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Storm Clouds

This issue of *School Leadership Review* comes at a time when many states and territories are dealing with the aftermath of hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria. Unprecedented rains, catastrophic winds, and historic levels of sustained flooding have devastated many communities, as well as the schools and universities within them. These awful disasters brought the loss of lives as well as total destruction of homes, businesses, and campuses. Perhaps the historic ferocity of these storms is coincidental or, more likely, they were fueled by a warmer than ever ocean, but whatever the cause, the impacts of these storms leave immense structural damage with lasting repercussions to these communities.

Amidst these disasters, we have also witnessed the enormous generosity of people, including an outpouring of money, products, and manpower to affected areas. But the help doesn't just come from without; it also arises from within. Stories of courage, tenacity, and compassion are many. William Faulkner noted in his acceptance speech for the 1949 Nobel Prize in Literature that "I believe that man will not merely endure: he will prevail. He is immortal, not because he alone among creatures has an inexhaustible voice, but because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance." We've heard so many first-hand stories trickling up from our graduate students of that spirit rising up in classrooms, schools, and communities, that we can only agree with Faulkner: educators have souls and spirits capable of compassion, sacrifice, and endurance. These communities, schools, and students will survive, will carry on, and will prosper.

Still, as we see the catastrophic impacts of the hurricanes, we can not help but feel that there are several attacks to our public schools and the leaders of the schools that also have long lasting impacts for communities. There is a sense that we, as school leaders and those who prepare school leaders, need to prepare and be ready to know how to respond to an anxious community that wants the best for their children. In this issue, authors share what people need and what leaders needs in order to highlight good examples of school leaders helping guide and facilitate schools of learning. It takes awareness and also an application of knowledge in order to rebuild and restart good programs. As people look at ways to improve and respond to disasters, our educational preparation programs and current school leaders also reflect on and find ways to ensure that our public schools have success. This takes resilient and reflective leaders. Our communities need to show the same kind of compassion seen by those who helped people restart from hurricanes. Public schools need the manpower and resources to help all students, including students from poverty. It will take strong leaders to guide the schools to a strong structural organization.

Holly Manaseri and Christopher Manaseri in their article, *Preparing Educational Leaders for Social Justice: Reimagining One Educational Leadership Program from the Ground Up*, look at one educational leadership program as it reorganized from a small department of two faculty to a combined department with two other departments in education at SUNY college in New York. A self-study was conducted to present the efforts to place the educational leadership program with a strong foundation of social advocacy and social justice and the need to develop curriculum that guides leaders in the practical ways to work and lead in diverse schools. The authors examined course descriptions, interviews with faculty, and key assessments, curriculum maps and outlines.

Their findings showed a lack of courses with alignment to social justice and equity objectives prior to 2016. Their findings also showed that there was moderate alignment in six out of nine courses since 2016. It is concerning if the leaders need more practical strategies to lead in a higher diverse school that the coursework does not have more curriculum on social justice and advocacy.

Tara L. R. Beziat, Yvette Bynum, and Erin F. Klash wrote, *Metacognitive Awareness and Mindset in Current and Future Principals*. They studied 69 current Alabama principals and instructional leader students from one university with the use of a survey on Metacognitive Awareness Inventory for Instructional leaders (Balcikanli, 2011) and Mindset Quiz (Dweck, 2006). One area was shown statistically significant between the current principals and the students for their declarative knowledge of an instructional leader and their ability to understand how to plan to meet their goals. There was no significant difference between the groups on the Mindset Quiz.

Jonte' C. Taylor and Doris Hill in their article, *Leading through Following: Understanding the Intersection of Followership, Leadership and Collaboration* present on Kellerman's (2008) definition of followership as important in gaining effective leadership skills. The followership used in their article is as teachers follow or respond the administrators. The authors further share different responses and terms used for those responses as isolates, bystanders, participants, activists, and diehards. They determined that administrators should foster collaboration to foster followership. This type of distributed leadership shows the importance of developing relationships between administrators and teachers.

Shelby Davidson and Jennifer T. Butcher present *Rural Superintendents' Experiences in the Application of Principle-Centered Leadership at the Personal and Interpersonal Levels*, an in-depth qualitative examination of ten rural superintendents and their leadership. Their findings show the importance of developing trusting relationships that empower and align to a vision as defined by Covey. There have been many studies on superintendents but few are specific to the decision-making and leadership skills specific to superintendents in rural communities. The ten superintendents were Caucasian males ranging age from 43 to 68. All ten participants expressed that family and faith were a major part of their character development. Other important leadership skills were based on a servant leadership, continual learning, balanced life between work and family, encourager of others, building relationships of trust, empowering others, listening well, keeping promises and commitments, and modeling by example.

Amy R Ambrose, George W. Moore, John R. Slate, and Cynthia Martinez-Garcia wrote, *Differences in Dropout Rates as a Function of High School Size for Students in Poverty: A Texas Multiyear, Statewide Study*, in which they share their research on the difference in dropout rates of low socioeconomic students in different sizes of high schools. Two school years were examined and there was a statistically significant difference in dropout rate in different sizes of schools as defined as small (less than 400 students), moderate (401-1,499) and large (1,500 or more students). An ANOVA was used to determine that students in small schools had a statistically significant higher dropout rate. It is often thought that small school personnel can better know their students and thus should be able to prevent drop-outs easier. However, the

moderate and larger schools may have more resources and thus be able to meet the students' needs better to prevent drop out. Previous research has matched these findings that large schools had fewer drop outs.

M. Chad Jones, John R. Slate, George W. Moore, and Cynthia Martinez-Garcia, offer *Grade Span Configuration and Academic Performance for Students in Poverty: A Texas Multiyear Analysis*, to address the impact of two grade span configuration on the academic performance in reading and mathematics for low socioeconomic status students over two years. One grade span configuration was elementary with grades Prekindergarten through eighth grade and the other was secondary grades configuration with grades sixth through twelfth grades. Their findings showed that reading achievement was statistically significantly higher in the elementary grade configuration for 6-8th grade students. The mathematics achievement was also statistically significantly higher in the elementary grade configuration. The middle school students may lose some skills when transitioning to middle schools and therefore, the Prekindergarten through eighth grade may help so there is at least one less transition for students.

All of the articles in this issue offer practical strategies for preparing and equipping school leaders to weather the storms that have affected or may be coming to their schools.

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Preparing Educational Leaders for Social Justice: Reimagining One Educational Leadership Program from the Ground Up

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Thirty years after the report that started the latest round of educational reform, A Nation at Risk (National Commission on Education Excellence, 1983), the Wallace Foundation began funding a series of studies examining the preparation of school and district leaders. Bringing together findings from four reports, one each by the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE), The School Superintendents Association (AASA), the American Institutes for Research (AIR), and the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA), the Wallace Foundation issued five key recommendations for university preparation of school leaders. This call to action was sounded at a time when a shortage of school leaders is both active and continuingly predicted, and in which a seemingly ever-increasing focus on accountability continues to prevail. The attention to quality of the next generation of educational leaders equipped to face challenges of leading schools for the future in the Wallace report includes a focus on a high-quality curriculum emphasizing the skills principals most need, such as the ability to be instructional leaders, and also enables candidates to practice important job skills (Wallace Foundation, 2016).

In New York State, certification requirements for Educational leaders lay out the knowledge and skills deemed essential for emerging leaders to be successful in supporting high achievement by and for all students and in alignment with the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA), which published the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders 2015. These standards were formerly known as the ISLLC standards. The Council of Chief State School Officers published the ISLLC standards for educational leaders in 1996, and revised them in 2008. However, the NPBEA sought to identify the gaps between previous standards, day to day work of educational leaders and the leadership demands of the future (NPBEA, 2015) as evidenced by an increased emphasis on student centered practices. At the time of this writing, a Wallace Foundation funded study of Principal Preparation programming in New York State is currently underway, a study informed in part by participants in and the current coordinator of the program examined herein. While the results of the Wallace Foundation study are not scheduled for presentation to the state's chief policy-making body for education, the Board of Regents, until summer 2017, it is routinely anticipated that they will highlight the need for educational leaders to be prepared to address issues of diversity, social justice and advocacy at multiple levels reflecting a student body comprised of increased racial, socio-economic, and gender as well as gender-identity, difference.

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In 2016 we began our work as new faculty in an educational leadership program that had been recently reorganized from a stand-alone two-FTE department to a program housed within the Department of Foundations and Social Advocacy, one of three departments within a School of Education at the SUNY college that produces the largest number of teacher candidates of any comprehensive college within the 64-campus SUNY system. As part of a self-study of the program upon our entry we sought to address the following research questions:

- RQ1: Does the existing curriculum (formal and informal, described and as taught) prepare future administrators for foundational advocacy and social justice work?
- RQ2: How can a social advocacy/social justice framework serve as a guide for developing a program preparing leaders to excel in administration of socially just schools?

The primary purpose of this paper is to share our efforts in educational leadership preparation change in terms of a foundations and social advocacy framework and its importance for both research and practice. In particular, we focus on the leadership preparation program of one upstate New York college that has recently reorganized from a stand-alone department into the Foundations and Social Advocacy department and work to thus reimagine the curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment practices to align with a social justice framework to ensure that graduates of the program see themselves as agents of change and disruption in the fundamental social replication structure of public schools. The lessons learned from this case study can provide insight to other educational leader preparation programs in New York, and across the nation, who seek to deeply examine their programs to ensure emphasis on the knowledge, skills and dispositions necessary to prepare the next generation of leaders as advocates for all students and families.

Theoretical Framework

Why social advocacy and social justice? As part of the reorganization of the Educational Leadership program from a stand-alone department into the Foundations and Social Advocacy (FSA) department at our institution, the FSA department revisited its mission, vision, and core values statements. The stated mission is one that is deeply embedded with a charge of preparing educators, and now educational leaders, to promote a reflective, critical, interdisciplinary approach to understanding the multiple and shifting contexts and practices of education (FSA, 2017). Situating ourselves as instructors within this department, we found it appropriate and necessary to review the literature on social justice in order to actualize this stated mission. Gewirtz (1998) provides a definition of social justice centered on the ideas of disrupting and subverting arrangements that promote marginalization and exclusionary processes. Social justice supports a process built on respect, care, recognition, and empathy. Goldfarb and Grinberg (2002) define social justice "as the exercise of altering [these] institutional and organizational arrangements by actively engaging in reclaiming, appropriating, sustaining, and advancing inherent human rights of equity, equality, and fairness in social, economic, educational, and personal dimensions" (p. 162). The preparation of teachers for linguistically and culturally diverse populations has been the subject of a growing body of research and discussion over the last two decades (Brisk, 2008; Cochran-Smith, Fieman-Nemser, McIntyre, & Demers, 2008). In

addition, there is an emerging body of theoretical work in the area of social justice and educational leadership (Blackmore, 2002; Bogotch, 2002; Dantley, 2002; Furman & Gruenewald, 2004; Larson & Murtadha, 2002; MacKinnon, 2000; Marshall & Ward, 2004; Rapp, 2002; Shields, 2004). We note that some educational leadership preparation programs have evolved to better address issues of social justice (Blackmore, 2009; Jean-Marie, Normore & Brooks, 2009; McKenzie et al., 2008), but the educational leadership literature is still insufficient when it comes to providing concrete examples programs can implement into their curricula (Diem & Carpenter, 2012).

Recent literature has laid the groundwork for a theoretical change required of school leadership, yet little has so far been published that promotes common practice in this regard. (Theoharis, 2016). In 2010 Hawley and James, in their survey of 62 institutions affiliated with the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA), found that educational leadership programs frequently failed to address a number of the micro-political diversity issues school leaders face on a daily basis. Thus, the offering of a curriculum failing to address how leaders should navigate "day-to-day" issues pertaining to diversity leaves future leaders without the strategies necessary to lead within the current context of increasingly diverse schools (Hawley & James, 2010). Capper, Theoharis, and Sebastian (2006) reviewed 72 pieces of literature related to administrator preparation and social justice and proposed a framework based on their review of the literature that would place programs in categorical compliance with a foundations framework involving a nine-box chart with vertical indices for Curriculum, Pedagogy, and Assessment intersecting horizontal indices of Disposition (or as they term it Critical Consciousness), Knowledge, and Skill. We find the intersection of these indices helpful in categorizing the relative maturity and depth of our approach to considering the changes in our program completed already as well as those contemplated for the near future, and use this schema to depict which of our existing courses falls where in their design.

Our underlying question in modifying the taught curriculum to reflect the mission, vision and values of the Foundations and Social Advocacy department became how we might bring to the classroom issues of poverty, equity of access, and contemporary diversity of race, class, gender, (dis)ability, and other areas of marginality that intersect the relatively traditional "school management" model of educational leadership preparation and replication of hierarchical power structures. In order to accomplish this task, we set about a year-long effort to acquaint ourselves with the educational leadership program as it existed in print and in principle, in policy and in practice. Concurrently, we worked with other faculty in the Foundations and Social Advocacy department who were responsible for courses in Foundations of Education, Urban Education and Inclusive Education, the majority of which coursework consisted of undergraduate teacher preparation classes for dual certification in elementary and inclusive special education. With that faculty we reshaped the department's Mission, Vision and Values statements to include recognition of teacher leadership and administrative preparation, while also conducting both a self-study of the existing Educational Leadership program and a cross-campuses comparative study of similar SUNY CAS programs in Educational Leadership with whom we might compete for students. The focus of this article is on the immediate implementation of change within the existing coursework required of graduate students seeking their Certificate of Advanced Study, such that Foundational and Social Advocacy/Social Justice issues were as expeditiously added to the taught curriculum as possible, essentially changing course orientation within the boundaries

of academic freedom and text and topic choice, while leaving the fundamental elements of course title, number and outline sufficiently unchanged so as to avoid lengthy and protracted processes required for institutionalizing, formally approving, and codifying such changes. We acknowledge that we bring a particular lens to this study, situating our work within a critical theory framework. We both hold degrees in Cultural Foundations of Education and were heavily influenced in qualitative methodology in order to examine underlying power (Biklen & Bogdan, 1998). That orientation pervaded our view of educational leadership practice while we were administrators of public schools, and continues to influence our interest in social justice and advocacy work in educational systems in order to better understand the ways in which existing power relationships are maintained or disrupted, made hierarchical or more democratic, and in which leadership is exercised as power and authority, advancing agency and change.

Methods

Structured interviews were conducted with current program faculty (both of whom were slated to leave teaching in the program at the end of 2017 summer session) to generate curriculum maps across four quadrants: course topics, assessments, key readings and course objectives. Data collection, coding, and analysis took place between December 2016 - March 2017.
An analysis of course descriptions available in the university course catalogue and most recent course syllabi for each course was completed. Of the ten required courses in the school building and school district leadership program, only nine had a written course syllabi and were included in this study. Syllabi course description, objectives and essential questions, as well as course outlines that enumerated specific topics for each week, class, or unit were analyzed. In addition, a review of the key assessments outlined as part of the required assessment reports were reviewed, as well as curriculum maps that were generated during a half-day program review meeting conducted in November, 2016.

Analysis

This study is situated within critical theory (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Carspecken, 1996; Roman & Apple, 1990) recognizing that this work is complex, influenced by power relations, and not necessarily empirically knowable. Specifically, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) aims to investigate critically social inequality as it is expressed, constituted, legitimized, and so on, by language use, or in discourse (Weiss & Wodak, 2003). This is most appropriate to our study in examining how discursive practices work to produce and reproduce unequal power relations. Drawing upon John Dewey's work on continuity and interaction (1938), we wanted to look deeply at the experiences provided to candidates in our educational leadership programs and how these do or do not provide opportunities for engagement in issues of social justice.

Using discourse analysis, we examined curriculum maps, course outlines, course syllabi, and key program assessments for congruence as well as evidence of social justice alignment based on the framework of Capper, Theorharis and Sebastian (2006) who advocate that to prepare leaders for social justice, educational leadership programs must attend to critical consciousness, knowledge, and practical skills focused on social justice with their students. In addition, they contend that preparation programs create the conditions for future educational leaders to take risks safely. Highly effective programs attend to these key attributes for social justice preparation throughout

their curriculum, pedagogy and assessments. Using their framework which defines horizontal dimensions that depict what school leaders must know, value and be able to enact to lead socially just schools, they identify these attributes as critical consciousness, knowledge and skills. Vertical dimensions of the framework include the key components of a preparation program necessary to "intentionally consider if students are to learn about critical consciousness, knowledge and skills" (p. 213). These components are curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. We applied this framework to our analysis of current existing course descriptions of the nine courses that qualified for the study found in the university course catalogue for the 2016-17 academic year and the actual taught course syllabi for the 2016 -2017 academic year, our first at the institution.

Coding

The various course weeks of instruction were coded according to the following key questions proposed in the Capper, Theoharis and Sebastian framework:

Level 1: Curriculum related to critical consciousness, knowledge and skills.
To what extent is the course addressing critical consciousness, knowledge about equity issues, and skill development for social justice?

Level 2: Pedagogy related to critical consciousness, knowledge and *skills for social justice. What methods are being used to raise consciousness, knowledge or skill development*?

Level 3: Assessment. *How are we measuring the critical consciousness, knowledge and skills to show we are impacting consciousness, knowledge and skills of students toward socially just ends?*

We gauged the emphasis of each lesson and coded each into one of the areas of their social justice framework. Within each area, we then coded the various lessons based on their primary focus. This two-step approach allowed us to provide a broad take on the curricular landscape and to explore particular topics in some detail. We used the constant comparative method of data analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) using both inductive and deductive components (Erickson, 1986; Graue & Walsh, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The constant comparative method was utilized for this research endeavor because the design contained "multi-data sources" (Bogdan & Biklen, p. 66). This method worked well with the guiding research questions in that "key issues, recurrent events, or activities in the data that become categories of focus . . . discover[ing] basic processes and relationships" (Bogdan & Biklen, p. 67). The process of constant "doubling back to more data collection and coding" provided an essential analytical approach to understanding the data from school leaders working for social justice.

Table 1 illustrates the curriculum gap analysis where course descriptions were identified as having high, moderate or weak alignment to a social justice framework and defines the taught curriculum through changes in texts or emphasis that allowed for increased involvement of issues of social advocacy and justice.

Table 1. Curriculum Gap Analysis

Course	Course Catalogue Description/Prescribed Curriculum	Modified Curriculum/Syllabus	Degree of Social Justice/Advocacy Alignment
EDL 613 Principles of Financial Leadership	The role of financial management at the building level, the management of budgets, managing building and student accounts, working with the business office and officials, the diversity of roles and responsibilities, and the legal and ethical ramifications related to financial management at the school level.	Added emphasis on inequitable state funding for local schools/CFE-AQE lawsuit, including information on distribution of state aid to schools of residence and work for each enrollee Added readings on role of federal dollars as lever for social change (ESEA and title I, NCLB, ESSA)	Moderate
EDL 615 Educational Leadership & the Law	(B) The legal, political and ethical issues faced by the school leader and a basic understanding of parent and student rights, personnel issues, contract negotiations and management, and other legal and education regulations that affect the school leader.		Moderate
EDL 616 Principles of Curriculum Leadership	(B) An understanding of curriculum, instruction, assessment and the curriculum improvement process, addressing curriculum development and models and strategies for supervision of curriculum.	Added UDL unit and text to address access and success of all students including marginalized populations (ELL, SPED, etc.) *Program Assessment on Comprehensive Curriculum Planning	Moderate
EDL 657 Principles of Organizational Leadership	Explores the roles, responsibilities and skills of the strategic, instructional and political leader within the organization, addressing organizational development, systems thinking, complexity theory, cultural diversity and the change process.	Removed "cultural diversity" from current syllabus of course description.	Weak
EDL 683 Principles of Special Programs Leadership	(B) The principles, laws, mandates and procedures required to manage and provide leadership for special programs such as pupil personnel, special education, social services and supplementary funding programs	Added "Equity Audit" assignment analyzing data on student achievement/achievement gaps using DTSDE protocols Focus on school/district responsibilities to ensure access to high quality academic and positive school climate through Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) Focus on parent engagement	Moderate

Table 1 (Continued)

Course	Course Catalogue Description/Prescribed Curriculum	Modified Curriculum/Syllabus	Degree of Social Justice/Advocacy Alignment
EDL 678 Strategic Supervision & Leadership	(B) An in-depth understanding of supervision of instructional and non-instructional staff and student management techniques through the exploration of theories of motivation, legal ramifications and models of supervision.	Added TESA (Teacher Expectations and Student Achievement) as a means of addressing concerns for equitable response opportunity, feedback and personal regard for ALL students Added texts to promote teacher professional conversations and teacher advocacy for imbedded PD on effective practices for all students Added analysis of research article on Teacher Effectiveness from MET Project funded by Gates Foundation Added Restorative Justice and PBIS to student supervision content	Moderate
EDL 680 Principal Leadership	The role of the principal, the change process, student guidance and management, legal aspects, curriculum supervision and models of decision-making and shared leadership	Added focus on Effective Schools Elements (Lazotte) Added focus on Data-Driven Decisions impacting student subgroups on state testing Added texts related to both data driven decision-making and to Effective Schools Model	Moderate
EDL 690 Principles of School District Leadership	A focus on district leadership as it relates to organizational and team development, strategic planning, district-wide financial management, working with policy and decision-making bodies, and legal, political and ethical issues. Prerequisite: Matriculation in the program. Completion of at least nine credit hours in the program.		Weak
EDL 699 Culminating Seminar	A culminating course providing a comprehensive assessment of students' leadership and administrative understanding, skills and dispositions. It is recommended that candidates take this course while they are enrolled in the administrative internship.		Weak

Findings

Emerging themes from analysis indicate three distinct findings, as areas where the formal curriculum had either a high degree of alignment, moderate alignment or weak alignment to advancing social justice and equity. There were areas where minor changes to the course readings and syllabus were able to insert themes of social advocacy/social justice with relative ease. And finally there were areas where within the timeframe of a single academic year, we were as yet unable to make substantive changes to specific courses, or courses for which no substantive change may be appropriate or necessary.

High degree of Alignment. Course descriptions and the most recent syllabus for each course indicating a high degree of alignment to social justice and equity objectives occurred in exactly zero out of nine opportunities. There were no courses in which we were able to ascertain as yet a high degree of alignment to social justice and equity objectives, in large part because we have /not yet attempted to modify the catalogue course descriptions, despite having made meaningful changes to the classroom, textbook and assessment requirements for several of the courses in question. Our focus in the first year has been on making substantive change to classroom practice (pedagogy) and readings (curriculum), and less so on making published changes to the course descriptions. This may be seen as expeditious only, or as partially subversive and "feminist" in our approach to making change within the formal hierarchical structures of the university processes. Either way, we make these changes unapologetically for what we perceive to be the immediate benefit of our current students, many of whom will complete the program and begin practice before the time necessary to accomplish catalogue changes approved by multiple parties at increasingly hierarchical and formal levels of review.

Moderate degree of alignment. Six out of nine courses indicated moderate degrees of alignment, using most recently redesigned syllabi, five more than would have otherwise been the case in the program. Two of the course syllabi showing moderate degree of alignment had recently been modified in the fall of 2016. The first course, ED 613 Principles of School Finance, was modified from previous offerings to be taught by a full-time faculty member rather than an adjunct faculty member who had been a school business official, and shifting the emphasis of the course from an overview of typical school business management administrative functions to issues which all school and district leaders ought to be able to address or advocate for from their positions of relative power. These issues involve inequitable distribution of resources, inequitable expenditures per pupil in urban and rural versus suburban settings, recent state lawsuits over adequacy of state school funding formula, awareness of social and fiscal inequities tied to urban and rural school environments and racial segregation, costs for special education programming and "victim"-blaming, and the changing economic and political environment and its effect on public schools including shifting costs to localities and then limiting their ability to address student needs through tax caps and similar structures designed to curb overall spending at the expense of shifting student needs (high poverty, high mobility, higher incidence of ELL and special education placements). The second course, EDL 683: Special Programs Administration, likewise showed what we term a moderate degree of alignment in the most recent syllabus, but was mismatched to the course description, which had weak alignment. This shift from weak to moderate was made by including field-based activities allowing candidates to analyze policy documents in their districts and reflect on equity issues

that may be presented in these policy and procedures. Students also use data to identify achievement gaps and make recommendations to address those gaps using the New York State Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness protocol to conduct a program audit of their school based on attributes of effectiveness in order to identify robust measures for school improvement. Students also review the Blueprint for Special Education Reform and Results Driven Accountability materials and reflect on the current practices in their own district to support students with disabilities in the general education setting with access to high quality instruction.

Two additional courses, one taught in spring and the second in summer session one, will have moved from Weak to Moderate. The first course, EDL 616: Curriculum, was taught in spring 2017 by a new full-time faculty member with a background in Social Foundations of Education, and was modified to include a digital text and major unit of study related to Universal Design for Learning, a major shift to accommodate in preplanning the potential needs of all students including traditionally marginalized groups, and to require all students to consider an Equity Audit for curricular design and delivery. The second course, the EDL 680: Principal Leadership, also includes the utilization of a full-time faculty member with a background in Cultural Foundations of Education and will in its current iteration offer both Essential Elements of Effective Schools material associated with Larry Lazotte, and data-based decision making based on statewide student examination scores, both at the elementary and secondary levels. These data analyses and response strategies complement the Regents Reform Agenda, the use of specific interventions to address specific population needs, RtI and AIS planning, and the use of technology and data mining both identify and to close achievement gaps for specific populations of students. The sixth course in this category, EDL 615 School Law, did not have a redesigned syllabus but was assessed at the moderate level in our analysis as the alignment to knowledge, skills and dispositions stress the rights of students and teachers and their constitutional guarantees.

Weak degree of Alignment. A surprising finding from our research shows a mismatch between the stated course description, which would have had a moderate degree of alignment, and the most recent syllabus for one course in particular. ED 657: Organizational Change has a stated course description that indicated a high degree of alignment to intended social justice and equity, however in the most recent version of the syllabus the reference to cultural diversity was removed. The other two remaining courses had none of the indicators of the social justice framework represented in the critical consciousness, knowledge or skills or of the written curriculum, pedagogy or program assessments as they exist currently.

Discussion

Beginning with a review of the formal written curriculum in educational programs to assess the degree to which the course descriptions and syllabi align with a social advocacy/justice framework provides an opportunity for critical reflection on the values of the program. Our findings indicate what is widely noted in the literature, that educational leadership preparation often lacks attendance to social justice issues. In fact, our review indicates that if no such alignment in the course description, course objectives or key assessments exists, it is very unlikely that any attention will be paid to social justice issues in the class content and course

delivery. In the case for five of the six courses that did indicate a most recently determined moderate degree of alignment, each course had intentional reference to social justice and equity; therefore, the instructors indicate that they intentionally enacted a social justice framework through their pedagogy and course assignments such as student written reflections, added or modified textbook selections, and in individual and group projects required. However, key assessments at the program level also need to be developed as performance tasks to indicate any evidence of impact such attention to social justice may have on the candidates themselves and on the program as it continues. Our intention is to continue first to infuse a social advocacy and justice framework within the extant courses, while we simultaneously work to modify the course descriptions if not the actual course offerings themselves, toward a greater recognition of the role of the school leader as an advocate for change within the school environment as opposed to an unenlightened, or, worse yet, acknowledged, perpetuator of inequitable policies and practices. Our research also allowed us to place each of the courses within Capper et al.'s framework as noted below:

Table 2. Course alignment to Capper, et al. Social Justice framework

Domain	Critical Consciousness/ Disposition	Knowledge	Skills
Curriculum	N= 6 613 (M) 657 (W) 615 (M) 678 (M) 616 (M) 683 (M)	N=6 613 (M) 657 (W) 615 (M) 678 (M) 616 (M) 683 (M)	N=2 615 (M) 616 (M)
Pedagogy	N=5 613 (M) 678 (M) 615 (M) 683 (M) 616 (M)	N=6 613 (M) 657 (W) 615 (M) 678 (M) 616 (M) 683 (M)	N=7 613 (M) 680 (W) 615 (M) 678 (M) 616 (M) 683 (M) 690 (W)
Assessment	N=3 613 (M) 615 (M) 616 (M)	N=3 613 (M) 615 (M) 616 (M)	N=0

The data charted here indicate that there is a greater degree of alignment of pedagogical practices within each of our existing courses than there is an alignment of either published curriculum or program assessment in practice. This corroborates our stated approach to utilizing a social justice lens or framework in which to make assignments of critical readings and in which to add topics of discussion to the course syllabus without significantly altering the published course descriptions. Note the significant number of courses in each of the top two boxes in the chart, depicting degree of alignment and number of courses in alignment with curriculum and pedagogy compared to critical consciousness (Dispositional Awareness) and Knowledge. The area in which there is the greatest degree of alignment is Pedagogy, that area wherein the instructor has the greatest degree in shaping the experiences that may or may not align to advocacy and social justice framework. Specific skills and assessments of those skills trail in development at this point. Great alignment should be anticipated moving forward once we concentrate on making curriculum reviewed changes to the course descriptions. Our college uses

Curriculog, a technology tool for tracking the approval process for such changes and a calendar of approvals from program faculty and departmental curriculum committee, departmental faculty through department chair, dean, School of Education curriculum committee, then Faculty Senate and Provost. Those formal process for change will come after informal processes are exhausted and our internal and external studies of comparable programs are complete. The need to pursue social justice issues in the preparation of school administrators, however, cannot wait for the fine-grinding but slow turning wheel of formal academic processes. The mission is too critical, the need for advocates for change as opposed to defenders of status quo too immediate.

Our findings also point to the need for a consistent curriculum review process to be in place in educational leadership programs to ensure that stated course descriptions are in fact translated into the taught course syllabi and student learning outcomes that promote a social justice agenda. The findings from this study show misalignment in some instances between the course description and the syllabus where attention to issues such as "cultural factors" were eliminated from the taught curriculum, though remaining in the published course description in the catalogue.

In addition, this study illustrates the importance of congruence between all factors in preparation programs, such as: the placement of the program into a department whose stated mission, vision and values align to the social justice framework; the alignment, creation or modification of course syllabi; planned and practiced pedagogy and assessment to reflect those values; and the attributes, preparation, and skill set of the instructors to create the conditions to bridge theory into practice in order to attend to macro and micro social justice issues so that graduates may be best prepared to address day to day challenges they will face in the increasingly diverse and demanding milieu of the public school environment in states like California and across the United States.

Conclusion

Academic freedom is a hallmark of the American university, and respect for the ability of faculty to determine the most effective means of achieving stated student learning outcomes is fundamental to best practice in any classroom at any level. By making changes to selected texts and other classroom materials, making consistent pedagogical practices that promote students relating their lived experiences in school settings to best administrative practices in professional development, using data analysis and gap-closing, and offering opportunities for reflection on one's own role in the replication or disruption of practices of power distribution, as well as embedding themes of social advocacy, social justice, and acknowledged privilege and inequity through existing course requirements, we believe that we have brought about a far greater degree of alignment to, and integrity within, the Educational Leadership program and the Foundations and Social Advocacy Department. We believe that Educational Leadership preparation that promotes Foundations approaches that inherently challenge such assumptions and promote the disruption of traditional repressive and antidemocratic principles is critical in the preparation of leaders to meet the needs of schools and society today. By changing personnel and by deliberately seeking individuals to teach that bring with them backgrounds in Foundations and similarly critical approaches to the examination of professional educational practices, and by empowering those individuals with the charge to alter the design and delivery of coursework that

has been very traditional and "practical" in its approach, our Educational Leadership program has taken, we believe appropriately, the initial steps toward becoming one that is increasingly responsive to the needs of all students its administrative graduates are hired to address. This shift of mindset, of perspective, of nuanced appreciation for the complexities of the needs of children and young adults in an increasingly diverse and too-often polarized society largely served by public schools in which the students of this program, all aspiring administrators, is one that reflects the values, the vision, and the mission of the Foundations and Social Advocacy program in which it is now much more appreciatively housed.

Lingering questions to still be addressed in future study may include: In what ways might situating an educational leadership program within a Foundations and Social Advocacy department facilitate alignment between teacher preparation, teacher leader preparation, and educational leadership preparation with social justice frameworks?

Our work continues to evolve in making Education Leadership a program of study that is intentionally self-reflective and critical of the status quo of schooling in America, one that is responsive to current and emerging student and parent needs, and one that recognizes the importance of treating all members of the paid educational community as professionals with purposes larger than the three Rs. Respect for individual and cultural difference, relevance of curriculum to students' lived experience, rigor of formal academic endeavor, and relationships that require democratic distribution of both resources and power are all elements of a Foundational approach to education that can and should be fundamental to schooling in an educated society in the 21st century. That the preparation of leaders for such schools should be part and parcel of a sound Educational Leadership program should be equally based on fundamental Foundational approaches to this purpose is only natural.

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Metacognitive Awareness and Mindset in Current and Future Principals

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Metacognition is a key component in education, yet little is known about whether or not instructional leaders are metacognitively aware. Metacognition is described as thoughts about one's knowledge and control over their own cognitive processes (Flavell, 1979). Kuhn (2000) indicated that metacognition develops from an early age, and asserted that the more explicit metacognitive thinking is, the more effective one would be able to engage in metacognitive thinking and control of their cognitive processes. Some examples of metacognitive strategies include planning, monitoring, and evaluating, and can be used by educators or students (Fathima, Sasikuman, & Roja, 2014). Metacognitive strategies should be selected based on tasks, contexts, and an awareness of situational activities (Bjork, Dunlosky, & Kornell, 2013).

Schmitt and Newby (1986) recognized that metacognitive strategies should be incorporated into instruction. Research demonstrates that when students engage in metacognitive practices, they are more successful in academics (see Finley, Tullis, & Benjamin, 2010, for a review). However, at the time of the current study, there is little research on teachers' and school leaders' awareness of metacognition in daily practice.

In order for educators to teach students to think metacognitively, they must think metacognitively themselves. This metacognitive awareness must be significant to the extent that educators are able to recognize metacognitive thinking in their own students (Prytula, 2012). Veenman, Van Hout-Wolters and Afflerbach (2006) noted "many teachers lack sufficient knowledge about metacognition" (p.10.) However, a study conducted by Wilson and Bai (2010), which examined teachers' knowledge of metacognition and how this knowledge affected their pedagogy, found teachers had a general understanding of metacognition. The teachers also recognized they needed more professional development in metacognition to implement more effective strategies in their classroom. Jiang, Ma, and Gao (2016) also asserted that teachers who are metacognitively aware will experience greater benefits in their teaching practice, which will result in greater student learning.

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According to Georghiades (2004), it is the responsibility of school leaders to ensure that metacognitive strategies are taught in our classrooms. In order for school leaders to provide opportunities for teacher development of metacognition, they must be able to think in a metacognitive fashion, exhibiting an awareness of their own metacognitive processes. At this time, we could not find any research on school leaders' metacognitive awareness. Therefore, one goal of our study was to measure school leaders' awareness of metacognition. In summation, in order for students to learn to regulate their metacognitive processes, it is essential that principals value and exhibit this complex cognitive process and facilitate opportunities for teachers to learn more about their own metacognitive processes. Teachers must be aware of their own metacognitive processes to teach students to think metacognitively.

Mindset and Education

Though school leaders do not have a direct effect on student achievement, their actions and mindset indirectly affect student outcomes (Wallace Foundation, 2012). To ensure students are engaged in metacognitive strategies in the classroom, school leaders need to encourage their teachers to grow professionally in this area. Research indicates that effective teacher learning and growth comes from continuous professional development (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Instructional leaders can influence and reinforce staff development through both direct and indirect methods. Staff development opportunities do not necessarily need to be intentional. Opportunities for learning and growth can occur through school-wide leadership teams (Yager & Yager, 2010), faculty study groups (Mullen & Hutinger, 2008), and professional learning communities (Prytula, 2012). In order for changes to occur to the school norms about growth mindsets, training is necessary (Guidera, 2014).

Gold, Evans, Earley, Halpin and Collarbone (2003) noted the attitudes and dispositions of the school leaders affect the quality of education within their respective school settings. Specifically, a principal that adheres to a growth mindset will lead others to value learning (Murphy & Dweck, 2009). Manning (2007) described that, in order for a growth mindset to occur, educational leaders need to be open to feedback and learning opportunities themselves, as opposed to limiting growth potential due the perceived threat of failure. Superintendents and principals may assume that certain leadership characteristics are fixed and cannot be changed. Bambrick-Santoyo (2013) explored if a growth mindset-coaching program could improve current principals' leadership skills. The results of the case study indicate that small chunks of feedback, easily incorporated into the classroom coaching routine, afforded an opportunity to practice new methods and improve as a leader. This "unfamiliar" practice in terms of instructional leaders and principals buts a focus on growth mindset in leadership (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2013).

Whether growth mindset occurs naturally or it is intentionally developed, it can help leaders become more effective in development of skills needed to lead a school (Kearney, Kelsey & Herrington, 2013). Again, the literature does not specifically address measuring school leaders' mindset. A second goal of this study is to assess future and current school leaders' mindset.

Based on the research available at the time this study was conducted, we sought to answer the following three questions:

1. What is the level of metacognitive awareness in school leaders?

2. Is there a relationship between school leaders' mindset and their metacognitive awareness?
3. Is there a difference between future and current school leaders' mindset and/or their metacognitive awareness?

Methods

Design and Procedures

A list of principals in the state of Alabama was obtained through the Alabama State Department of Education website. Using the email provided on the list, individuals were sent an invitation to participate in the study through Qualtrics. A follow-up email was sent to participants who had started the survey and not finished, or had yet to begin the survey. Current and former instructional leadership students at a medium-sized university in the Southeast were also sent an invitation via email to participate in the study. Any duplicate emails from the original list of current principals were eliminated. Again, a follow-up email was sent to those who had begun the survey but not finished as well as those who had not started.

Participants

Current principals in the state of Alabama were included in the study as well as current and previous instructional leader students at a mid-size southeastern university. Eighty-five surveys were collected in the study, but 16 respondents' information could not be included due to incomplete surveys (see Table 1). The final sample included 69 participants. Sixty-three percent were current principals and 58% of the sample was female. Ten participants held leadership positions as either a lead teacher or department chair.

Instrumentation

The data for this study was collected using a survey. The survey contained three parts: Demographic questions, the Metacognitive Awareness Inventory for Instructional Leaders, adapted from the Metacognitive Awareness Inventory for Teachers (Balcikanli, 2011) and a Mindset Quiz (adapted from Dweck, 2006).

Metacognitive Awareness Inventory for Instructional Leaders (MAIIL)
The Metacognitive Awareness Inventory for Teachers (MAIT) was created to measure teachers' metacognitive awareness. The MAIT is based on Schraw and Dennison's (1994) Metacogntive Awareness Inventory that contains 42 items and 6 subcategories: declarative knowledge, procedural knowledge, conditional knowledge, planning, monitoring, and evaluating. The MAIT contains 24 questions that are divided into the same six subcategories. The MAIT was found to be valid and reliable (declarative knowledge α =.85, procedural knowledge α = .82, conditional knowledge α =.84, planning α =.81, monitoring α =.80 and evaluating α =.79) in measuring teachers' metacognitive awareness (Balcikanli, 2011). The MAIT was adapted to reflect instructional leadership instead of teaching. To do this, words related to teaching were substituted with words related to leadership. For example, "I am aware of the strengths and

weaknesses in my teaching" was changed to "I am aware of my strengths and weaknesses in my leadership abilities."

Table 1.
Demographic Statistics of Survey Respondents

	Current Principals	Future Principals
Sex		
Male	23	6
Female	21	19
Ethnicity		
African American	8	12
White	34	13
Native American	0	0
Hispanic	0	0
Asian	1	0
Other	1	0
Age		
23-27	0	1
28-32	2	6
33-37	3	4
38-42	10	5
43-47	8	4
47 and Over	20	4
Area of Specialization		
Elementary	22	2
Secondary	19	1
Educational Coach	0	2
Pre-School Director	0	1
Other	3	19
Degree		
M.Ed.	11	8
Ed.S.	15	10
Ph.D./Ed.D.	18	7

Mindset Quiz

The original Mindset Quiz (Dweck, 2006) contained 8 items and was adapted by the National Council for Community and Education Partnerships (2016). The revised instrument contained 20 items and each of these statements was identified as either a fixed or growth mindset statement. A 4-point Likert Scale was used ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. When participants answered growth mindset questions, such as, "No matter how much intelligence you have, you can always change it quite a bit," with "Strongly Agree," they were assigned 3 points. When participants answered fixed mindset question, such as, "I often get angry when I get feedback back about my performance," with "Strongly Agree," they were assigned 0 points.

A total score was calculated based on the 20 statements, then scored using the following scale:

60-45 points= strong growth mindset
44-34 points=growth mindset with some fixed ideas
33-21 points= fixed mindset with some growth ideas
20-0 points=strong fixed mindse

Results

Reliability analysis was run on each measure using Chronbach's Alpha. The adapted instrument, MAILL, was found to be reliable (α =.841). With the current sample, the mindset quiz does not appear to be reliable (α =.230). This measure did vary from Dweck's original measure but also this measure has not been tested with school leaders. An additional concern is the limited sample size. Li and Bates (2017) recently called into question the reliability of Dweck's mindset research in regards to student mindset and achievement. Based on the current reliability results and the findings of Li and Bates, results related to mindset are discussed with caution. The Levene's test of homogeneity of variance was employed because of the variance in group sizes (current principals, N=44, future principals, N=25). For each of the measures, no significant differences were found, therefore equal variances were assumed with the independent sample t-tests. Independent sample t-tests were used to see if there were differences between the current principals and future principals in metacognitive awareness (MAILL). There was a statistically significant difference between current principals and future principals with respect to their declarative knowledge and planning. The size of the effects for declarative knowledge (d= .50) and planning (d=.58) are a medium effect (Cohen, 1992). This indicates that those who are principals do have a better understanding of what they know about being an instructional leader and understand how to plan to meet their goals. There were no statistical differences in the other MAILL subscales or with the total score. With the means closer to 1 or 2 (see Table 2), this indicates most participants were practicing metacognitive strategies. They were aware that they needed to plan, monitor and evaluate their learning as it relates to instructional leadership practices.

Though there was not a statistically significant difference between these groups on the Mindset Quiz, both groups' mean scores indicate they have a growth mindset with some fixed ideas. An analysis of the fixed mindset questions was conducted to identify agreement with the fixed mindset ideas. Two questions yielding a low agreement with a fixed mindset view of intelligence were found. Specifically, both groups agreed with the following "personality/character mindset-fixed" statements: "Some people are good and kind and some are not- it's not often that people change" (M=1.62, SD=.621) and "You can do things differently, but the important parts of who you are can't really be changed" (M=1.78, SD=.639).

The final step in the analysis was to see if there was any correlation between their level of metacognitive awareness and mindset. There were no significant correlations between the measures.

Table 2

Results of Independent Sample t-tests and Descriptive Statistics for Metacognitive Awareness Inventory for Instructional Leaders and Mindset Quiz

	Current Principals (N=44)	Future Principals (N=25)	95% CI for Mean Difference	t	df
MAIIL	*M* (SD)	*M* (SD)			
Declarative Knowledge	1.37 (.326)	1.55 (.395)	-.357, -.004	-2.05*	67
Procedural Knowledge	1.60 (.370)	1.64 (.375)	-.229, .143	-.47	67
Conditional Knowledge	1.46 (.328)	1.52 (.314)	-221, .102	-.73	67
Planning	1.85 (.452)	1.57 (.481)	.045, .508	2.39*	67
Monitoring	1.65 (.579)	1.50 (.500)	-.128, .424	1.07	67
Evaluating	1.46 (.438)	1.35 (.451)	-.111, .331	.99	67
Total	1.56 (.295)	1.52 (.309)	-.109, .192	.55	67
Mindset Quiz	39. 70 (3.32)	38.48 (3.13)	-.404, 2.85	1.50	67

*p <.05.

Discussion and Implications

Those surveyed indicated a general metacognitive awareness as it relates to instructional leadership. Scores on the Metacognitive Awareness Inventory for Instructional Leaders indicated that current and future principals think about their thinking. Specifically, they plan for, monitor and evaluate their thinking in relationship to their leadership. The differences between current and future principals in the areas of declarative knowledge and planning indicated that practice or experience may play a role in making one more aware of these components of leadership. It is possible that one must be immersed in the schools to metacognitively aware of the knowledge necessary for leading in schools and the planning involved in that task.

The instructional leaders in this study exhibited an overall growth mindset with a subset of fixed ideas. This is significant from both a leadership and educational perspective because it is reflective of the belief held, by the leaders/future leaders surveyed, that people can grow when provided opportunities to learn. This is consistent with prior research implications (Manning, 2007; Bambrick-Santoyo, 2012). As Murphy and Dweck (2009) noted, this type of thinking from the perspective of instructional leaders, will resonate and filter down to teachers and classrooms in schools. Leaders will begin to value professional development opportunities to learn and practice metacognitive strategies, and, in turn, encourage their faculty and students to seek out opportunities to grow accordingly.

Professional Development Opportunities in Metacognition

In recent years, there is a movement away from "top-down" professional development and towards teacher-led development. In the past, central office administration or principals have

selected the professional development activities for their staff, based on what they deemed a "need" on their campus. This change is a result of how power and leadership is distributed in buildings. Many schools have moved to a distributed leadership model and, as a result, teachers and administrators are encouraged to make decisions about professional development together (Harris & Spillane, 2008; Claudet, 2014, Valle, Almager, Molina, & Claudet, 2015). As Wilson and Bai (2010) demonstrated, teachers see the importance and relevance of metacognition in their classrooms, but are unaware of how they can implement metacognitive strategies with their students. Given the change in leadership-styles on many campuses, hopefully, there will be a shift towards more professional development opportunities in facilitating metacognitive strategies in the classroom.

Nichol and Turner-Bisset (2006) asserted that educators need opportunities to engage in cognitive apprenticeships which enable them to use metacognitive strategies, immediately, following professional development. Based on this, in more traditional educational settings, instructional leaders could begin by surveying their faculty to determining levels of awareness of metacognition, and its importance in education. Following this, leaders could develop and facilitate professional development sessions which would promote an awareness of metacognitive strategies. These strategies could immediately be accessible for use in the classroom setting to afford both students and teachers with experiences in thinking at a metacognitive level. Additionally, leaders could provide supports that would help students plan for, evaluate, and monitor their learning.

At present, Li and Bates found, "mindsets and mindset interventions effects on both grades and ability, however, were null or even reversed from the theorized direction" (pg. 22). It seems promoting growth mindset as a strategy to increase academic outcomes has some flaws. What is clear from the current research, is using effective teaching strategies, will lead to student growth and progression (Hattie, 2009; Hattie, 2012). School leaders and instructional coaches can ensure best practices are occurring in the classroom by offering professional development related to metacognition and not growth mindset.

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Leading through Following: Understanding the Intersection of Followership, Leadership and Collaboration

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There is a popular saying around education that, "a bad principal can convince a teacher to leave a good school; while a good principal can convince a teacher to stay at a bad school." In a blog post titled *Teachers Quit Principals, Not Schools,* Barnes (2017) writes about teacher and administrator interactions and how those relationships effect personal decision-making and school climate. Both the popular educational saying and Barnes's writing, while not directly, speak to the relationship between leaders and followers and how that dynamic sometimes plays out in educational settings. Broadly speaking, the dynamic between leadership and followership is important, yet historically in education, only leadership has seen emphasis and examination.

Followership in itself is not a new concept because virtually every individual spends more time in the role of follower than leader and there have been both leaders and followers throughout the course of history. However, the examination followership as a construction for examination is relatively fresh. Understandably, the military arena, due to the nature of the enterprise, establishes followership as a construct to develop (see Figure 1 for principles of followership [Meilinger, 1994]). Aside from the military, other hierarchical entities (i.e. business/corporate structures) intentionally focus on followership as a construct for examination (for a review of followership see Yung & Tsai, 2013). Additionally, situations related to cultural phenomena (i.e., large populations of people with shared experiences) unintentionally and indirectly cast focus on followership (for an example related to higher education see Kellerman, 2008). Even within the described structures (i.e., military, business, culture), there is still scant research on followership which unsurprisingly results in virtually no research on followership in K-12 educational settings. As schools are comprised of teachers and administrators in the roles of followers and leaders, understanding nuances in the leadership-followership dynamic provides opportunities for improving collaboration and thus school climate.

In her book *Followership: How Followers Are Creating Change and Changing Leaders*, Barbara Kellerman (2008) defines followership, what it means to be a follower, and identifies types of followers in four different contexts/industries. While Kellerman's work does not specifically focus on K-12 educational settings, the current authors feel that the theories and ideas she posits can apply to the teacher/administrator dynamic found in schools. Further, we feel that Kellerman's work can support effective collaboration between teachers and

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administration. As such, the authors will apply Kellerman's ideas regarding followership to K-12 school settings to answer the following questions:

1. What is followership and how does it influence leadership?
2. What are the characteristics, types, and behavior of followers?
3. How does the followership/leadership dynamic intersect with improved collaboration?

Figure 1. Adapted from "The Ten Rules of Good Followership" by Colonel Phillip S. Meilinger, 1994, *Military Review*, 74(8), p. 32-37. Copyright 1994 by the Army University Press.

Meilinger's Ten Rules of Good Followership	
1)	Don't blame your boss for an unpopular decision or policy; your job is support, not undermine.
2)	Fight with your boss if necessary; but do it in private, avoid embarrassing situations, and never reveal to others what was discussed.
3)	Make the decision, then run it past the boss; use your initiative.
4)	Accept responsibility whenever it is offered.
5)	Tell the truth and don't quibble; your boss will be giving advice up the chain of command based on what you said.
6)	Do your homework; give your boss all the information needed to make a decision; anticipate possible questions.
7)	When making a recommendation, remember who will probably have to implement it. This means you must know your own limitations and weaknesses as well as your strengths.
8)	Keep your boss informed of what's going on in the unit; people will be reluctant to tell him or her their problems and successes. You should do it for them, and assume someone will tell the boss about yours.
9)	If you see a problem, fix it. Don't worry about who would have gotten the blame or who now gets the praise.
10)	Put in more than an honest day's work, but don't ever forget the needs of your family. If they are unhappy, you will be too, and your job performance will suffer accordingly.

What is Followership and How Does it Influence Leadership?

If leaders effect change, both good and bad, followers enable it (Kellerman, 2007). There are numerous programs and structures in place to create and improve leaders. So many in fact, that leadership training is its own profitable industry (Kellerman, 2008; Ready & Conger 2003). Unfortunately, the practices of followership are rarely (if ever) part of the discussion on leadership. This includes the practices of following established rules, implementing policy, complying with instructions, supervising or being supervised by others. As followership applies to teachers, the role of follower is in addition to teaching students daily.

So what is followership? As defined by Kellerman (2008), followership "implies a relationship (rank), between subordinates and superiors, and a response (behavior), of the former to the latter" (p. xx). Applying this definition to school settings, followership refers to the behaviors of teachers in response to the overt or implied behaviors of the administration. For example, what do teachers (both individually and as a collective group) respond to the directives or requests of the principal of the school? More specifically, if a principal continuously requests a small group of preferred teachers to perform preferred tasks, the followership for those teachers may be different (more positive) than that of other non-preferred teachers. Based on this scenario, the overall school climate and effective collaboration between teachers and teachers/administrators may be adversely affected.

Exhibiting good followership mirrors the traits that make for good future leadership. Kelley (1996) focused on two behavioral dimensions of effective followership; critical thinking and participation. Critical thinkers process situational information for implications and possibilities before action, a skill valued by most successful leaders. Participation involves anticipating requirements and planning in accordance with them. Effective followership involves working well with others, embracing change, building trust, and communicating with courage. Competent followership from teachers can translate to productive administrative leadership in creating atmospheres where all team members adopt the vision of the administration as their own through communication and joint collaboration (Kelley, 1996; Maxwell, 2007).

What are the Characteristics, Types, and Behavior of Followers?

The idea of a person being a follower is fraught with the trappings of negative connotations and negative associations. Subsequently, we think of followers as the opposite of leaders who lack influence, power, and/or importance. To dismiss followers as only as subordinates to be controlled, manipulated, or deployed as agents of the leaders' desires is to underestimate the importance of followers in the leadership/followership dynamic. In fact, Keller (2008) asserts that followers are more important than ever due to their ability to enact change and sometimes become more influential than the leader. As defined by Kellerman (2008) followers can be identified by rank (as subordinates in the hierarchical structure) or by behavior (enacting the intentions of another). Although Kellerman focuses her work on the rank of followers, for the purpose of the current discussion and applying her ideas to K-12 schools, we focus on the behaviors of followers by type. Followers fall into five types (i.e., isolates, bystanders, participants, activists, and diehards) with behaviors specific to each type (Kellerman, 2008). In examining types of followers, we can ascribe behaviors to each and identify those behaviors in

teachers. This allows us to both identify how each type of follower influences the teacher/administrator dynamic but also identify qualities that may help predict future leadership skills.

Isolates. Isolates are uninterested in the leadership or their agenda and through there detachment enhance the strength of the leaders who are already in a position of power (Kellerman, 2008). In school settings, teachers who are isolates can be problematic to school climate if leadership is poor. While most teachers are dedicated to their students and schools, there can be teachers who are completely disengaged from the school climate that may be due to a number of reasons (e.g., retirement, moving to new school, etc.). Isolate teachers are easy scapegoats for poor leaders and ineffective leadership. For example, they provide an excuse for leaders when their agendas fail in that administrators can purport that their poor outcomes are less a reflection of their poor leadership abilities and more a direct reflection on poor followership by isolate teachers.

Bystanders. Bystanders stand on the sidelines and follow the status quo of the situation or people in charge, and generally remain neutral (Kellerman, 2008). Bystander teachers conscientiously just follow the administration and/or the zeitgeist of the moment. Most generally perform duties and tasks related to the purview of their teaching responsibilities and possibly nothing more. Equally important, bystanders complete tasks tacitly without question. Expressed differently, bystanders keep their heads down and do little to influence the overall climate of the school.

Participants. Participants actively engage in activities either for or against the leadership the leadership's agenda and/or the organization itself by investing whatever resources they have based on their own perspectives (Kellerman, 2008). Teachers who are participants can have a definite impact on the outcomes put forth by administration. Either in support of or against leadership's ideas, participants engage to influence the outcomes. For example, if the administration wants to invest in using a commercial reading program, a participant teacher could be an asset (if they believe in the program) in seeing that program successful. Conversely, if that participant teacher does not think the program is viable for students, he or she may prove to detrimental to its implementation and success.

Activists. Activist act strongly, eagerly, and energetically on behalf of the leader or institution (i.e., the school or district) (Kellerman, 2008). Activist teachers who have a heavy investment in the administration or the school can be of significant importance to school climate. Activists may enthusiastically support the administration and promote their agenda wholeheartedly. However, if he activist's loyalty is to the institution and they feel that the administration is ineffective or poor, that teacher may actively engage in behaviors to remove them from administrative positions.

Diehards. Diehards will go to the extreme for whatever the cause, institution, or person they believe in (Kellerman, 2008). Diehard teachers are exemplified by the phrases "teacher x bleeds [insert school color of choice]" or "teacher x would go to the ends of the earth for administrator y". If a diehard teacher is completely dedicated to the school, they will go to the ends of the earth for the betterment of that school even at the expense of leadership. Conversely, if a diehard

is dedicated to the any particular administrator, they would be willing to risk their livelihood (i.e., their job or career) for their belief in that administrator.

None of these typographies described are absolute. It is completely possible and likely that any teacher may exhibit any of the behaviors above and be associated with any or all of the typographies at any given time during their career. Nonetheless, having a general idea of the characteristics and types of followers can improve leaders, leadership, and the collaborative process, which is essential to fostering a productive school climate.

How Does the Followership/Leadership Dynamic Intersect with Improved Collaboration?

Collaboration with parents, general and special education teachers, administrators, paraprofessionals, and support staff and professionals is required daily in K-12 school settings. Without effective collaboration coupled with effective leadership/followership skills, stress from poor communication will contribute to teacher attrition and poor student outcomes. Effective collaboration skills improve organizational health and are an integral part in fostering academic and behavioral success for all students. Administrators who foster effective followership and collaboration skills in teachers will reap the benefits.

McGrath (2007) stresses continuous communication and notes that when classroom teachers are oriented toward inclusion and collaboration, professionals share leader-follower responsibilities; they establish goals that can be achieved, understand the mission, and work together to solve problems on behalf of the student. For these reasons, it is imperative to develop strategies aimed at reducing stress, increasing collaboration, sharing leader/follower responsibilities, improving school climate, and developing effective future administrative leaders by demonstrating and encouraging good followership. Although originally designed to foster collaboration between general education and special education teachers, Simpson (2007) developed eleven strategies for overcoming barriers to collaboration (see Figure 2) which apply to K-12 settings and implementation by leaders or followers.

Coupling followership skills with the skills requisite to overcoming barriers can be extremely helpful to educators, especially since training time for teachers is limited (Lerman, Vorndran, Addison, & Kuhn, 2004). These strategies have the potential to enhance retention, job satisfaction, collaboration, and professionalism, and improve the teaching environment for students. Administrators (i.e., leaders) should demonstrate and encourage the skills for effective collaboration as a model for followers to foster a positive working environment.

Conclusion

Administrators who foster effective followership and collaboration skills in teachers will reap the benefits. In school settings, as there are more teachers (as followers) than administrators (as leaders), having a positive dynamic is essential for effective successful. Cox, Plagenes, and Sylla (2010) suggested that the leader-follower relationship could be interchangeable. Furthering this notion, Hollander (1992) posited that those who are effective followers have the potential to demonstrate effective leadership capabilities. Ultimately, understanding the types and behaviors of followers can enhance a leaders ability to lead as well help develop those who aspire to be

successful future leaders. Developing collaboration skills is important to enhancing the distributed leadership responsibilities across principals, assistant principals, and teachers within schools and across districts (Crockett, 2007; Seltzer, 2011). Understanding effective followership and nurturing the practices associated with good followership can provide the basis for effective leadership later. This base can set the example to model professionalism and active followership to other teachers (Price, 2008). Developing good leadership, followership and collaboration skills are essential to making the transition to 21st century schools and effective educational leaders.

Figure 2. Adapted from "Professional Collaboration" by Robert G. Simpson, 2007, *Behavior Management: RSED 4010 Course Packet*, p. 67. Copyright 2007 by Auburn University.

Strategies for Overcoming Barriers to Consultation and Collaboration

1) Demonstration of a willingness to share knowledge and expertise.

2) Acknowledgement of colleague's specific field expertise.

3) Acknowledgement of the demands of the each colleague's position.

4) Avoidance of a condescending tone, expression, or body language.

5) Listening actively to what colleagues say.

6) Communicating clearly.

7) Reacting gracefully to differences of opinion.

8) Minimizing personal pride.

9) Being patient

10) Sharing follow-up and problem solving responsibilities.

11) Setting up simple systems to enhance communication between colleagues.

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Rural Superintendents' Experiences in the Application of Principle-Centered Leadership at the Personal and Interpersonal Levels

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Covey (1990) suggested that to achieve success in leadership, one must identify core values and principles and ensure that managerial and organizational systems are aligned with these values and principles. These values explained by Covey in principle-centered leadership are built upon the foundation principles of trustworthiness at the personal level and trust at the interpersonal level, which allows for empowerment at the managerial level and alignment at the organizational level. Covey explained that trust or the lack of trust is the foundation of success or failure both in relationships as well as business, industry, education, and government. Combs, Edmonson, and Harris (2013) suggested the premise that trust matters has been confirmed by research findings and trust is often the distinguishing factor between leadership success and failure.

Although much has been written about trust in the business environment, school leaders operate from different contexts and have different needs (Combs et al., 2013). In addition, approximately two-thirds of superintendents in the U.S. are employed in rural districts (Kowalski, 2013). In the past, school leaders often took trust for granted, both within the school and outside the school community (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). However, Tschannen-Moran explained there has been a trend away from trust, which makes trust more difficult for leaders to develop and sustain. In addition, the expectations for school leaders continue to become much more complex and demanding (Kowalski, 2013). Therefore, it is of utmost importance and urgent that school leaders understand the dynamics and meaning of trust for improved school organizational adaptability and productivity (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). School leaders must understand how actions encourage or destroy trust within an organization so that trust may be built by fully understanding what contributes to trust in the organization (Combs, Harris, & Edmonson, 2015).

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore rural superintendents' experiences in the application of principle-centered leadership in their school districts. The following research questions were addressed:

1. What do rural superintendents experience in the application of the principle of trustworthiness at the personal level?
2. What do rural superintendents experience in the application of the principle of trust at the interpersonal level?

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Conceptual Framework

The seminal work that guided this study comes from the book, *Principle-Centered Leadership* (Covey, 1990). Covey defined principle-centered leadership as leadership based on leaders centering their lives and the leadership of organizations and people on certain "true-north" principles. Covey suggested that principle-centered leadership is practiced from the "inside out" based on four principles on four levels. The four levels of principle-centered leadership suggested by Covey are: personal (my relationship with myself), interpersonal (my responsibility to get a job done), managerial (my responsibility to get a job done with others), and organizational (my need to create structure, strategy, and systems). The four principles of principle-centered leadership identified by Covey are trustworthiness at the personal level, trust at the interpersonal level, empowerment at the managerial level, and alignment to vision at the organizational level.

Summary of the Literature

This literature review examines the history of the superintendency. In addition, the roles and responsibilities, leadership behaviors, and preparation skills required for the superintendent position are reviewed. The expectations and challenges of the rural superintendency are examined as well as leadership and preparation skills needed for success in the rural environment. Finally, the principles of trustworthiness at the personal level and trust at the personal level are reviewed to investigate how they are used for leadership effectiveness.

Superintendency

As the role of the superintendent has become much more visible over the years, today's superintendent is a chief executive who must possess vision, skills, and knowledge to lead in the 21st century (Hoyle, Bjork, Collier, & Glass, 2005). Carter and Cunningham (1997) commented that a superintendent must have a solid background in pedagogy, finance, child growth and development, politics, organizational behavior, staff development, and must be able to provide leadership in an age of pressure. Fullan (2007) noted that superintendents in rural districts may serve multiple roles with limited resources; however, superintendents in larger urban districts are confronted with varying conflicts, crises, personnel issues, and possible financial situations. Fullan also indicated that superintendents must often deal with these issues through specialists embedded within a bureaucracy. Despite the size of the district, the superintendency is a position that is increasingly more demanding and complex (Kowalski, 2013). Harris (2009) noted that superintendents are held to high expectations and with the ever increasing complexity of superintendents' jobs and the complexity of the world in general, the superintendent must not lose focus on the ultimate goal of changing a student's world. Harris added that the superintendent is ultimately responsible for maximizing student learning.

Evolution and history of the superintendent position. The first superintendent was appointed by the city of Buffalo, New York in 1837, followed by Providence, Rhode Island appointing a superintendent in 1839 (Callahan, 1966). The period of 1837 to 1942 represented a great time of change and growth for schools and their leadership (Bogotch, 2011). Kowalski (2005) noted that in 1850, 13 city schools had an administrator. Callahan (1966) indicated that because of the slow

growth of public schools, there were only 27 city superintendents in 1870. Later in the twentieth century, there were superintendents in smaller cities and towns (Carter & Cunningham, 1997). The increased need for superintendents was necessitated by conditions such as an increase in larger school districts, consolidation of rural districts, state curriculums, compulsory school attendance, and increased accountability and efficiency expectations (Kowalski, 2003). In 1915, there were 1,551 superintendents (Callahan, 1966). Kowalski (2013) noted there were approximately 14,000 local school systems utilizing a school superintendent in 2013.

The original position of superintendent was primarily clerical and created to execute policies of school boards, which consisted primarily of volunteers (Carter & Cunningham, 1997). According to Kowalski (2013), the first superintendents performed mostly routine, menial administrative tasks and had very little actual authority. During the early 20th century, school boards and city executives continued to withhold power from superintendents. The school board members and city executives were fearful of the power superintendents might acquire and did not want to establish independence from the politics of city government. Kowalski indicated that many issues of the larger school systems started to create problems such as money mismanagement, inadequate facilities, and unqualified teachers. Lawmakers were encouraged to delegate more local power and authority to superintendents to combat many of the burgeoning issues. Even with the problems encountered and the encouragement to address them, there was still strong opposition to making the superintendent a professional position.

Challenges and changes of the rural superintendent. According to Lamkin (2006), rural superintendents face unique issues and challenges that often rendered their role as less attractive than superintendents in larger districts. It has become increasingly more difficult to attract, reward, and retain school leaders in the rural setting. Lamkin also revealed rural superintendents have unique challenges in their role that require specific skills, training, and connections to the field of practice. Lamkin suggested that increased preparation and support could attract more candidates and help rural superintendents succeed in their early years of service.

Lamkin (2006) noted some of the challenges that are unique to the role of rural superintendent. The rural superintendent was often the sole chief executive in the community and often was the target of much criticism. Lamkin indicated that rural superintendents bore sole responsibility for success or failure of the district and suffered a lack of privacy. Lamkin also suggested that rural superintendents often came under intense scrutiny for everything they do in all settings.

In a study of superintendents and principals in small, rural school districts in Texas, Canales, Tejeda-Delgado, and Slate (2008) determined that the dual role of superintendent and principal in the rural district required many different leadership skills and behaviors. Based on the Leadership Behavior Description Questionnaire XII, superintendents, principals and school board presidents agreed on the most important successful leadership behaviors needed for success in the rural district. The most important behavior needed by superintendents/principals in rural districts, as ranked by superintendents, principals and school board presidents in the questionnaire, was tolerance of freedom by the superintendent for allowing the followers initiative, decision and action. Also, ranked as highly important was the representation of the school by the superintendent and consideration of the needs of school employees by the superintendent.

Decision-making skills needed for the rural superintendency. Jenkins (2007) reported that the making of tough decisions by rural superintendents came with no guarantees. It was important that superintendents develop a capacity for making decisions as the superintendent's ethics and values were involved in the decision making process. Langlois (2004) suggested that it was difficult to make a decision in alignment with organizational standards when they conflict with the decision maker's personal values and beliefs. The decision making process used by the superintendents in the study was deemed ethical when not only did they incorporate reflection in the process, but their personal and professional values shaped their organizational workplace. A superintendent's values served as a support, which kept him or her authentic and helped hold the superintendent morally responsible when making a decision. Consequently, rural school leaders in their decision making remain committed to personal, professional, and educational values in making tough decisions (Campbell, Gold, & Lunt, 2003).

Community values in the rural setting. Jenkins (2007) suggested that a rural superintendent who does not account for community values and reaction when making a decision is making a serious mistake. In addition, not only was it important for the superintendent to consider community values, but also how he considered them in the rural environment was also extremely important. While never suggesting that a superintendent compromise his own personal values, it was of utmost importance to be aware of the community's values and their expectations of values for the superintendent. Jenkins suggested that superintendent longevity in the rural community could also be linked to acquiring some of the values that are most unique to the community. Cruzeiro and Boone (2009) found that superintendents in rural districts also desired to hire principals in their districts who recognized the importance of commitment to the community.

Preparation needs and skills for success as a rural superintendent. Spanneut, Tobin, and Ayers (2011) suggested that if superintendents are to thrive and be successful, they must recognize both their leadership skill limitations as well as their leadership skill needs. The superintendent must know how to identify their weaknesses and how to address these needs through professional growth and development. Holloway (2001) noted that superintendents desire continuing professional development to help them deal with the demands and complexities of the job. Hyle, Ivory, and McClellan(2010) studied what knowledge counted most from the perspective of rural superintendents and also how they gained this important knowledge.

Hyle et al. (2010) indicated the knowledge that really counts was continually changing because of the rural context themes of competing visions with the superintendent being at the center of the wheel, balancing, negotiating, and weighing decisions. The researchers found that superintendent preparation programs may not provide the necessary training and skills needed to prepare them for their jobs. Because of the unique challenges of the rural superintendency, Lamkin (2006) suggested improved preparation and support for the role of superintendent. In addition, improved preparation could advance more potential candidates, attract more qualified candidates, and help these rural superintendents to be successful in their schools

Trustworthiness at the Personal Level

Trustworthiness at the personal level is based on character and competence and is the foundation of trust (Covey, 1990). Covey added that character is "what you are as a person" and competence is "what you can do" (p. 31). However, Covey emphasized that if a leader has character but is not competent, they will not develop trust and many leaders are not considered trustworthy because they have become "obsolete" from a competence standpoint in their organizations. Covey noted that both character and competence must be demonstrated by a leader to be considered trustworthy and a leader's competence must be continually increased through professional development. Maxwell (1998) added that a leader must demonstrate competence, connection, and character in order to have trustworthiness.

Combs et al. (2015) suggested that because of the complex issues manifested by today's social problems, leaders have multiple opportunities to display character in their actions and decisions. Character is more about what individuals do that what they say and often there may be a gap between a leader's desires for themselves and the true "right" thing to do (Stephenson, 2009). Stephenson further explained that character is often revealed by how one deals with the many pressures and temptations encountered and not only doing right when there is something to gain, but doing the right thing in all situations.

Trust at the Interpersonal Level

Covey (1990) defined trust as "the emotional bank account between two people that enables them to have a win-win performance agreement" (p. 31). Covey explained that if there is trust between two individuals based on trustworthiness, they will have better communication, more empathy for one another, more synergism as a team, and they will depend on one another to be more productive in the organization. If there are competence issues, further training and development must take place to resolve these issues. If there are character issues, there must be actions undertaken to rebuild or repair trust. Covey commented that trust, or lack of trust, is the primary source of triumph or breakdown in personal relationships as well as in various types of organizations. Trust builds culture and broken trust affects everyone in the organization (Olsen, 2009). There is a crisis of trust that may be greater throughout the world today than at any other time in history (Covey & Link, 2012). Trust is the primary building block of leadership and a leader loses influence if he or she ever loses the trust of the people (Maxwell, 1998). Covey (1990) suggested an "inside-out" approach to developing trust where we must change and control our private selves and subrogate our personal motives to higher purposes and principles. Covey maintained that this "inside-out" approach is a renewing process that causes growth and increased interdependence, thus resulting in greater trust.

Ultimately, Covey (1990) asserted that leaders who base their personality upon correct principles build trust with others. In addition, trust is built upon a leader's trustworthiness over an extended period of time. Communication occurs easily and mistakes are allowed in a high trust environment. However, communication is extremely difficult and ineffective in a low trust environment. Covey commented that in a high trust environment, leaders don't have to supervise people because they can provide self- supervision. The leader offers guidance and help for the people as expectations are agreed upon by all stakeholders. In addition, the needs of the people

must be intertwined with the needs of the organization. There is strong accountability and the people are involved in the evaluation of their performance.

Methodology

The research design of this study was a phenomenological investigation. Marshall and Rossman (2006) defined phenomenology as "the study of lived experiences and the way we understand those experiences to develop a worldview" (p. 104). Marshall and Rossman explained that there is both a structure and essence to common experiences that can be described in narrative form. Phenomenological research is most appropriate when the researcher desires to understand the common or shared experiences of several individuals with a given phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Creswell also noted that as these common experiences are better understood, policies and practices might be constructed to better understand the many facets of the phenomenon. The goal of a phenomenological study, according to Creswell, is to investigate a concept or phenomenon and describe common meanings for multiple individuals of the lived experiences of that phenomenon. While the researcher describes the common experiences of the participants experiencing the phenomenon, the ultimate purpose of phenomenological research is to describe the "universal essence" of the individual experiences associated with the phenomenon.

Participants

This study was conducted with 10 superintendents representing rural public school districts in East Texas. Participants from the study were purposely chosen from several different counties as well as from districts of varying sizes of student enrollment. As criteria for inclusion in the study, superintendents must:

1. Serve in a rural district as defined by Kowalski (2013) and/or serve in a district located in a town of less than 10,000 (population).
2. Serve as a superintendent in the Region VII Educational Service Center Region.
3. Have served as a superintendent in their current district for at least two years.
4. Be identified by the Region VII Educational Service Center School Operations Director as providing exceptional leadership in their district.

An "insider" was used to help identify and recruit potential participants. An "insider" is one who helps identify persons who meet the sampling criteria of the study, helps facilitate requests for participation, and assists with getting questions to the participants (King & Horrocks, 2010). King and Horrocks suggested that using an insider can be advantageous to the researcher in identifying the potential participants who meet the sampling criteria of the investigation as well as providing a greater opportunity for access to the participant pool without the need for lengthy research. King and Horrocks noted that participants are much more likely to participate if the request originates from a trusted source. The researcher used the Region Service Center School Operations Director who was knowledgeable of rural superintendents in the region to help identify and recruit superintendents who are viewed as providing exceptional leadership in their districts. Region VII is composed of 96 public school districts, with 89 of these districts being identified as primarily rural. Of these 89 primarily rural districts, 10 superintendents were asked to participate in the study.

Participants in the study ranged from forty-three to sixty-eight years of age. All participants were of Caucasian ethnicity and all were male. Years spent as superintendents of their current district range from four to sixteen years. Four of the participants are serving their first superintendent role and two of the superintendents are previously retired superintendents. The participants were informed that their names would not be associated with any of the research findings and the confidentiality of their responses would be protected. Pseudonyms were used to protect the confidentiality of the participants.

Results and Discussion

Research questions were used to facilitate this study. These questions investigated the lived experiences of rural superintendents in the application of the principles of trustworthiness at the personal level and trust at the interpersonal level. Major findings of the study were summarized by the research questions. From the answers to these questions, several emergent themes developed.

Research Question One. Research question one investigated the lived experiences of rural superintendents in the application of the principle of trustworthiness at the personal level. Emergent themes included family and faith, being service oriented, continual learning, leading balanced lives, believing in other people, and building and maintaining trustworthiness.

Family and faith. All of the participants emphasized the importance of their family as being the most important factor in building their character to where it is today. This included the superintendents' parents providing examples of being honest, working hard, and high character. For example, David discussed how he developed character from observing his parents practice trustworthiness and honesty in their own lives. Ethan learned the lesson being close and depending upon one another from his family.

In regards to family, six of the participants noted the impact of their father in their character development. John spoke of how his father taught him to establish and stick with his own values so that others did not see him as simply a "reed blowing in the wind." Charles looked to his father as his role model. He noted that there was a right way, a wrong way, and his father's way of doing things. Ben noted that his father taught him about love, devotion, and family. Jeffrey shared that his father was a policeman whom many people in his town knew. Jeffrey spoke about how he wanted to live up to the expectation of being his father's son.

Eight of the participants stressed the importance of the role of Christianity in their character progression. For example, Ethan felt that being extremely involved in church was a big part of his family's life. Gary noted that his father was a Southern Baptist preacher who spent over sixty years in the ministry. Therefore, he grew up in a home of strong, Christian values. William shared that he grew up in a Christian home and accepted Jesus Christ as part of his life and being Christ-centered is a major part of who he is. Charles spoke of how the right way of doing things in his family was based on their faith.

Being service oriented. Being service-oriented was also an emergent theme of the participants. In their discussion of experiences with trustworthiness at the interpersonal level, all ten of the participants discussed the importance of being service oriented toward those that they lead. Eight

of the participants said that being service oriented was one of the most important characteristics of principle-centered leaders. However, all felt that being service oriented was a requirement for success as a leader. For example, John stressed that a leader has to be a servant to everyone and being service-oriented means that you care about other people as much or more than yourself.

Charles noted that one cannot step on others to advance your own career, but one can advance the organization through servant leadership. Seth stressed that one cannot be a dictator, a changer and fixer, and have long-term success. Gary stressed that people should be in education because it is a calling, ministry, or service and one must truly love kids to be in the profession. If not, a disservice is being done to the students. William stressed the position to serve other people. Scott spoke of serving in a capacity to make people grow and feel better.

Continual learning. Another emergent theme of participants regarding superintendents' experiences with trustworthiness at the personal level was continual learning. All of the participants discussed how they promoted their intellectual growth. Five of the participants listed continual learning as one of the most important characteristics of principle-centered leaders. Scott noted that continual learning might be the most important characteristic of principle-centered leaders, because if the leader is not growing, the people will not grow either. Scott stressed that a leader must not only learn, but also share the information that is learned. William emphasized that a leader who thinks that he or she knows everything cannot get any better. William equated continual learning with continual improvement. David stressed that to keep from continuing to have the same experiences, one must continue to learn in order to get better. John explained that if the individuals in the organization are to get better, it must begin with the leader. John also stressed that if one is to be a leader instead of a mere manager, one must continue to learn.

All of the participants discussed how they promoted their intellectual growth. Seven of the ten participants noted that reading was a primary way of promoting intellectual growth and seven of the ten participants also noted that attending conferences and/or professional development was a primary way of advancing intellectual growth. Gary stressed learning from others' mistakes. Scott emphasized that individuals are either getting better or worse and one cannot simply stand still. Scott remarked that learning is a lifelong experience and the desire to be around people who make him think. Ben spoke of a quote from his father-in-law, "If you rest, you rust."

Leading balanced lives. Another emergent theme of participants regarding superintendents' experiences with trustworthiness at the personal level was leading balanced lives. All ten participants stressed the importance of maintaining a balance between work and family life. For example, Ben explained that maintaining a balance between work and family is not a problem because he loves, honors, and values his family and wants to be with them and be a part of their lives. Ben further noted that he didn't want to be like many of the superintendents of larger schools where it would be more difficult to balance between work and family. Gary stressed that spending time with the family helps to keep the balance between work and family.

As another example, Ethan explained that he has gotten better balancing work and family over time. He also noted that it is important to plan for a time to simply get away from school with your family. Gary spoke of how it really isn't a struggle to balance family and work because his

school board promotes a balance in his life. Seth explained that while he hasn't always been the best example of leading a balanced life, he preaches it to his principals and others that work for him. Charles suggested that achieving a balance between work and family life is easier than when he worked in a larger urban district. John stressed that one needs to focus on relationships with family and friends when away from work. David said that his family was his hobby.

Two participants talked about the difficulty of separating work and family. Jeffrey said that work was his family and the two were simply intertwined. He further explained that school had been his family's life. Scott talked about how difficult achieving a balance between work and family life early on in his career. He felt that so many people were depending upon him. He didn't want to let anybody down. However, he noted that he did a better job of achieving balance as he became older.

As to promoting emotional growth, all participants shared different avenues. Seven of the ten participants discussed the value of church and Bible study. William explained that he stays grounded through Bible study and church. David stressed that he relies on faith and prayer. He asks for guidance, strength, and direction through prayer. Ethan explained that emotional growth comes through God and family. Other things mentioned in achieving emotional growth include exercise, community activities and music.

Believing in other people. Still another emergent theme regarding superintendents' experiences with trustworthiness at the personal level was believing in other people. Seven of the ten participants listed believing in other people as one of the top three most important characteristics of principle-centered leadership. For example, David noted that he owes his success to the people around him. Charles explained that although believing in others doesn't come naturally for him, he believes it encourages those whom are believed in. Ethan suggested that people know whether you believe in them or not. Gary explained that belief in others is important because after all, the school business is all about people. Scott spoke about the importance of believing in people, allowing them to do their job, and having expectations of them. He also emphasized that as a leader, you must move your people forward.

Building and maintaining trustworthiness. The final emergent theme regarding superintendents' experiences with trustworthiness at the personal level was building and maintaining trustworthiness. All of the participants spoke about the importance of building and maintaining their trustworthiness with others. While all agreed that building and maintaining trustworthiness is required to be an effective leader, there were varying ideas of the best way to build and maintain trustworthiness. Some of the ideas suggested include ensuring that actions match up with what is said as well as visibility, communication, and honesty.

Five participants spoke about people watching your actions. For example, Charles explained that a superintendent's actions must be consistent and motives driven by the right reasons. He said, "Talk is cheap, but people watch actions." William talked about making sure one's core values match up with what one says and how one acts and that decisions and recommendations are congruent with these values. Gary noted that one must lead by his own example. It is important not to ask others to do something that he wouldn't do. Ethan explained that people see you every day and observe your actions and that observation tells them what you're all about. Ben

commented that superintendents are judged on their character, how one expresses their beliefs and how one acts.

Seth talked about communication and visibility as a requirement for trustworthiness, while David also spoke about visibility, Jeffrey also talked about communication as well. Scott discussed honesty and always telling people the truth. Scott also added that he always tries to help people. John spoke about treating each individual equitably as well as communication.

Research Question Two. Research question two investigated the lived experiences of rural superintendents in the application of the principle of trust at the interpersonal level. Emergent themes included building relationships, building others up, listening, keeping promises and commitments, and modeling by example.

Building relationships. An emergent theme regarding superintendent's experiences with trust at the interpersonal level was building relationships. All participants spoke of the importance of building relationships to earn trust. Participants were eager to share their experiences in building relationships. All of the participants talked about the value of communication and just getting to know others in building relationships.
Ethan, William, and Ben emphasized listening to others. Ethan spoke of listening and letting others know that you're interested in what they are saying. He also stressed the importance of following through with anything that you say you're going to do. Ben said, "Listen to their story." William stressed giving others the opportunity to tell you what's on their mind. He emphasized trying not to cut others off when listening as well as encouragement of others. Jeffrey and William spoke of being open to the concerns of others as well.

Scott, David, Jeffrey, Charles, Seth, Gary, and John stressed building relationships come from activities such as interaction, people observing actions over time, and communication with others. John spoke of the values that people see him model every day. Gary stressed honesty and making sure that your actions back up your words as you prove yourself on a daily basis with the way you conduct yourself and the way you deal with people. Seth also emphasized honesty and truly getting to know others. Charles spoke of taking time to visit, talking with people, and getting to know them. Jeffrey stressed communication and building lines of communications, avoiding cutting off discussions from others and being open to others' line of thinking. David spoke of investing time and having interaction with people. Scott emphasized building relationships and trust through the experiences people have with each other.

Building others up. An emergent theme regarding superintendents' experiences with trust at the interpersonal level was building others up. All of the participants discussed how they build others up in the organization. While all embraced the importance of building others up in the organization, the participants differed somewhat in how they accomplished building others up.

For example, Ben, William, Gary, Ethan, and John all talked about the importance of allowing others to have greater responsibility as a means of building them up. Ben talked about recognizing their talents and William mentioned outlining goals for accomplishment. Gary noted that he often lets his people make presentations to the school board as a means of giving

responsibility. Ethan discussed giving added responsibility and John discussed giving opportunities for taking risks.

As far as other means of building others up, Jeffrey noted that he just lets them know by talking to them. Charles stressed that he builds others up through the informal relationships and looking at them eyeball to eyeball as well as handwritten notes to recognize accomplishments. Scott noted that he continues to build on what his people do well. William noted that he acknowledges success while David spends time complementing. Gary has an opening day pep event and he also notes that he listens in order to build others up. Seth tries to encourage others by being positive. Ethan noted that it is important to recognize accomplishments.

Listening. Another emergent theme regarding superintendents' experiences with trust at the interpersonal level was listening. Participants discussed how they sought to understand others' point of view. Eight of the participants noted that listening was the best way to truly understand others' point of view. For example, Scott noted that it is important to ask questions about "why." David said, "I try to listen and keep my mouth shut." He stressed the importance of listening before you talk. Jeffrey stressed communication in understanding others' point of view. Charles emphasized listening and asking questions for clarification. He also noted giving others the opportunity to express their point of view. Gary spoke of not only listening, but trying to put yourself in their place as best you can to understand where they are coming from. John explained that listening involves listening beyond the conversation that they're having. He spoke of how many times what people are telling him is not the real issue. It takes seeing past what they are saying to get to the root of the problem. John described this as empathetic listening.

Another example of listening was provided by William. William spoke of giving people plenty of time to talk and not talking over people. He also stressed asking clarifying questions and extension questions before telling them what you want them to hear. Ben noted that one must listen first, select or pick out what they are saying that they need to do, and then connect by letting them know your feelings about the conversation.

Keeping promises and commitments. Another emergent theme regarding superintendents' experiences with trust at the interpersonal level was the importance of keeping promises and commitments. All ten of the participants commented on the importance of keeping promises and commitments in building trust. For example, Charles shared that everything he says has to be right on because people will take what he says and bank on it. He stressed that people often hang on to every work that he speaks. Seth said, "If you say stuff and don't follow through, then they're going to lose confidence in you." Ethan stressed that you must follow through with anything that you say you're going to do. Scott emphasized that nothing is more important in building trust, confidence, and your integrity level than keeping commitments. He said, "There's no ifs, ands, or buts. That has to happen." David commented, "I think if you say you're going to do it, you've got to do it." Jeffrey stated, "You just don't lie to people. You don't make promises you can't keep. You just don't."

Gary stressed that while you don't make promises that you can't keep, you should also never make a threat that you can't back up or would be willing to follow up on. John stressed that keeping your word builds trust. He stated, "If I say I'm going to do something, I need to do it, or

if I can't, I need to give an explanation why I can't do it." William explained, "There is no way around it. If you say you're going to do something, you need to do it. If you don't, you need to have the courage to tell them you didn't and why you didn't. You go and ask for their forgiveness or whatever."

Eight of the participants discussed the importance of choosing words carefully so people do not misinterpret what they are saying. Gary commented that you have to be careful what you say because often people want you to make a promise. John noted that even shaking your head can be misinterpreted as agreement. Seth noted that just being positive when someone is initiating something can be mistaken as agreement with them. David emphasized that often people only hear what they want to hear and it is not anything like it was said. Ben stated that you often have to tell people, "Now, I'm not promising you this, but I'm telling you I will look into it."

Modeling by example. Another emergent theme regarding superintendents' experiences with trust at the interpersonal level was modeling by example. Nine of the participants discussed the importance of modeling by example as a way to build trust. These nine superintendents discussed that they modeled to others by their example to build trust. However, the means by which they modeled varied among the participants.

For example, three of the participants noted that they model by example by just being themselves. Jeffrey said, "I just try to be myself wherever I am. I don't wear a tie." Ethan spoke of trying to be the same no matter what the situation. Charles stressed he and his family are no better than everybody else. He said, "I sit in the stands and spit sunflower seeds with the best of 'em. I think it's good for people to see."

Four of the participants spoke of the importance of sticking to morals and values and/or keeping one's word as a means to model by example. Ethan stressed morals and values and William spoke of sticking to one's values when making decisions or recommendations. William also encouraged others to readily admit their mistakes when they stray from their values. Ben stressed that modeling by example is simple. He stated, "If you tell them you're going to do it, do it." Scott noted that modeling by example means walking the walk. He also emphasized keeping one's word.

Gary suggested that his example is set by the language that he uses. He also noted that one should set the example of being visible. Seth spoke of being an example by being positive and supportive. David emphasized setting an example of not asking anyone to do something that you are not willing to do yourself.

Conclusions

This qualitative study investigated rural superintendents' experiences with the application of principle-centered leadership in their districts. This study affirms that practicing principle-centered leadership helps superintendents to become effective leaders in their districts. During this study, it was apparent that effective superintendents practice the tenets of principle-centered leadership with different methods and actions based on their beliefs and personalities. In addition, it was apparent in the study that trustworthiness and trust is the foundation of principle-

centered leadership, which allows for empowerment and alignment to vision. Based on the findings from the individual interviews, specific conclusions are discussed in terms of the research questions that guided the study.

Research question one. What do rural superintendents experience in the application of trustworthiness at the personal level? Based on the findings, it can be concluded that superintendents' family and their faith had the largest impact on their character progression. Superintendent's feel that being service oriented is one of the most important characteristics of principle-centered leaders. The findings were also consistent with the research of Greenleaf (1977) regarding building trustworthiness through servant leadership and the research of Spears (2004) regarding the characteristics central to the development of servant leader as well as the research of Blanchard (1998) regarding leading and building trustworthiness with servant leadership.

Continual learning helps to build a superintendent's trustworthiness and effectiveness in the district. Superintendents must strive to balance work and family life. Effective superintendents believe in other people as they build their trustworthiness with others. Furthermore, it can be concluded that superintendents must continually build and maintain their trustworthiness with those they lead. Superintendents may use different methods and actions, but agree that building and maintaining trustworthiness is required for effective leadership in their district. These findings were consistent with the principle of trustworthiness at the personal level (Covey, 1990) and the assertion by Combs et al. (2015) that competent leaders are continually learning and improving themselves and others.

Research question two. What do rural superintendents experience in the application of trust at the personal level? Based on the findings, it can be concluded that superintendents work to build relationships with those they lead in order to establish trust at the interpersonal level. Even though different strategies may be used by individual superintendents, relationships must be built to build trust in the district. In addition, building others up in the organization builds trust. Of paramount importance is the value of superintendents keeping their promises and commitments to others. People do not trust leaders who fail to keep promises and commitments. Furthermore, superintendents must model to others that they lead by their example in order to build trust in the district.

The findings were consistent with the principle of trust at the interpersonal level (Covey, 1990) and the suggestion by Combs et al. (2015) that the leader may build trust by fully understanding what contributes to trust in the organization. The findings were also consistent with the research of Greenleaf (1977) regarding building trust through servant leadership and the research of Spears (2004) regarding the characteristics central to the development of servant leader as well as the research of Blanchard (1998) regarding leading and building trust with servant leadership. In addition, it is of utmost importance and urgent that school leaders understand the dynamics and meaning of trust for improved school organizational adaptability and productivity (Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

Implications for Practice

Followers tend to trust those whose personality is founded upon correct principles (Covey, 1990). These principles as suggested by Covey are trustworthiness at the personal level, trust at the interpersonal level, empowerment at the managerial level, and alignment to vision at the organizational level. The findings of this study provide practices by superintendents to build their trustworthiness and trust with others.

The suggested practices related to trustworthiness and trust aligns with the practices for building trust suggested by Combs et al. (2015). The suggested practices are also consistent with the research of Greenleaf (1977) regarding building trust and trustworthiness through servant leadership and the research of Spears (2004) regarding the characteristics central to the development of servant leader, as well as the research of Blanchard (1998) regarding leading and building trust and trustworthiness with servant leadership. The practices align with the conditions for building trustworthiness and trust at the personal and interpersonal level suggested by Covey (1990).

Suggestions to implement for practice include the following:

1. Build character and trustworthiness through family values and faith.
2. Build trustworthiness and trust through servant leadership.
3. Build competence and trustworthiness through continual learning and improvement.
4. Believe in other people.
5. Maintain a healthy balance between work and family life.
6. Continually build and maintain trustworthiness through different strategies.
7. Build relationships with others to increase trust.
8. Build others up to increase trust.
9. Keep all promises and commitment to others to increase trust.
10. Model and lead by example daily to increase trust.

Recommendations

Due to the value of trustworthiness and trust in promoting empowerment and alignment to vision in school districts as requirements for superintendents' effectiveness, it is important to consider multiple positions, characteristics of people, and backgrounds regarding principle-centered leadership. Other research recommendations include the following:

1. Interview principals regarding their experiences with the application of principle-centered leadership.
2. Interview other central office administrators regarding their experiences with the application of principle-centered leadership in their districts.
3. Interview suburban and urban superintendents regarding their experiences with the application of principle-centered leadership in their districts.
4. Interview women superintendents regarding their experiences with the application of principle-centered leadership in their districts.

5. Interview superintendents of diverse cultural backgrounds regarding their experiences with the application of principle-centered leadership in their districts.
6. Interview superintendents and/ or other school leaders regarding challenges and problems encountered in applying principle-centered leadership in their organizations.

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Differences in Dropout Rates as a Function of High School Size for Students in Poverty: A Texas Multiyear, Statewide Study

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Child poverty in the United States, with regard to student achievement, has grave challenges for the children who face poverty (Scott & Pressman, 2013). Not only is living in poverty associated with lower academic achievement, but student poverty is also associated with lower rates of school completion (Borg, Borg, & Stranahan, 2012; Cooper & Crosnoe, 2007; Kena et al., 2015). Consequentially, students who do not complete high school are more likely to (a) serve time in prison, (b) need government assistance, and/or (c) die at an earlier age (Messacar & Oreopoulos, 2013). With the increasing number of children who are living in poverty, child poverty is an issue that needs to be at the forefront of the educational agenda (Tienken, 2012).

In 2014, approximately 10.9 million children, age 5 to 17, lived in poverty (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). Despite educational reforms such as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002, students in poverty are still dropping out at a higher rate than are their more affluent peers (Howard & Madison-Harris, 2011). Messacar and Oreopoulos (2013) documented that students in poverty as well as Black and Hispanic students were disproportionately leaving school before completion.

Even before children from low-income families enter school, the achievement gap is apparent (Duncan & Sojourner, 2013; Reardon 2011). With increasing income inequality and a lack of financial resources invested into the development of children, students in poverty are facing a huge disadvantage even before entering school (Altintas, 2016; Kornrich & Furstenburg, 2013; Western, Bloome, & Percheski, 2008). Compared to their more affluent peers, students who are economically disadvantaged experience limited learning opportunities (Miller, Pavlakis, Lac, & Hoffman, 2014). As a result, students in poverty are entering schools with weaker academic skills than their more affluent peers (Duncan & Magnuson, 2011; Duncan & Murnane, 2011; Hughes, 2010; Miller et al., 2014).

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Moreover, the achievement gap between income classes also can be attributed to social and cultural factors affecting student performance: (a) number of moves, (b) number of parents, (c) food insecurity, (d) violence rate, and (e) average income (Berliner, 2009; 2013). Fiorni and Keane (2014) and Willingham (2012) identified the amount of time invested in developmental cognitive skills as another important explanation for the achievement gap between students of affluence.and students of poverty. Students in poverty are entering school doors with less financial and social resources than their more affluent peers, which could affect their long term successes.

Several researchers (e.g., Merten & Flowers, 2003; Rendon, 2013; Suh, Suh, & Houston, 2007; Turner, 2000) have established that poverty and achievement rates are negatively associated. In a study conducted in Minnesota for the 1998-2010 years, Nitardy, Duke, Pettindell, and Borowsky (2014) documented that students in poverty had poorer academic achievement than students who were not economically disadvantaged. White students had approximately a 0.17-point advantage on Black students' GPA and a 0.37-point advantage on Hispanic students' GPA. Furthermore, when asked about intentions of completing high school, approximately 2.3% of Black students and 3% of Hispanic students who were economically disadvantaged had the intention of dropping out, compared to only 2% of White students who were economically disadvantaged.

With regard to academic achievement and poverty, Lee and Auhtor (2014) examined advanced performance on the 2012 Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) Higher Education Readiness Component for English Language Arts and Mathematics as a function of student poverty. Statistically significant differences in performance were present. Students who were economically disadvantaged had statistically significantly lower performance than their more affluent peers on all exam subjects and advanced indicators. On the TAKS English Language Arts test, students who were economically disadvantaged were 6.19% less likely to earn Commended Performance and 27.61% less likely to be college-ready than students who were not economically disadvantaged. Small effect sizes (Cramer's V) of .23 were present. On the TAKS Mathematics test, students who were economically disadvantaged were 56.32% less likely to earn Commended Performance and 24.39% less likely to be college-ready than their more affluent peers.

Disparities between students of affluent neighborhoods and students in poor neighborhoods not only affect student achievement, but also influence whether or not students receive a high school diploma. Students from more affluent backgrounds are more likely to achieve a diploma than their peers who live in poor neighborhoods (Anderson & Leventhal, 2014; Boyle, Georgiades, Racine, & Mustard, 2007; Sastry & Pebley, 2010). In states that have higher unequal income distribution, higher dropout rates occur (Berliner, 2013; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010).

Lower academic achievement can lead to high dropout rates, especially for students in poverty. Leventhal-Weiner and Wallace (2011) investigated the dropout rates of Black, Hispanic, and White students who were economically disadvantaged. Leventhal-Weiner and Wallace established the presence of statistically significant higher dropout rates for White, Black, and Hispanic students living in poverty than their peers who were not living in poverty. Black and Hispanic students in poverty had higher dropout rates than White students.

In a recent investigation, Ambrose, Slate, and Moore (2016) examined two school years (i.e., 2011-2012 and 2012-2013) of Texas statewide data to determine the extent to which dropout rates differed as a function of high school size for students in poverty. Congruent to this investigation and previous research, they categorized high school size into three sizes based on student enrollment numbers: (small-size school = 50 to 400 students; medium size school = 401 to 1,500 students; large-size school > 1,500 students). Ambrose et al. documented the presence of statistically significant differences in dropout rates by high school size for their sample of students in poverty. For both school years, small-size high schools had higher dropout rates for students in poverty compared with medium or large-size high schools.

With respect to the topic of school size, whether large-size or small-size schools are better with respect to student achievement, is an ongoing argument. Several researchers (Conant, 1959, Duke, DeReberto, & Trauvetter, 2009; Supovitz & Christian, 2005) contended smaller schools were better for supporting student achievement and offered better educational opportunity. However, in more recent research investigations, researchers (e.g., Greeney & Slate, 2012; Rios, Slate, Moore, Martinez-Garcia, 2016a, 2016b) have emphasized larger high schools best support student achievement and high school completion rates.

In a recent investigation of dropout rates, Rios et al. (2016a) investigated the dropout rate of Hispanic students as a function of high school size. Texas statewide data of school years, 2009-2010 to 2013-2014, were used to examine high school sizes, small [50 to 400 students], medium [401-1499], and large-size high schools [1500 or more students] and their relationship to dropout rates of Hispanic students. Statistically significant differences were yielded with small effect sizes in this study. For all five years, Hispanic students dropped out at a higher rate in small-size schools rather than large-size schools. Using the same parameters for school years and high school size, in a second study, Rios et al. (2016b) documented the presence of statistically significant differences in attendance rates for Hispanic students as a function of high school size. Attendance rates for Hispanic students were lower in small-size high schools than medium or large-size high schools. Percentage points ranged from 0.36 to 1.59 lower in small-size high schools than medium or large-size high schools.

Kahne, Sporte, de la Torre, and Easton (2008) conducted an investigation of large-size high schools in Chicago. One strategy implemented by Chicago's school reform was leaders converted some large-size high schools into smaller high schools. Kahne et al. documented dropout rates for the initial cohort were decreased, but no difference was present for the second cohort compared to the original dropout rates in the large-size schools.

Scott, Ingels, Shera, Taylor, and Jergovic (1996) examined data from the High School Effectiveness Supplement from the National Educational Longitudinal study of 1988. In their investigation, they established that schools with more academic courses were less likely to have students drop out than did schools with fewer academic offerings? Greater graduation rates were also documented for schools that had a student enrollment of 1,500 students or less than schools that had fewer students enrolled.

Werblow and Duesbery (2009) analyzed the relationship of school size to mathematics achievement and to dropout rates of sophomores and seniors (n = 16,081) from the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002. They determined that students who attended very large schools (2,592 or more students) or very small schools (674 or fewer students) had higher student performance in mathematics. Moreover, students enrolled in larger schools were more likely to drop out than students in small schools. Werblow and Duesbery (2009) further contended building smaller schools was best practice due to their findings on mathematics achievement and dropout rates. Similarly, in an investigation of the relationship of school size and dropout rates in the consideration of socioeconomic status, Gardener, Riblatt, and Beaty (2000) discovered statistically significant differences for dropout rates for larger schools versus smaller schools. Larger schools had higher dropout rates for students who were economically disadvantaged than did smaller schools.

The most recent studies reviewed in this investigation were interpreted to support the idea that large-size schools were better for higher graduation rates. Also of note is that these investigations were conducted on data from the students in Texas, the same state of interest in this study. The studies that were interpreted to support the idea small-size schools are better were conducted outside of Texas and reflect older research.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this investigation was to examine the degree to which differences might be present in high school dropout rates as a function of high school size for students in poverty. Specifically, high school size and dropout rates were analyzed for two school years: 2012-2013 and 2013-2014. These school years were selected because they constituted the most recent data available for Texas high schools.

Significance of the Study

Students living in poverty may encounter barriers that may prevent them from having success through education (McKinney, 2014). Addressing poverty is not a simple task, nor does a simple fix exist. However, due to dropout rates being a part of the accountability system in the state of Texas, educational leaders need insights in how to help all students achieve, regardless of economic status. By allowing for the equitable access to opportunities for educational achievement, schools can enhance the lives for children in poverty (McKinney, 2014).

Policymakers and school leader may use the results and recommendations from this study to determine a school size that best supports student achievement and the attainment of a high school diploma. In the consideration of students who are economically disadvantaged, policymakers and school leaders may take into account how the formation of schools affects this particular population. Moreover, educators may use the results from this study as a valuable lens through which they may determine the relationship of school size to dropout rates for all students as well as those students who are economically disadvantaged.

Research Questions

The following research questions were addressed in this study: (a) What is the difference in dropout rates as a function of high school size for students in poverty using the Greeney and Slate (2012) school size definition?; (b) What is the difference in dropout rates as a function of high school size for students in poverty using the Perez and Slate (2015) school size groupings?; (c) What is the difference in dropout rates as a function of high school size for student in poverty using the Texas University Interscholastic League groupings?, and (d) What consistency, if any, is present in dropout rates by high school size for students in poverty using the Greeney and Slate (2012) definition?; (e) What consistency, if any, is present in dropout rates by high school size for students in poverty using the Perez and Slate (2015) definition; and (f) What consistency, if any, is present in dropout rates by high school size for students in poverty using the Texas University Interscholastic League groupings? The first three research question were analyzed for two school years (i.e., 2012-2013, 2013-2014) whereas the fourth, fifth, and sixth research questions were a comparison of results across both school years. Therefore, a total of nine research questions was addressed in this study.

Method

Research Design

The research design for this empirical investigation was a non-experimental, causal comparative (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). In this causal comparative study, archival data were analyzed. In this investigation, the independent variable of high school size and the dependent variable of high school dropout rates for students who were economically disadvantaged had already occurred. Accordingly, neither variable could be manipulated—a typical occurrence in causal comparative research studies (Johnson & Christensen, 2014).

Participants and Instrumentation

Participants in this study were students who were determined to be economically disadvantaged and who are enrolled in traditional Grade 9 through Grade 12 Texas high schools. In this investigation, students who were economically disadvantaged were students who lived in a household that met the guidelines for free or reduced lunch (Texas Academic Performance Report Glossary, p. 14). Students who were considered to have completed high school typically refer to students from a class of first-time ninth graders who completed their high school education within the traditional 4-year period (Texas Education Agency, 2015). Students were assigned a final status of graduate, once they had completed all graduation requirements (Texas Education Agency, 2015).

For the purpose of this study, high school size in the Greeney and Slate (2012) definition consisted of three groupings: small, moderate, and large. A Small-size high school was defined as a school with an enrollment of 400 or fewer students, with a minimum of 50 students. A Moderate-size high school defined as a school with an enrollment of 401 to 1,499 students. A Large-size high school was a school with an enrollment of 1,500 or more students (Greeney & Author, 2012).

In the Perez and Slate (2015) definition, high school size consisted of four categories: small, moderate, large, and very large. A Small-size high school was defined as a high school with a student enrollment of 50 to 500 students. A Moderate-size high school was a high school with a student enrollment of 501 to 1,499 students. A Large-size high school was defined as a high school with a student enrollment of 1,500 to 2,499 students. A Very Large-size high school had a student enrollment of 2,500 or more students (Perez & Slate, 2015).

The third grouping of high school size was the University Interscholastic League (2014) guidelines: Very small, Small, Moderate, Medium, Large, and Very large. A Very Small-size high school was defined as a high school with a student enrollment of 25 to 104 students. A Small-size high school was a high school with a student enrollment of 105 to 219 students. A Moderate-size high school was defined as a high school with a student enrollment of 220 to 464 students. A Medium-size high school was a high school with a student enrollment of 465 to 1,059 students. A Large-size high school was defined as a high school with a student enrollment of 1,060 to 2,099 students. Finally, a Very Large-size high school was a high school with an enrollment of 2,100 or more students (University Interscholastic League, 2014).

For the 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 school years, archival data were obtained from the Texas Academic Performance Reports as published annually by the Texas Education Agency. Available at the Texas Academic Performance report website are data for both of the school years. With specific reference to this investigation, Texas Academic Performance Report data were downloaded for the 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 school years. Specific variables that were downloaded were: (a) configuration of each high school; (b) total student enrollment; and (c) dropout rates of students in poverty.

Results

To determine whether a difference existed in dropout rates as a function of high school size as defined by Greeney and Slate (2012), Perez and Slate (2015), and the Texas University Interscholastic League (2014) groupings for students who were economically disadvantaged, an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) procedure was conducted to address each research question. Before calculating an ANOVA, the standardized skewness coefficients and the standardized kurtosis coefficients were calculated to determine the degree to which the dropout rate data were normally distributed, +/- 3 (Onwuegbuzie & Daniel, 2002). The Levene's Test of Error Variance was also calculated to determine the degree of homogeneity of the data, in which a violation was discovered. Despite not all of the underlying assumptions being met, Field (2009) contends the ANOVA procedure is sufficiently robust to use as the statistical procedure.

Research Question 1

For the first research question, student enrollment was grouped into three high school sizes (Greeney & Author, 2012): Small-size high schools (50 to 400 students); Moderate-size high schools (401 to 1,499 students); and Large-size high schools (1,500 or more students). For the 2012-2013 school year, a statistically significant difference was revealed in the dropout rates of students in poverty as a function of school size, $F(2, 1114) = 15.71, p < .001, \eta^2 = .027$, a small effect size (Cohen 1988). Scheffe` post hoc procedures were used next to determine which school size pairwise comparisons were statistically significantly different with respect to dropout

rates for students in poverty. Two of the three post hoc comparisons yielded a statistically significant difference. Students in poverty who were enrolled in Small-size schools had statistically significantly higher dropout rates than did students in poverty who were enrolled in either Moderate-size or in Large-size high schools. The dropout rates of students in poverty did not differ between Moderate-size and Large-size high schools.

With regard to the 2013-2014 school year, a statistically significant difference was yielded in the dropout rates of students in poverty as a function of school size as defined by Greeney and Slate (2012), $F(2, 1119) = 15.15, p < .001, \eta^2 = .026$, a small effect size (Cohen 1988). Scheffe` post hoc procedures were again used to determine which pairwise groupings of high school size differed with respect to the dropout rates of their students in poverty. These post hoc procedures revealed that two of the three pairwise comparisons had statistically significant differences in the dropout rates of their students in poverty. Similar to the previous school year, students in poverty who were enrolled in Small-size high schools had statistically significantly higher dropout rates than for students in poverty who were enrolled in either Moderate-size or in Large-size high schools. The dropout rates of students in poverty did not differ between Moderate-size and Large-size high schools

Research Question 2

For the second research question, student enrollment was grouped into four high school sizes (Perez & Slate, 2015): Small-size high schools (50 to 500 students); Moderate-size high schools (501 to 1,499 students); Large-size high schools (1,500 to 2,499 students); and Very Large-size high schools (2,500 or more students). For the 2012-2013 school year, a statistically significant difference was revealed in the dropout rates of students in poverty as a function of school size, $F(2, 1113) = 4.70, p = .003, \eta^2 = .012$, a small effect size (Cohen 1988). Scheffe` post hoc procedures revealed that two of the six post hoc pairwise comparisons yielded a statistically significant difference. Students in poverty who were enrolled in Small-size schools had statistically significantly higher dropout rates than did students in poverty who were enrolled in Moderate-size high schools. Statistically significant differences were also revealed between Small-size high schools and Large-size high schools and Very Large-size high schools. Small-size high schools had higher dropout rates than Large-size high schools and higher dropout rates than Very Large-size high schools. The dropout rates of students in poverty did not differ between Moderate-size and Large-size high schools or in Large-size and Very large-size high schools.

Concerning the 2013-2014 school year, a statistically significant difference was yielded in the dropout rates of students in poverty as a function of school size based upon the Perez and Slate (2016) definition, $F(3, 1118) = 4.72, p = .003, \eta^2 = .013$, a small effect size (Cohen 1988). Scheffe` post hoc procedures revealed that of the six post hoc comparisons yielded a statistically significant difference. Similar to the previous school year, students in poverty who were enrolled in Small-size schools had statistically significantly higher dropout rates than students in poverty who were enrolled in any of the other high school sizes. The dropout rates of students in poverty did not differ between Moderate-size and Large-size high schools or Large-size and Very large-size high schools.

Research Question 3

For the third research question, student enrollment was grouped into the six Texas University Interscholastic League classifications (2014): Very Small-size high schools (25 to 104 students); Small-size high schools (105 to 219 students); Moderate-size high schools (220 to 446 students); Medium-size high schools (465 to 1,059 students); Large-size high schools (1,060 to 2,099 students); and Very Large-size high schools (2,100 or more students). For the 2012-2013 school year, a statistically significant difference was revealed in the dropout rates of students in poverty as a function of school size, $F(5, 1137) = 29.84, p < .001, \eta^2 = .116$, a medium effect size (Cohen 1988). Scheffe` post hoc procedures revealed that six of the 14 post hoc comparisons yielded statistically significant differences. Students in poverty enrolled in Very Small-size high schools had higher dropout rates than any other school size in the 2012-2013 school year. Statistically significant differences also were apparent between Small-size high schools and Medium-size high schools. Differences were not present between Medium-size high schools and Moderate-size high schools. Differences were also not present between Medium-size high schools and Large-size high schools and Very Large-size high schools

With regard to the 2013-2014 school year, a statistically significant difference was revealed in the dropout rates of students in poverty as a function of school size based upon the Texas University Interscholastic League classifications, $F(5, 1144) = 35.46, p < .001, \eta^2 = .134$, a near-large effect size (Cohen 1988). Scheffe` post hoc procedures revealed that five of the 14 post hoc comparisons yielded statistically significant differences. Students in poverty who were enrolled in Very Small-size high schools had statistically significantly higher dropout rates than students in poverty who were enrolled in any other size high school. No statistically significant differences were revealed in any of the other comparisons between high school sizes.

Research Question 4

To address the consistency of the results across both school years (i.e., 2012-2013 and 2013-2014) using the Greeney and Slate (2012) groupings, Small-size high schools had higher dropout rates for students in poverty than either Moderate-size or Large-size high schools. Dropout rates for students in poverty who were enrolled in Small-size high schools were almost double the dropout rates of students in poverty who were enrolled in Moderate-size high schools in both school years. Though not a research question, the dropout rates of students in poverty revealed a slight increase from the 2012-2013 to the 2013-2014 school year

Research Question 5

Consistent results were yielded when using the Perez and Slate (2015) high school size groupings in both school years (i.e., 2012-2013 and 2013-2014). Small-size high schools had higher dropout rates for students in poverty than any other school size examined in this investigation. A slight increase was noted in the dropout rates of students in poverty from the 2012-2013 to the 2013-2014 school year. One explanation for this change in dropout rates may be due to having data from five additional high schools available for analysis in the 2013-2014 school year.

Research Question 6

Consistent results were also revealed using the University Interscholastic League (2014) high school size groupings for both school years (i.e., 2012-2013 and 2013-2014). Very Small-size high schools had higher dropout rates for students who were in poverty than any other high school size examined in this investigation (i.e., Small-size, Medium-size, Moderate-size, Large-size, and Very Large-size). Of importance was that the average dropout rate for students in poverty who were enrolled in the Very Small-size high schools was more than twice as large as the average dropout rate for students in poverty at any of the other high school sizes using the University Interscholastic League groupings.

Discussion

In this investigation, the extent to which high school dropout rates differed as a function of high school size for students in poverty was examined. Statewide Texas data were obtained from the Texas Academic Performance Reports for two school years (i.e., 2012-2013 and 2013-2014). Inferential statistical procedures were used to determine whether high school size was a contributing factor to the dropout rates of students in poverty in Texas. By analyzing two school years of data, consistent higher dropout rates in Small-size high schools was determined.

Summary of Results for Dropout Rates for Students in Poverty

Students in poverty who were enrolled in smaller size high schools had statistically significantly higher dropout rates than their peers who were in poverty but were enrolled at high schools with higher levels of student enrollment. For both school years, regardless of the high school size classifications, high schools with smaller student enrollment had higher dropout rates. For students in poverty, in the state of Texas, smaller high schools were not conducive for preventing drop out.

Connections to the Literature

These results are congruent with previous investigations conducted in the State of Texas (Ambrose et al., 2016; Rios et al., 2016a). The smaller the high school enrollment, the higher the dropout rates for students in poverty. Conversely, the larger the high school enrollment, the lower the dropout rates for students in poverty. As such, high school size with respect to student enrollment is clearly connected to dropout rates of students who were economically disadvantaged.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Based upon the results of the three sets of inferential analyses, clearly evident were the presence of statistically significant differences in the dropout rates of students in poverty as a function of the student enrollment at their high schools. The smallest size high schools in each of the three definitions of school size had statistically significantly higher average dropout rates than any of the larger high school size groupings. As such, policymakers and educational leaders are encouraged to examine the possibility of having larger high schools, with respect to student

enrollment. Policymakers and educational leaders should consider the idea of consolidation, where possible, smaller size high schools into larger size high schools. It may be that larger size high schools, with respect to student enrollment, have more resources and can offer their students programs and services that reduce dropout rates. When making decisions about the construction and the consolidation of high schools, educational leaders should consider larger high schools, especially for areas that have a large population of students in poverty. Finally, educational leaders are encouraged to audit each of their high school's dropout rates by student economic status, as well as by other demographic characteristics. Such audits could assist them in determining whether new programs are needed to reduce their dropout rates, as well as in ascertaining the extent to which any current programs in place are effective.

Recommendations for Future Research

In this investigation, the dropout rates of students in poverty were analyzed as a function of high school size, with respect to student enrollment. Moreover, aggregated dropout rate data at the high school level for a 2-year time period were examined. As such, researchers are encouraged to analyze the dropout rates of students by important demographic characteristics. That is, are the dropout rates of Black or Hispanic students influenced by the size of the student enrollment at their high schools? The degree to the results obtained herein on the relationship of dropout rates of students in poverty to their high school size would generalize to other groups of students is not known. Another recommendation for research would be to obtain dropout rate data at the individual student level, rather than at the aggregated high school level. By analyzing individual student level data, a more nuanced examination of the interrelationships of student demographic characteristics (e.g., Black boys in poverty) could be conducted.

Researchers are encouraged to investigate the relationship of high school size with other important academic outcomes such as graduation rates and college readiness. The extent to which the findings obtained in this investigation would generalize to other academic outcomes is not known. This research study was conducted exclusively with regard to Texas students. Accordingly, this research investigation should be replicated in other states to ascertain whether the results in other states are similar to these Texas results.

Conclusion

The results of the two years of data were not consistent with the idea that smaller size high schools are better for students. Rather, the dropout rates for students in poverty were statistically significantly higher in the smaller size high schools. All three high school size groupings yielded similar results, dropout rates were lower in the smallest high school size groupings. The evidence in this investigation provides merit to the discussion of consolidating smaller size high schools into larger ones.

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Grade Span Configuration and Academic Performance for Students in Poverty: A Texas Multiyear Analysis

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Grade-span configuration refers to the range of grades within a school (Coladarci & Hancock, 2002). The debate over the benefits of one grade span configuration over the other has ensued for decades (Howley, 2002). Specific questions in this debate are (a) Which grade span configuration is most cost effective?; (b) Which grade span configuration yields the best academic achievement?; and (c) Which grade span configuration best meets the social and emotional needs of middle level children? (Howley, 2002).

In regard to the cost effectiveness of grade-span configurations, Bickel, Howley, Glascock, and Williams (2000) concluded that expenditure per pupil increased proportionally with school size. In addition, they stated that as school size increases, costs associated with having students in poverty in schools increased per pupil expenditures. The Bickel et al. (2000) article is particularly relevant to this article because data on students in poverty were analyzed herein.

Over the past two decades, an increase has occurred in the number of schools containing a Grade K-8 configuration rather than the Grade 6-8 traditional middle school (Blair, 2008). The reason behind this trend may reflect educator awareness that achievement loss takes place during each transition (Alspaugh, 1999; Cullen & Robles-Pina, 2012; Clark et al. 2013a). As educational leaders make decisions about how to configure the schools within their district, one major factor they must take into account is the effect that school transitions will have on students and the timing of such transitions. Adolescents experiencing cognitive, physiological, social and emotional developmental changes associated with puberty also have to contend with another important developmental process, the transition from elementary to secondary school (Aikins, Bierman, & Parker, 2005).

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Statement of the Problem

A pronounced regression in student achievement has been documented to occur during the transition from elementary school to middle school (Alspaugh, 1998; Alspaugh & Harting, 1995). Several researchers (e.g., Becker, 1987; Byrnes & Ruby, 2007; Clark, 2012; Connolly et al., 2002; Fink, 2010; Franklin & Glasscock, 1996; Offenburg, 2001; Schafer, 2010; Tucker & Andrada, 1997; Wihry et al., 1992) have demonstrated the presence of statistically significant relationships between grade span configuration and academic achievement. In these studies, students enrolled in K-8 school settings demonstrated a higher academic performance than students enrolled in traditional middle school settings (i.e., Grades 6-8). Very few research studies are available, however, in which the academic performance of middle level students enrolled in elementary schools (i.e., Grades P/K-8) have been compared to the academic performance of students enrolled in secondary settings (i.e., Grades 6/7-12). Hough (2005) coined the term *elemiddle* schools to describe the P/K-Grade 8 schools. Results from this empirical statewide study may provide useful information to educational leaders, school board members, and legislators as they set policies or make decisions regarding school grade span configuration.

Significance of the Study

The ideal grade span configuration for students in Grades 6, 7, and 8 is still unknown. Given the inconsistency of grade span configurations from school district to school district, continually low student achievement scores, the inability to close the achievement gap, and ever changing accountability standards, educational leaders may be able to use information from this empirical statewide investigation to assist their decision-making regarding grade span configuration. This study is unique in that over 60% of Texas students are in poverty and students of poverty traditionally have low academic achievement. Therefore, as educators must take steps to close this achievement gap for the poor and hopefully, data from this study may be used to make decisions about grade span configuration in the future.

Gradet al., 2013b). As enrollment increases and new schools are built, educational leaders have to determine what configuration would provide the best results for their students. Previous researchers (e.g., Clark et al., 2013a; Clark et al., 2013b) have focused on campus level data, as opposed to this study in which the emphasis was placed on individual student level data. Educational leaders must make decisions about campus grade configurations with the understanding that the more campuses they have, the more transitions their students must go through. Therefore, an understanding of how transitions affect students of various ages is important in helping make these decisions. Given the fact that many different grade span configurations exist and student academic achievement is low, the need for more research on grade span configuration and academic achievement is pressing (Clark et al., 2013a; Clark et al., 2013b).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this article was to examine the extent to which the academic achievement of Grade 6, 7, and 8 students in poverty differed as a function of grade span configuration. The specific grade span configurations of interest in this investigation were elementary settings (i.e., Pre-K/K-Grade 6/7/8) and secondary settings (i.e., Grades 6/7-Grade 12). For purposes of this investigation, the grade span configuration for elementary settings was referred to as elemiddle settings (Hough, 2005) and the grade span configuration for secondary settings was regarded as secondary settings. Academic achievement herein were aggregated campus level Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) data obtained from the Texas Education Agency Academic Excellence Indicator System.

Research Question

In this investigation, the following research question was addressed: (a) What is the effect of grade span configuration (i.e., elemiddle and secondary settings) on the academic achievement of Grade 6, 7, or 8 students who were economically disadvantaged? This research question was repeated for the last two school years in which the TAKS Reading and Mathematics tests were administered.

Method

Research Design

A causal-comparative research design was used in this investigation (Creswell, 2009). Specifically analyzed were archival data as a function of the grade span configuration of the schools in which they were enrolled on Texas Grade 6, 7, and 8 students by their economic status. The independent variable of grade span configuration and the dependent variables of reading and mathematics achievement had already occurred for students whose data were analyzed herein. As such, the research design most appropriate for this investigation was a causal-comparative one (Silva, 2010).

Readers should note that in the causal-comparative research design that was used, as is typical for archival data, only the presence or absence of statistically significant differences between the two grade span configurations can be documented. Readers should not infer nor do we imply that grade span configuration is the cause of any differences that may be present for students in their academic achievement. Cause-and-effect relationship can only be made from experimental research designs with sufficient controls. Those controls are absent when archival data are analyzed as was this case in this investigation.

Participants and Instrumentation

Archival data were obtained from the Texas Education Agency Academic Excellence Indicator System database for the last two years of TAKS data: the 2009-2010 school year and 2010-2011 school years. Examined in this study were TAKS Reading and Mathematics test scores of students in Grades 6, 7, and 8 by their economic status. Specifically compared were reading and mathematics test scores of students who had been enrolled in elemiddle schools to the reading and mathematics test scores of students who had been enrolled in secondary schools. For purposes of this investigation, the definition of economically disadvantaged was the one used in the Texas Education Agency Texas Academic Performance Report Glossary (2015). As such,

economic disadvantage was defined as being "eligible for free or reduced-price lunch or eligible for other public assistance" (p. 10).
Although the State of Texas changed its mandatory statewide examination to the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness, numerous problems were present in its implementation. As such, only data from the predecessor to the current state-mandated assessment, the TAKS, were analyzed in this investigation. The TAKS Reading examinations were given to measure student knowledge of the Texas Reading Essential Knowledge and Skills. Assessments in Grades 6, 7, and 8 contained 42, 48, and 48 multiple choice items, respectively. In addition, each exam assessed four reading objectives: (a) the understanding of culturally varied written texts, (b) the application of knowledge of literary elements, (c) the use of reading strategies to analyze texts, and (d) the application of critical thinking skills to analyze texts.

The TAKS Mathematics examinations were given to measure student knowledge of the Texas Mathematics Essential Knowledge and Skills. Assessments in the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades contained 46, 48, and 50 multiple choice items each, respectively. In addition, each of the three tests assessed six strands of mathematical concepts: (a) numbers, operations, and quantitative reasoning; (b) pattern relationships and algebraic reasoning; (c) geometry and spatial reasoning; (d) measurement; (e) probability; and statistics, and (f) mathematical processes and tools. Readers are directed to the Texas Education Agency website for information regarding the score reliability and score validity of the TAKS assessments.

Results

To answer the previously delineated research questions, independent samples *t*-tests were calculated and checks were made for normality. Independent samples *t*-tests were the appropriate statistical technique to use because the independent variable of grade span configuration consisted of two groups (i.e., elemiddle and secondary settings) and the dependent variables were test scores. The results of these analyses will now be presented, with reading analyses presented first, followed by the mathematics analyses.

TAKS Reading Results for Students in Poverty

For the 2009-2010 school year for Grade 6 students in poverty, a statistically significant difference was not yielded, $t(30.82) = 1.16$, $p = .26$, in passing rates on the TAKS Reading test as a function of grade span configuration. Grade 6 students in poverty had similar passing rates on the TAKS Reading test regardless of the grade span configuration in which they were enrolled. Delineated in Table 1 are the descriptive statistics for this school year.

Concerning the 2010-2011 school year for Grade 6 students in poverty, a statistically significant difference was revealed, $t(33.44) = 2.43$, $p = .02$, in the TAKS Reading passing rates as a function of grade span configuration. This difference represented a small effect size (Cohen's *d*) of 0.46 (Cohen, 1988). Grade 6 students in poverty who were enrolled in elemiddle schools had an average passing rate on the TAKS Mathematics test that was 4.34% higher than the average passing rate of Grade 6 students in poverty who were enrolled in secondary schools. Revealed in Table 2 are the descriptive statistics for this analysis.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for the TAKS Reading Passing Rates by Grade Span Configuration for Grade 6, 7, and 8 Students in Poverty for the 2009-2010 School Year

Grade Level and Grade Span Configuration	*n* of schools	*M*	*SD*
Grade 6			
Elemiddle	438	85.18	9.47
Secondary	28	83.11	9.15
Grade 7			
Elemiddle	42	83.74	8.48
Secondary	101	80.46	10.84
Grade 8			
Elemiddle	35	88.17	7.59
Secondary	84	83.64	11.01

With respect to the 2009-2010 school year for Grade 7 students in poverty, a statistically significant difference was present, $t(97.17) = 1.94$, $p = .05$, in the TAKS Reading passing rates as a function of grade span configuration. This difference represented a small effect size (Cohen's *d*) of 0.34 (Cohen, 1988). Grade 7 students in poverty who were enrolled in elemiddle schools had an average passing rate on the TAKS Mathematics test that was 3.28% higher than the average passing rate of Grade 7 students in poverty who were enrolled in secondary schools. Revealed in Table 1 are the descriptive statistics for this analysis. Regarding the 2010-2011 school year for Grade 7 students in poverty, a statistically significant difference was not revealed at the conventional level, $t(100.60) = 1.73$, $p = .09$, in the TAKS Reading passing rates for Grade 7 students in poverty. Similar passing rates on the TAKS Reading test for Grade 7 students in poverty were similar regardless of the grade span configuration in which they were enrolled. Table 2 contains the descriptive statistics for this analysis.

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics for the TAKS Reading Passing Rates by Grade Span Configuration for Grade 6, 7, and 8 Students in Poverty for the 2010-2011 School Year

Grade Level and Grade Span Configuration	*n* of schools	*M*	*SD*
Grade 6			
Elemiddle	476	84.17	8.95
Secondary	31	79.84	9.67
Grade 7			
Elemiddle	47	84.11	10.77
Secondary	97	80.67	12.01
Grade 8			
Elemiddle	40	85.80	11.33
Secondary	95	81.86	11.89

With respect to the 2009-2010 school year for Grade 8 students in poverty, a statistically significant difference was yielded, $t(91.09) = 2.58$, $p = .01$, in the TAKS Reading passing rates as a function of grade span configuration. This difference represented a small effect size (Cohen's *d*) of 0.48 (Cohen, 1988). Grade 8 students in poverty who were enrolled in elemiddle schools had an average passing rate on the TAKS Mathematics test that was 4.53% higher than the average passing rate of Grade 8 students in poverty who were enrolled in secondary schools. Descriptive statistics for this analysis are presented in Table 1. With respect to the 2010-2011 school year for Grade 8 students in poverty, a statistically significant difference was not revealed at the conventional level, $t(76.74) = 1.82$, $p = .07$, in the TAKS Reading passing rates as a function of grade span configuration. Although not statistically significant at the conventional level, Grade 8 students in poverty had higher average passing rates on the TAKS Reading test in elemiddle schools than in secondary settings. Table 2 contains the descriptive statistics for this school year.

TAKS Mathematics Results for Students in Poverty

For the 2009-2010 school year for Grade 6 students in poverty, a statistically significant difference was revealed, $t(32.77) = 3.31$, $p = .002$, in the TAKS Mathematics passing rates as a function of grade span configuration. This difference represented a moderate effect size (Cohen's *d*) of 0.67 (Cohen, 1988). Grade 6 students in poverty who were enrolled in elemiddle schools had an average passing rate on the TAKS Mathematics test that was 9.23% higher than the average passing rate of Grade 6 students in poverty who were enrolled in secondary schools. Delineated in Table 3 are the descriptive statistics for this analysis.

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics for the TAKS Mathematics Passing Rates by Grade Span Configuration for Grade 6, 7, and 8 Students in Poverty for the 2009-2010 School Year

Grade Level and Grade Span Configuration	*n* of schools	*M*	*SD*
Grade 6			
Elemiddle	454	82.09	12.42
Secondary	31	72.81	15.73
Grade 7			
Elemiddle	48	78.52	15.05
Secondary	110	71.60	15.82
Grade 8			
Elemiddle	42	78.64	15.24
Secondary	110	69.91	18.77

Concerning the 2010-2011 school year for Grade 6 students in poverty, a statistically significant difference was revealed, $t(33.51) = 2.48$, $p = .018$, in the TAKS Mathematics passing rates as a function of grade span configuration. This difference represented a moderate effect size (Cohen's *d*) of 0.50 (Cohen, 1988). Grade 6 students in poverty who were enrolled in elemiddle schools had an average passing rate on the TAKS Mathematics test that was 6.84% higher than

the average passing rate of Grade 6 students in poverty who were enrolled in secondary schools. Descriptive statistics for this analysis are revealed in Table 4.

Table 4
Descriptive Statistics for the TAKS Mathematics Passing Rates by Grade Span Configuration for Grade 6, 7, and 8 Students in Poverty for the 2010-2011 School Year

Grade Level and Grade Span Configuration	*n* of schools	*M*	*SD*
Grade 6			
Elemiddle	472	82.59	11.69
Secondary	32	75.75	15.28
Grade 7			
Elemiddle	49	79.96	12.23
Secondary	114	72.17	14.90
Grade 8			
Elemiddle	46	79.37	14.23
Secondary	114	68.99	16.11

With respect to the 2009-2010 school year for Grade 7 students in poverty, a statistically significant difference was yielded, $t(93.84) = 2.62$, $p = .01$, in the TAKS Mathematics passing rates as a function of grade span configuration. This difference represented a small effect size (Cohen's *d*) of 0.45 (Cohen, 1988). Grade 7 students in poverty who were enrolled in elemiddle schools had an average passing rate on the TAKS Mathematics test that was 6.92% higher than the average passing rate of Grade 7 students in poverty who were enrolled in secondary schools. Revealed in Table 3 are the descriptive statistics for this analysis. Regarding the 2010-2011 school year for Grade 7 students in poverty, a statistically significant difference was revealed, $t(109.79) = 3.48$, $p = .001$, in the TAKS Mathematics passing rates as a function of grade span configuration. This difference represented a moderate effect size (Cohen's *d*) of 0.54 (Cohen, 1988). Grade 7 students in poverty who were enrolled in elemiddle schools had an average passing rate on the TAKS Mathematics test that was 7.79% higher than the average passing rate of Grade 7 students in poverty who were enrolled in secondary schools. Delineated in Table 4 are the descriptive statistics for this analysis.

Concerning the 2009-2010 school year for Grade 8 students in poverty, a statistically significant difference was present, $t(90.78) = 2.96$, $p = .004$, in the TAKS Mathematics passing rates as a function of grade span configuration. This difference represented a moderate effect size (Cohen's *d*) of 0.51 (Cohen, 1988). Grade 8 students in poverty who were enrolled in elemiddle schools had an average passing rate on the TAKS Mathematics test that was 8.73% higher than the average passing rate of Grade 8 students in poverty who were enrolled in secondary schools. Table 3 contains the descriptive statistics for this analysis. With respect to the 2010-2011 school year for Grade 8 students in poverty, a statistically significant difference was revealed, $t(93.62) = 4.02$, $p < .001$, in the TAKS Mathematics passing rates as a function of grade span configuration. This difference represented a moderate effect size (Cohen's *d*) of 0.68 (Cohen, 1988). Grade 8 students in poverty who were enrolled in elemiddle schools had an average passing rate on the TAKS Mathematics test that was 10.38% higher than the average passing rate of Grade 8

students in poverty who were enrolled in secondary schools. Delineated in Table 4 are the descriptive statistics for this analysis.

Discussion

In this multiyear statewide analysis, the degree to which grade span configuration was related to the reading and mathematics achievement of Grade 6, 7, and 8 students in poverty in Texas public schools was addressed. With respect to the TAKS Reading passing rates, three of the six analyses revealed statistically significant differences, with small to moderate effect sizes. Although the other three TAKS Reading analyses were not statistically significant, average passing rates on the TAKS Reading tests for students in poverty were higher at the elemiddle schools than in secondary schools in all six analyses.

Concerning the TAKS Mathematics passing rate analyses, statistically significant differences were revealed in all six analyses. In all of the analyses, passing rates on the TAKS Mathematics test for students in poverty were higher in the elemiddle grade span configurations than in the secondary grade span configurations. Small to moderate effect sizes were present.

Connection with Existing Literature

Student achievement has been documented to decrease during the transition from elementary school to middle school (Alspaugh, 1998; Alspaugh & Harting, 1995). Many researchers (e.g., Becker, 1987; Byrnes & Ruby, 2007; Clark, 2012; Clark et al., 2013a; Collins, 2006; Connolly et al., 2002; Fink, 2010; Franklin & Glasscock, 1996; Offenburg, 2001; Schafer, 2010; Tucker & Andrada, 1997; Wihry et al., 1992) have demonstrated the presence of statistically significant relationships between grade span configuration and academic achievement. In previous studies, students enrolled in K-8 school settings had better academic performance than their peers enrolled in traditional middle school settings (i.e., Grades 6-8). Few research studies are available, however, in which the passing rates of students enrolled in elemiddle schools (i.e., Grades Pre-K/K-Grade 6,7,8) have been compared to the passing rates of students enrolled in secondary settings (i.e., Grades 6/7-12), particularly when the focus was placed on students in poverty. Results from this study are commensurate to these previous studies because in both, students enrolled in the configuration with the least number of transitions (i.e., elemiddle) outperformed their counterparts enrolled in the grade span configuration with more transitions (i.e., middle school or secondary school).

Implications for Policy and Practice

The ideal grade span configuration for students in Grades 6, 7, and 8 is still not known. Considering the poor academic achievement of students of poverty in Texas, the inconsistencies of grade span configurations from school district to school district, ever changing accountability standards, and the inability to close the achievement gap, school administrators and educational leaders may be able to use data from this study to help them make decisions about grade span configuration. Results delineated in this investigation may also aid legislators and policymakers in their decisions regarding educational facilities.

Grade span configuration has been documented to impact student achievement (Clark et al., 2013a; Clark et al., 2013b). One issue of concern is that school administrators must make decisions about campus grade configurations with the understanding that the more campuses they have, the more transitions their students must experience. Therefore, an understanding of how transitions affect students of various ages is crucial in helping make these decisions. Given the fact that many different grade span configurations exist and student academic achievement is low, the need for more research on grade span configuration and academic achievement is pressing (Clark et al., 2013a; Clark et al., 2013b).

As we noted earlier in this article, increases in the number of schools containing a Grade K-8 configuration rather than the Grade 6-8 traditional middle school (Blair, 2008) have taken place in the last two decades. The reason behind this trend may reflect awareness that student achievement suffers during each transition (Alspaugh, 1999; Cullen & Robles-Pina, 2012; Clark et al. 2013a). As educational leaders make decisions about how to configure the schools within their district, one major factor they must take into account is the effect that school transitions will have on students and the timing of such transitions. Adolescents experiencing cognitive, physiological, social and emotional developmental changes associated with puberty also have to contend with another important developmental process, the transition from elementary to secondary school (Aikins, Bierman, & Parker, 2005).

Suggestions for Future Research

Examined in this study was the degree to which differences were present in the TAKS Reading and Mathematics passing rates as a function of grade span configuration for Grade 6, 7, and 8 students of poverty in Texas. Specifically analyzed were passing rates for Grade 6, 7, and 8 students of poverty who were either enrolled in elemiddle settings (i.e., Pre-K/K-Grade 6/7/8) or in secondary settings (i.e., Grades 6/7-Grade 12). In this investigation, data were analyzed at the aggregated campus level. In the future, researchers are encouraged to analyze individual student data rather than campus level passing rate data. Such investigations would allow for a more detailed analysis of the relationship of grade span configuration to student performance. Other suggestions for future research would be to examine the relationship of grade span configuration to other academic areas than just reading and mathematics such as science, social studies, and writing; examine grade span configuration and other student demographic characteristics such as at-risk or English Language Learners or students in special education. Future researchers might also analyze grade span configuration and student discipline data.

Data from this investigation were solely composed of the TAKS Reading and Mathematics passing rates for the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 school years. Due to issues in the implementation of the replacement for the TAKS, the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness, a decision was made to not use data from the newly mandated state assessment. Although data from the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness were not considered valid for this study, in the future researchers are encouraged to analyze data from its administration.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research study was to determine the extent to which differences were present in the TAKS Reading and Mathematics passing rates as a function of grade span configuration for Grade 6, 7, and 8 students of poverty. In reading, two out of the six analyses revealed statistically significant differences. In all instances, however, reading performance was higher in the elemiddle settings than in secondary settings. Statistically significant differences were revealed in all six of the analyses of student mathematics passing rates. In all six analyses, mathematics performance was better in the elemiddle settings than in secondary settings. Consistent with previous research (Clark et al., 2013a; Clark et al., 2013b) students in elemiddle settings performed better than students in secondary settings.

Lest readers overgeneralize from the results of this investigation, several caveats are in order. First, only archival data were analyzed. As such, no cause-and-effect relationships can be made. We established in this study that statistically significant reading and mathematics achievement was present between the two grade span configurations. The reasons for such differences were not determined in this study. Second, we analyzed data for two student groups. The complexities of student demographic characteristics, their academic performance, and the manner in which they respond to transitions were not addressed in this investigation. As a result, readers are urged to be cautious in the extent to which they generalize from the results of this study.

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