structures to facilitate a pattern of continuous improvement stuck out as

intentional, clear, and crucial to the achievement observed at SEHS. There was an understanding at SEHS that organizational structures must support and sustain improvement (see Figure 16). This process involved understanding impediments, planning interventions and programming, implementation, and corresponding assessment. The explicit addition of team structures and corresponding collaborative work time should be considered by any district hoping to improve achievement.

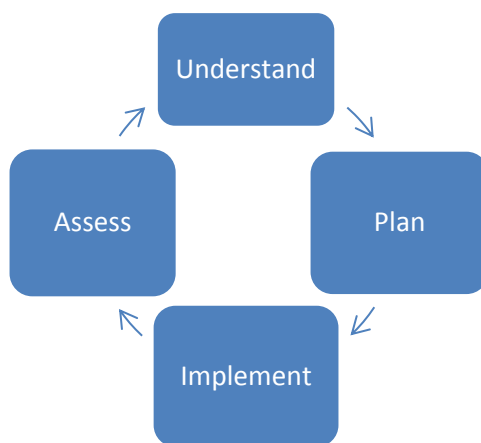


Figure 16. SEHS Organizational Structure for Improvement

Leadership within Stanley Estrada High School embraced the recommendations of organizational theorists (Collins, 2001; Fullan, 2015; Heifetz et al, 2009; Zepeda, 2013) in setting a clear mission with specific goals aligned to that mission. Central to Stanley Estrada’s mission is the tenant that all students will achieve. This corresponds with the communally established district goals one and two.

Goal 1: Increase and maximize student achievement and growth.

Goal 2: Design, develop, implement, and evaluate strategies to support academic and social and emotional development of students.

By establishing a communally established mission dedicated to creating a nurturing and challenging environment where all students achieve success and supporting this mission with specific goals aligned to social and academic growth, the district embraces the tenants of cultural proficiency. Culturally proficient behavior acknowledges and values difference. By establishing that the district will maximize achievement for all students through a nurturing and challenging environment, the district lays the groundwork for addressing the individual needs, beliefs, values, and environments and the corresponding cultures that influence these needs and beliefs, values and environments.

The intentional acknowledgement of difference and the acknowledgement of its inherent value reflect the ideals promoted by the framework for cultural proficiency. Schools wishing to maximize achievement must acknowledge that students must feel respected, welcomed, and valued if they are to achieve. The framework for cultural proficiency utilized in this study identifies behaviors and perspectives that promote the culturally responsive relationships crucial to nurturing and challenging students in pursuit of maximizing achievement. Any district hoping to understand and address the achievement gaps between its demographic groups must first attempt to understand and address the unique assets and challenges of each student. Stanley Estrada High School's inclusion of diversity training, student surveys, achievement data analysis, Equity Action Committee, and dedication to social-emotional education through character education reflects an attempt to better understand and value its students. Similar pursuits should be

included in any school's attempt to reduce achievement gaps while maximizing improvement for all students.

The commitment of the District Superintendent to the precepts of cultural proficiency combined with the stability of administrative leadership seem to have played a significant role in the success of Stanley Estrada High School. In short, the organization has had the opportunity to incrementally adapt over time. Chingos, Whitehurst, and Lindquist (2014) indicate the average tenure of a district Superintendent at three to four years. The Superintendent at Stanley Estrada High School reported ten years of service as Superintendent in the district with an additional four years as Assistant Superintendent. He started the work of shifting the culture of the district as Assistant Superintendent and carried that work through to his role as Superintendent. The district was provided stability in mission, vision, and goals because of the stability of leadership at the district and building levels. Even if districts are faced with frequent turnover, any district seeking to improve in the midst of significant demographic change should consider establishing a mission, vision, and corresponding goals that supersede the role of the Superintendent and direct the actions of the Superintendent. This mission, vision, and corresponding goals should be couched in the ideals of cultural proficiency.

Limitations

The scope of this study was primarily limited to the vantage point of school administrators. While some data relating to the opinions or actions of teachers was collected during professional development observations and committee meeting observations, the preponderance of data came from the vantage point of school leaders.

Marzano and Waters (2009) call for collaborative goal setting. Lindsey et al. (2009) assert that the family, as defined by each culture, is the primary system of support in the education of children. Given the role that other stakeholders play in the Marzano and Waters (2009) and the Lindsey et al. (2009) frameworks, it is necessary to acknowledge that this study does not directly address the knowledge, views, or opinions of other stakeholders in the Stanley Estrada School District. The perspectives of leadership are provided, but these perspectives are not juxtaposed with the perspectives of teachers, students, parents, other family members, local business leaders, or other community members. This study speaks to the important role of educational leadership. The viewpoint represented is that that vision, focus, and attention to process can make a dramatic difference, particularly when paired with stability of educational leaders. What the study does not address is how teachers, parents, students, and the broader community feel about this viewpoint.

The study relied on a single researcher to code and analyze data. Although extensive literature review, member checking, triangulation, reflexive journaling, and peer review played active roles throughout the research process, two potential areas for bias necessitating continual reflexivity were the White race of the researcher and the researcher's experience and education in leadership practices for education. As a member of the White majority and member of the educational beauracracy reflexivity was crucial in weighing the biased view that accompanies one's race, education, and personal experiences. While steps were taken to better ensure objective analysis, the researcher's

predilection toward any single explanation or data source could have resulted in a biased data pool.

Purposeful single case analysis limits the studies ability to generalize findings to other districts. Readers will have to determine for themselves what findings are relevant to their specific contexts through naturalistic generalizations (Stake, 1995). An additional limitation is inherent in the snowball method utilized to identify potential interview candidates. Initial interviews were arranged based upon pre-determined criteria through the support of district administration. Given that some selections were not random, they could have resulted in some level of bias. In order to intentionally seek out alternative explanations or viewpoints, all protocols included a question asking interviewees to speculate about what criticisms exist surrounding district initiatives in an effort to uncover alternative perspectives and opinions.

Summary and Conclusion

The United States is becoming more diverse, but there is little dispute that most American schools fail to prepare minority students as well as their white counterparts. This failure has lasting implications for these students as well as American society as a whole. Without access to effective educational systems, the systematic oppression of minority populations will continue to persist (Berliner, 2005; Irizarry, 2011; Lindsey et al., 2008). Access to effective educational systems is a significant factor in dismantling the cycles of oppression that result in racial discrepancies in health, mortality, employment, wages, crime, and incarceration (Grotsky & Pager, 2001; Hayward et al., 2000; Pampel, 2009; Pettit and Western, 2004; Phillips, 2002). Most educational leaders

will need to respond effectively to demographic change at some point, if not throughout, their career. As such, it is necessary that district superintendents and administrative teams are equipped with a data driven knowledge base, both qualitative and quantitative, to guide them in their decision making process (Bernhardt, 2005; Bernhardt 2009; Park & Datnow, 2009; Pulliam, 2005) as they continually try to improve achievement levels for all students within their district.

Analysis of Stanley Estrada High School provides new insight into how educational leaders can maintain and improve student achievement in the midst of significant demographic change and reiterates the findings of Marzano and Waters (2009) and Lindsey et al. (2009). Marzano and Waters' (2009) five practices for effective leadership were each identified as present and active within the SEHS culture. Especially noteworthy was the extent to which the district promoted collaborative goal setting, non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction, and monitoring of student achievement and instruction goals. The framework for cultural proficiency supported these practices by promoting a cultural expectation of inclusion where difference is acknowledged and valued rather than disparaged or tolerated. District organizational structures and practices that promoted communication, including teams and daily common time designed for professional collaboration on curriculum and instruction in the context of individual and group student performance, seem to have been crucial in facilitating a culture of continuous improvement based on an ongoing cycle of assessment, analysis for understanding, planning of specific and appropriate programming and interventions, and implementation of programming and interventions.

School leaders in the midst of significant demographic change hoping to reduce achievement gaps among student groups while promoting improved achievement for all students should embrace the inclusive and mission oriented leadership practices promoted by Marzano and Waters (2009) and Lindsey et al. (2009) and create the working parameters, specifically team structures and corresponding time, to support these practices through collaborative analysis, open discourse, and action.

APPENDIX A
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Project Title: Maintaining and improving academic achievement in the midst of significant demographic change: A case study analysis

Researchers: Aaron Raatjes

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. David Shriberg

Introduction:

Dear participant,

You are being asked to take part in a research study being conducted by Aaron Raatjes for a dissertation under the supervision of Dr. David Shriberg in the Department of Education at Loyola University of Chicago. You are being asked to participate because your school district has experienced significant demographic change for a period of a least ten consecutive school years while maintaining or improving achievement scores as measured by the Prairie State Achievement Examination. Your participation in this study will provide educational leaders in the state of Illinois the chance to learn from your experiences as they find themselves challenged with the act of maintaining and improving student achievement in the midst of demographic change. *Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before deciding whether to participate in the study.*

Purpose: The purpose of the study is to explore and analyze the relationship between educational leadership and academic achievement in the context of significant demographic change in the hope of refining and informing best practice for high school administrators.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to:

- Sign a “Letter of Consent to Participate in Research” indicating your agreement to participate in this study.
- Answer questions regarding this research by completing an anonymous interview approximately taking 45 minutes to complete and during which paper-pen and/or an electronic voice recorder would record voice documents.
- Allow the researcher access to board minutes, district budgets, demographic data, documents relevant to diversity and/or student achievement, and publically available documents.
- Allow the researcher to interview current and former board members about decisions related to student diversity and student achievement.
- Review initial analysis of recorded materials to clarify intended meaning as part of a member checking process.

Risks/Benefits:

There is minimal risk to be considered in the participating of this study. The researcher’s intent is to have an open conversation about the programs and leadership of the school district in the areas of curriculum, personnel, and programs. There are no foreseeable risks associated with the participation in this research beyond the experiences of everyday life. Scrupulous precautions will be taken to ensure your anonymity as a study participant.

There are no direct benefits to you for your participation; however, it is hoped that this study will add to the body of research in leadership, education, and the superintendency. Additionally it is hoped that the information found in this study will benefit current and future superintendents by providing insights on how to handle the challenges associated with running an effective school system in the midst of significant demographic change.

Confidentiality:

- All responses will remain confidential. Each respondent will receive a unique identification number. All data will be analyzed/coded using the identification number. Individual names and school districts will not be used in the final writing.
- The audio tape recordings of the interviews and transcripts will be kept in a locked file in the researcher's home. Once the final writing of the research is completed, the recordings will be destroyed.

Voluntary Participation:

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you do not want to be in this study, you do not have to participate. Even if you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or to withdraw from participation at any time without penalty. If you choose to participate you may decline to be audiotaped.

If you have questions about this research study, please contact:

Aaron Raatjes at 708-408-4241 or at araatjes@lw210.org

Dr. David Shriberg at 312.915.7087 or at dshribe@luc.edu

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Loyola University Office of Research Services at (773) 508-2689.

Statement of Consent:

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above, have had an opportunity to ask questions, and agree to participate in this research study. You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

I consent to be audiotaped.

I do not consent to be audiotaped.

Participant's Signature Date

Researcher's Signature Date

APPENDIX B
CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

I, _____, have agreed to perform the duties of audiotape transcriber for a research study being conducted by Aaron Raatjes, Doctoral Candidate in the School of Education at Loyola University Chicago.

I understand the nature of this work will involve sensitive and confidential information about the interview subjects. By signing this agreement, I agree to keep all transcript information confidential and in a secure place when in my possession.

Furthermore, the information in my possession will not be shared verbally or visually with anyone except the researcher.

Aaron Raatjes will provide the necessary equipment for me to transcribe the audiotape interviews from this study. This will include earphones, so that I may listen to the tapes confidentially. Transcriptions and audiotapes will be kept in a locked portfolio, provided by the researcher, while in my possession.

I agree to the confidentiality terms of this agreement.

Signature of Audiotape Transcriber: _____

Signature of Researcher: _____

APPENDIX C
DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

Document Analysis Worksheet

IDENTIFICATION OF DOCUMENT

What type of document is it? (Newspaper, letter, journal, advertisement, legal document)

How can you tell? If it is difficult to tell exactly, describe it by title or purpose.

DATES OF DOCUMENT AND CREATOR OF DOCUMENT

If either of these is unknown, simply state “not known”.

PURPOSE OF DOCUMENT

Explain why you think this document was written and for whom it was written.

OTHER FEATURES OF THE DOCUMENT

Describe any other features you find interesting about the document. What questions do you still have about the document that you would ask the author, if you could?

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL – ADMINISTRATION

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL – Administration

Factors contributing to academic success in the context of shifting demographics

Research Questions:

1. How has this district been able to maintain or improve its school-wide academic achievement levels in the midst of significant demographic change?
2. What actions has this district taken that reflect existing best practices for effective school leadership as identified by Marzano and Waters (2009).
3. What actions has this district taken that reflect existing best practices for cultural proficiency as described by Lindsey, Nuri Robins, and Terrell (2009).

Codes:

1. Ensuring collaborative goal setting.
2. Establishing non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction.
3. Creating board alignment with and support of district goals.
4. Monitoring student achievement and instruction goals.
5. Allocating resources to support the goals for achievement and instruction.
6. Assessing cultural knowledge.
7. Valuing diversity.
8. Managing the dynamics of difference.
9. Adapting to diversity.
10. Institutionalizing cultural knowledge.

Demographic Information:

Identification Number:

Position:

Years in Position:

Years at school:

Total Years Exp.:

Interviewed by: Aaron Raatjes

Interview Date:

Knowledge/Experience

1. In your words, what is the mission of the school? Does the district live up to this mission?(Q1,2,3)
2. Tell me about one of the most significant changes in this school within the last 10-12 years. (Q1,2,3-4,5,8,9)
3. How do you assess the needs of your students? (Q1, 2, &3-4,8)
4. How do you attempt to meet those needs? (Q1,2,&3-8,9,5,1,2)

5. To what extent has the board of education been supportive of district goals over the past 15 years? (Q1-3,5)
6. Would you please describe the demographic shift going on in the district. (Q2&3-6,7,8,9)
7. Would you describe the socio-economic status of the district? Is this status stable? (Q2&3-8,4)
8. Have there been any initiatives from the district intended to specifically address the shifting student population? (Q1,2,&3-1,8,4,5,10,2)
9. How are these initiatives conceived and implemented? (Q1,2&3-1,2,3,5)
10. How are teachers kept informed of district goals and supported in achieving these goals? (Q2-1,4,5)
11. Has the district provided professional development for diversity or cultural awareness training within the last 15 years? Tell me about it. (Q2-5,6)

Opinion

12. What do you think the district needs to do to improve student achievement? (Q1,2&3-1,8)
13. How has the district been able to succeed where other districts have failed (Q1,2&3-open)
14. Why do you think the Hispanic and Black achievement levels within the district are continuously lower than those of their white peers? (Q1, 2, &3-4,5,8,9)
15. How should the district address this? (Q1,2,&3-open)
16. Do you feel existing discipline polices support all students? (Q3-7,8,9)

Wrap up

17. Do you have any documentation or hard copies of any information that you would be willing to share that relates to school demographics and student achievement? (Q2&3)
18. Who do you think I should speak with to gain a better understanding of the districts academic success during this time of demographic change? (Q1,2&3)

19. Are there any criticisms about how the district does or does not meet the needs of students as demographics have been changing? (Q1,2,&3)

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL – BOARD MEMBER

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL - Board Member

Factors contributing to academic success in the context of shifting demographics

Research Questions:

1. How has this district been able to maintain or improve its school-wide academic achievement levels in the midst of significant demographic change?
2. What actions has this district taken that reflect existing best practices for effective school leadership as identified by Marzano and Waters (2009).
3. What actions has this district taken that reflect existing best practices for cultural proficiency as described by Lindsey, Nuri Robins, and Terrell (2009).

Codes:

1. Ensuring collaborative goal setting.
2. Establishing non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction.
3. Creating board alignment with and support of district goals.
4. Monitoring student achievement and instruction goals.
5. Allocating resources to support the goals for achievement and instruction.
6. Assessing cultural knowledge.
7. Valuing diversity.
8. Managing the dynamics of difference.
9. Adapting to diversity.
10. Institutionalizing cultural knowledge.

Demographic Information:

Identification Number:

Position:

Years in Position:

Years at school:

Total Years Exp.:

Interviewed by: Aaron Raatjes

Interview Date:

Knowledge/Experience

1. In your words, what is the mission of the school? Does the district live up to this mission?(Q1,2,3)
2. Please describe the role of the board of education and administration? (Q1-1,3)
3. Tell me about one of the most significant changes in this school within the last 10-12 years. (Q1,2,3-4,5,8,9)
4. How does the district assess the needs of its students? (Q1, 2, &3-4,8)

5. How is the board kept informed of district progress and needs?
6. How does the board attempt to meet those needs? (Q1,2,&3-8,9,5,1,2)
7. How does the board set its goals? (Q1-3,5)
8. To what extent is goal setting collaborative? Who is involved in this process? (Q1- 1,3)
9. Would you please describe the demographic shift going on in the district. (Q2&3-6,7,8,9)
10. Would you describe the socio-economic status of the district? Is this status stable? (Q2&3-8,4)
11. Have there been any initiatives from the district intended to specifically address the shifting student population? (Q1,2,&3-1,8,4,5,10,2)
12. How are board initiatives conceived, communicated, and implemented? (Q1,2&3-1,2,3,5)
13. How are teachers kept informed of district goals and supported in achieving these goals? (Q2-1,4,5)
14. Has the district provided professional development for diversity or cultural awareness training within the last 15 years? Tell me about it. (Q2-5,6)

Opinion

15. What do you think the district needs to do to improve student achievement? (Q1,2&3-1,8)
16. How has the district been able to succeed where other districts have failed (Q1,2&3-open)
17. Why do you think the Hispanic and Black achievement levels within the district are continuously lower than those of their white peers? (Q1, 2, &3-4,5,8,9)
18. How should the district address this? (Q1,2,&3-open)
19. Do you feel existing discipline polices support all students? (Q3-7,8,9)

Wrap up

20. Do you have any documentation or hard copies of any information that you would be willing to share that relates to school demographics and student achievement? (Q2&3)
21. Who do you think I should speak with to gain a better understanding of the districts academic success during this time of demographic change? (Q1,2&3)
22. Are there any criticisms about how the district does or does not meet the needs of students as demographics have been changing? (Q1,2,&3)

APPENDIX F
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL – ADMINISTRATION

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL - Administration

Factors contributing to academic success in the context of shifting demographics

Research Questions:

1. How has this district been able to maintain or improve its school-wide academic achievement levels in the midst of significant demographic change?
2. What actions has this district taken that reflect existing best practices for effective school leadership as identified by Marzano and Waters (2009).
3. What actions has this district taken that reflect existing best practices for cultural proficiency as described by Lindsey, Nuri Robins, and Terrell (2009).

Codes:

1. Ensuring collaborative goal setting.
2. Establishing non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction.
3. Creating board alignment with and support of district goals.
4. Monitoring student achievement and instruction goals.
5. Allocating resources to support the goals for achievement and instruction.
6. Assessing cultural knowledge.
7. Valuing diversity.
8. Managing the dynamics of difference.
9. Adapting to diversity.
10. Institutionalizing cultural knowledge.

Demographic Information:

Identification Number:

Position:

Years in Position:

Years at school:

Total Years Exp.:

Interviewed by: Aaron Raatjes

Interview Date:

Knowledge/Experience

1. In your words, what is the mission of the school? Does the district live up to this mission? How does the EAC support this mission?(Q1,2,3)
2. Tell me about one of the most significant changes in this school within the last 10-12 years. (Q1,2,3-4,5,8,9)
3. Tell me about the EAC, its formation, and its mission.
4. How does the EAC assess the needs of the students? (Q1, 2, &3-4,8)

5. How do you attempt to meet those needs? (Q1,2,&3-8,9,5,1,2)
6. To what extent has the board of education been supportive of EAC initiatives over the past 15 years? (Q1-3,5)
7. Would you please describe the demographic shift going on in the district. (Q2&3-6,7,8,9)
8. Would you describe the socio-economic status of the district? Is this status stable? (Q2&3-8,4)
9. Have there been any initiatives from the district intended to specifically address the shifting student population? (Q1,2,&3-1,8,4,5,10,2)
10. How are these initiatives conceived and implemented? (Q1,2&3-1,2,3,5)
11. How are teachers kept informed of district goals and supported in achieving these goals? (Q2-1,4,5)
12. Has the district provided professional development for diversity or cultural awareness training within the last 15 years? Tell me about it. (Q2-5,6)

Opinion

13. What do you think the district needs to do to improve student achievement? (Q1,2&3-1,8)
14. How has the district been able to succeed where other districts have failed (Q1,2&3-open)
15. Why do you think the Hispanic and Black achievement levels within the district are continuously lower than those of their white peers? (Q1, 2, &3-4,5,8,9)
16. How should the district address this? (Q1,2,&3-open)
17. Do you feel existing discipline policies support all students? (Q3-7,8,9) How is this being addressed?

Wrap up

18. Do you have any documentation or hard copies of any information that you would be willing to share that relates to school demographics and student achievement? (Q2&3)

19. Who do you think I should speak with to gain a better understanding of the districts academic success during this time of demographic change? (Q1,2&3)
20. Are there any criticisms about how the district does or does not meet the needs of students as demographics have been changing? (Q1,2,&3)

APPENDIX G
OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

Background Information:

Observation Date: _____
 Observation Time: Start: _____ End: _____
 Observation Location: _____

Codes:

1. Ensuring collaborative goal setting.
2. Establishing non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction.
3. Creating board alignment with and support of district goals.
4. Monitoring student achievement and instruction goals.
5. Allocating resources to support the goals for achievement and instruction.
6. Assessing cultural knowledge.
7. Valuing diversity.
8. Managing the dynamics of difference.
9. Adapting to diversity.
10. Institutionalizing cultural knowledge.

Physical Setting

- Description of the environment including placement of the group members.

Social Interactions

- Description of the relationships observed, including an indication of “side” conversations.
- Is there a discussion hierarchy with a clear leader, or is it more of an open forum with equal participation?
- Is there a pattern to extraneous discussions?
- How do conflicting opinions affect the overall tenor of the group discussion?

Activities/Focus

- Identify the different activities that occur during the group discussion.
What topics are discussed? How do they relate these topics to achievement and or diversity?
- What topics of discussion are brought to conclusion?
- What topics are designated for further discussion?

Closure

- Describe the wrap-up activities employed by the group.
- Date/location of the next meeting.

APPENDIX H
INTRODUCTORY EMAIL

EMAILSCRIPT**Subject Line: Case Study**

Dear Dr. _____,

My name is Aaron Raatjes. I am a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Loyola University of Chicago. I am emailing to invite you to participate in a research study I am conducting for my dissertation, under the supervision of Dr. David Shriberg. You are being asked to participate because of your direct experience with the school district I am studying.

Purpose:

(Name of School District) has had unusual academic success in the midst of significant demographic change, and I would like to better understand how (Name of School District) has been able to achieve this success where other districts have struggled under similar circumstances. The purpose of the study is to explore and analyze the relationship between educational leadership and academic achievement in the context of significant demographic change in the hope of refining and informing best practice for high school administrators.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- Sign a "Letter of Consent to Participate in Research" indicating your agreement to participate in this research study.
- Answer questions regarding this research by completing a confidential interview taking approximately 45 minutes to complete and during which paper-pen and/or an electronic voice recorder would record voice documents.
- Allow the researcher access to board minutes, district budgets, demographic data, documents relevant to diversity and/or student achievement, and publically available documents.
- Allow the researcher to interview current and former board members about decisions related to student diversity and student achievement.

Risks/Benefits:

There is minimal risk to be considered in the participating of this study. The researcher's intent is to have an open conversation about the programs and leadership of the school district in the areas of curriculum, personnel, and programs. There are no foreseeable risks associated with the participation in this research beyond the experiences of everyday life. Scrupulous precautions will be taken to ensure your anonymity as a study participant. There are no direct benefits to you for your participation; however, it is hoped that this study will add to the body of research in leadership, education, and the superintendency. Additionally, it is hoped that the information found in this study will benefit current and

future superintendents by providing insights on how to handle the challenges associated with running an effective school system in the midst of significant demographic change.

Confidentiality:

All responses will remain confidential.

If I do not hear back from you within a few days I will call you to follow up and answer any questions you may have about the research. I realize how busy you are, and sincerely thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Aaron Raatjes
Doctoral Candidate
Loyola University Chicago
German Teacher
Dean of Students
Lincoln-Way High School District 210

REFERENCE LIST

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