

# School Leadership Review

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# School Leadership Review

The international, peer-reviewed journal of the Texas Council of Professors of Educational Administration

## Summer 2015

*The Changing Landscape of Leadership*

*Pauline M. Sampson, Scott Bailey, and Kerry Roberts*

*The Impact of High Stakes Testing on School Leadership*

*Yanira Oliveras-Ortiz*

*The Augmentation of Bilingual/Bicultural Courses in Educational Administration Core Requirements*

*Ava J. Muñoz*

*Measuring Up: Teachers' Perceptions of a New Evaluation System*

*Darnisha Rigsby and Jennifer T. Butcher*

*A Phenomenological Narrative Study: Elementary Charter Principals' Role as an Instructional Leader*

*Ahmet F. Cetinkaya*

*Five Critical Skills Necessary for the Interim Superintendent in Texas*

*Susan J. Nix and Gary Bigham*

# **School Leadership Review**

Summer 2015 Volume 10 Issue 2

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The editorial staff of *School Leadership Review* seeks high-quality, original manuscripts in consideration for the upcoming publication of the journal. The *School Leadership Review* is an internationally refereed journal sponsored and published by the Texas Council of Professors of Educational Administration and is designed to offer a publishing opportunity to professors of educational leadership across the country on topics related to school administration. We encourage submissions from new professors as well as those with years of valuable experience. Manuscript guidelines are as follows:

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## ***The Changing Landscape of Leadership***

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Leading a campus is not what it used to be (nor is teaching a class, being a student, or raising a child for that matter). The increasing pace of societal and technological change provides an ever-evolving backdrop against which educational leaders view and conduct their work. Overlay a culture of accountability enacted amid budget cuts, surging enrollments, and shifting demographics, and the roles of school leaders become clouded with uncertainty, imbued with responsibility, and demanding increased personal commitment and professional and technical knowledge. One principal preparation student recently commented that her teaching colleagues routinely asked her, “Why in the world do you want to do that?” Upon reflection, it’s a valid question we should all answer.

Fortunately, the research provided in the selections of this issue of *School Leadership Review* begins to address, if not the “whys,” at least the “hows” of improving leadership in this new landscape. Among the many evident changes in leadership, this issue focuses on how both leaders and leadership preparation programs can adjust their roles to respond effectively to changing needs and demands. Primary among these is a continued focus on instructional leadership under new accountability standards and achievement tests, such as the STAAR test in Texas and similar high-stakes exams in other states. Additionally, in Texas, as in other states, preparations are underway for new principal and teacher appraisal systems, driven to meet NCLB demands. These accountability measures relentlessly increase while the demographics of our students have changed to a larger percentage of minority, second language, and economically-disadvantaged students. This change has resulted in the need for enhanced leadership skills in cultural competence.

These changes in the leadership landscape require leaders to determine how research can inform their practice. The pace of learning must increase for leaders and one way to make this happen is for leaders and researchers to share their knowledge, both with each other and with the broader educational community. The research presented in this edition, generated by both researchers and practitioners, leads others to increased knowledge so that there is quality in changes for leaders. These are strong examples of ways to meet the changing needs of leaders today. *The Impact of High Stakes Testing on School Leadership* by Yanira OLivera-Ortiz describes a principal’s view of changing classroom environments because of the state of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) test. Further, the author shares instructional leadership viewpoints of campus principals and proponents and opponents of high-stakes testing. This mixed method study surveyed 20 principals from four large school districts in Texas to understand their perceptions of changes in their leadership practices working under accountability practices. Additionally, five of these principals were interviewed to validate the survey results. The results showed that the majority of principals surveyed perceived that the STAAR was detrimental to classroom instruction and the pressure to obtain higher achievement scores negatively impacted their ability to lead.

*The Augmentation of Bilingual/Bicultural Courses in Educational Administration Core Requirements* by Ava J. Muñoz emphasizes the importance of teaching cultural competence in principal preparation programs. This quantitative study found that 75% of Hispanic Serving

Institutions (HSI) offered one bicultural core course while non HIS in Texas showed only 45% offering one bicultural core course. Even less prominent were bilingual courses.

*Measuring Up Teachers' Perceptions of a New Evaluation System* by Darnisha Rigsby and Jennifer T. Butcher explores teachers' perceptions of a new appraisal system through a phenomenological narrative study. Their findings uncovered themes that the new system was more objective, had a clear purpose, and better monitored progress with than the prior appraisal system.

*A Phenomenological Narrative Study: Elementary Charter Principals' Role as an Instructional Leader* by Ahmet F. Cetinkaya presents a study of the instructional leadership behaviors of six elementary charter school principals. The findings showed that principals demonstrated their belief in the importance of instructional leadership by scheduling data meetings, supporting teacher morale, focusing on student learning, providing viable curriculum, and providing professional development.

*Five Critical Skills Necessary for the Interim Superintendent in Texas* by Susan J. Nix and Gary Bigham is a phenomenological study examining the critical role of an interim superintendent. These researchers found five critical skills for interim superintendents as experienced in Texas schools, including time and flexibility, attitude and commitment, problem-solving, and the willingness to do hard things. The authors also reflect on the political and emotional importance of the interim superintendent, as that individual bridges the past with the future.

The five articles in this issue all address, in one way or another, the continuing and emerging challenges faced by educational leaders in the changing landscape that is today's schools. But with every challenge comes an opportunity: an opportunity to change, to grow, to develop, and to lead others to be better tomorrow than they were today. As leaders, we accomplish those tasks in part by continuing our own learning process, by seeking out new ideas and putting them into practice. Sharing and promoting actionable ideas is the purpose of the *School Leadership Review*. Learn; grow; lead.

Pauline M. Sampson, Ph.D.  
Editor

Scott Bailey, Ed.D.  
Assistant Editor

Kerry L. Roberts, Ph.D.  
Associate Editor



## ***The Impact of High Stakes Testing on School Leadership***

***Yanira Oliveras-Ortiz<sup>i</sup>***

***The University of Texas at Tyler***

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### **A Former Principal's Conundrum**

As I observed and recorded a classroom teacher at the beginning of the spring semester, I remembered how much I enjoyed working with teachers to help them grow and become master teachers. While reflecting on this master teacher's lesson, I pondered how drastically things have changed since I became a school administrator in 2001. I was amazed when the advanced academics teacher mentioned the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) need a source for STAAR on a number of occasions throughout her lesson. The intent of her comments was to bring awareness to these young learners about the upcoming tests.

As I walked around the classroom, I noticed packets of STAAR "*decontextualized test preparation*" (Firestone, Schorr & Monfils, 2004) materials. I was reminded once again of the changes that education has endured in the last 15 years. Having worked with this particular teacher in the past, I felt comfortable approaching her about what I had witnessed, an unusual focus on STAAR in an advanced academics classroom. When I asked her, she explained that her supervisors had given her a class set of STAAR preparation materials to use along with the directive to "block off an hour of the day to go over the STAAR preparation materials".

Not only was I surprised by the teacher's instructional practices, but by the principal's directive to stop instruction of the district's curriculum to go over "*decontextualized test preparation*" (Firestone et al., 2004) materials. The principal who had issued the directive was known and well respected by his colleagues for being an advocate of strong instruction. He was known for believing that if teachers focused on providing students with strong learning opportunities aligned to the curriculum and the students' needs, there was no need to use "*decontextualized test preparation*" materials. The principal was known for saying, "Strong instruction takes care of test scores!"

I left the school disappointed! I was mortified that a principal who had been an advocate of good instruction for over 20 years, and a teacher who worked with advanced students had opted to use "*decontextualized test preparation*" materials in an effort to increase STAAR scores. I was determined to understand and shed some light on the reasoning behind the actions of a principal who issued a directive undermining his own personal and instructional beliefs.

The intent of the study was to shed some light onto the reality of the pressure school principals face under the implementation of high-stakes tests, such as the Texas STAAR. This manuscript provides suggestions for principals and educational leadership programs to tackle the challenges principals face under the current state testing programs.

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<sup>i</sup> Dr. Yanira Oliveras-Ortiz may be contacted at [yoliverasortiz@uttyler.edu](mailto:yoliverasortiz@uttyler.edu).

## **Contextual Framework**

Having a good teacher is the most important factor in improving student achievement (Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern, & Keeling, 2009). Research has shown that teacher preparation shares a strong correlation with student achievement (Kaplan & Owings, 2001). Given the significant impact teacher effectiveness and the quality of instruction have on students' success, it is of utmost importance that school leaders ensure every child has the opportunity to receive instruction from excellent teachers. "The difference between a good and a bad teacher can be a full level of achievement in a single school year", (Hanushek as cited in Kaplan & Owings, 2001, p. 67). Although school leaders cannot control the quality of the preparation teachers bring to their schools, they can control the level of support, professional development opportunities, and the supervision they provide for their teachers.

School leaders can be steadfast instructional leaders. Instructional leadership can significantly impact student learning and success (The Wallace Foundation, 2011; Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2013). If educators are to effectively impact student learning, teachers must receive meaningful feedback from their instructional leaders so they can improve their teaching practices (Darling-Hammond, 2014). Therefore, instructional leadership cannot be overlooked or dismissed as principals deal with the pressure of producing high test scores.

### **Instructional Leadership**

The notion of principals as instructional leaders has gained attention as a result of the growing focus on accountability; however, instructional leadership is not a new phenomenon (Jenkins, 2009). Instructional leadership is the principals' efforts to impact teachers' practices in an attempt to improve student learning. Being instructional leaders is more than completing teacher evaluations when the principals judge the teachers' teaching practices. Instructional leaders spend time in the classrooms supervising and providing meaningful feedback; they use the gathered information to promote reflection and teacher growth. Highly effective instructional leaders have a set of mind frames that impact their actions (Hattie, 2015). Among those mind sets, Hattie (2015) explains that principals who effectively serve as instructional leaders "understand the need to focus on learning and the impact of teaching" (Hattie, 2015, p. 38) and "believe that success and failure in student learning is about what they, as teachers or leaders, did or didn't do. They see themselves as change agents", (Hattie, 2015, p. 38).

"Leadership is second only to classroom instruction among school-related factors that affect student learning", (The Wallace Foundation, 2011, p. 3). However, instructional leadership only begins with the campus principal. The principal has the responsibility to empower teachers and other instructional personnel to become learners and leaders in their schools. Instructional leaders who significantly impact learning create a school culture of learning, where everyone learns, and create teams that work together (Hattie, 2015). Empowering teachers to be leaders within their schools while the principals model effective instructional leadership can have a significant and positive impact on student achievement (Seashore Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom & Anderson, 2010).

## High-Stakes Testing

Regardless of the testing discourse principals agree with; the reality is that the public, parents, school boards, and central administrators continue to use high-stakes testing, such as STAAR, to measure schools' effectiveness. The use of standardized tests as a measure of Texas schools' success began back in 1979 when the first assessment program was implemented after the 66<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature (Texas Education Agency, 2012). The first administration of the Texas Assessment of Basic Skills (TABS) took place 1980 (Texas Education Agency, 2012); since then the Texas assessment program has undergone a number of revisions. The changes culminated with the development and implementation of the latest assessment program, the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR), which was first administered in 2012. Some argue that the cognitive level of the STAAR tests is higher than any other assessment program in the history of Texas accountability and high-stakes testing. The level of rigor of the STAAR tests has increased the pressure and stress among teachers and educational leaders as they aim to produce high student scores. The demands of the accountability system and the mandates to increase students' academic performance on state tests increase the principals' stress level and add pressure to an already overwhelming job (Sogunro, 2012).

In spite of lacking research to support the use of tests to determine the effectiveness of the education system, "high-stakes testing has become the reform of choice for U.S. public schools" (Jones, Jones and Hargrove, 2003, p. 1). The increasing pressure teachers feel to improve student achievement as measured by high-stakes testing has resulted in a growing trend in classrooms around the nation; teachers feel compelled to teach to the test. Teaching to the test implies teachers are altering instructional practices with the sole purpose of helping students do well on the tests, with no consideration to authentic learning of the subject matter (Firestone et al., 2004; McCollum, 2011). Firestone et al. (2004) have labeled this practice as *decontextualized test preparation*, "the planning and teaching of lessons that are loosely related to the curriculum and mainly focused on the test (page ?)." Researchers advise about the danger of using high-stakes testing as a measure of school effectiveness.

Irrespective of the principals' beliefs regarding testing and test preparation, school administrators face the reality that testing and accountability indisputably impact their jobs. Studies have found that principals can have a positive impact on students' learning and achievement (Coelli & Green, 2012; The Wallace Foundation, 2011; Seashore Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom & Anderson, 2010). However, it is up to each principal to decide how to manage and balance the fundamental responsibilities associated with school accountability, and inevitably high-stakes testing, along with the duties as instructional leaders. Yet, it is unclear how the pressure of producing high scores has impacted principals' leadership and the instructional practices implemented in their schools. It is the purpose of this study to begin to shed light onto this enigma.

## Purpose and Significance of the Study

"Numerous studies spanning the past three decades link high-quality leadership with positive school outcomes" (Hornig & Loeb, 2010, p. 66). Instructional leadership has a positive impact on teacher effectiveness and student learning. However, the implementation of STAAR seems to

have taken principals' attention away from instructional leadership. Although an important component of instructional leadership is data-driving instructional decision-making, the intensifying focus on student scores appears to require that campus leaders become data managers. Although advocates of instructional leadership suggest that principals must "free themselves from bureaucratic tasks and focus their efforts toward improving teaching and learning" (Jenkins, 2009, p. 37); the increasing value placed upon test results might be having an opposing effect. In an effort to understand the impact STAAR has on principals' leadership and their efforts toward instructional leadership, a mixed methods study was conducted among Texas principals. The study was driven by two main questions. (1) How has the implementation of STAAR changed your leadership style? (2) How do you believe the implementation of STAAR has impacted the education Texas students are receiving?

The results of the study begin to shed light onto the reality of Texas schools. The issues broached by the participating principals ought to be considered by educational leadership programs when designing principal preparation courses. With the increasing focus on STAAR results, educational leadership programs must ensure aspiring principals are well prepared to handle the pressure and challenges they will face as these principals enter educational administration in an era when the principal's success and the school's effectiveness are largely measured by test scores.

### **Methodology**

A mixed methods study was conducted early in 2015. In a mixed method design, "the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods presents a more enhanced insight into the research problem(s) and question(s) than using one of the methods independently" (Creswell, 2012; Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013; Hong & Espelage, 2011, as cited in Caruth, 2013, p. 113). A random group of principals from four large school districts across Texas completed a survey designed to understand the principals' perceptions regarding the impact STAAR testing implementation has had on their leadership, their priorities and education in general. Twenty principals voluntarily participated; the participants' years of experience as campus principals ranged from first-year to veteran principals with over 15 years of experience. Principals were asked to answer questions using a Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (one), disagree, agree, and strongly agree (four). In addition, an open-ended question was included to give principals the opportunity to share their thoughts about the changes principals have experienced as leaders since the implementation of the latest testing program in Texas: STAAR.

In an effort to validate the survey findings and further delve into the principals' perspectives, follow-up interviews were conducted. Convenience sampling (Creswell, 2013) was used given the availability and willingness of some survey participants to be interviewed. Five experienced principals, with three to fifteen years of principal experience, shared their experiences and thoughts regarding STAAR testing and the impact the implementation of such a rigorous test has had on their leadership. The information gathered through the survey was analyzed using Qualtrics. The open-ended question and interview answers were analyzed in search for patterns among the principals' responses.

## Results

The mean scores for survey questions are presented in Table 1. The Likert scale ranged from one representing strongly disagree to four being strongly agree. The questions are presented from the highest mean score, representing the highest degree of agreement with the statement, to the lowest mean score. When reading the questions and the mean scores, it is important to notice that the statement “The pressure of having high STAAR scores has had NO impact on the way I lead” was reverse scored.

**Table 1: All Principals - Mean Scores per Survey Question**

Survey Question	Mean Score
I feel that the importance given to the STAAR test has damaged the quality of instruction in our classrooms.	3.5
This year, my focus continues to be improving instruction because good instruction will take care of the scores.	3.2
This year, I worried about data and scores more than any other year in my career as a school administrator.	3.2
Because of the pressure I'm under to produce high STAAR scores, I have made decisions that I would not have made in my previous years as a school administrator	3.0
I regularly worry that I might lose my job due to my students' STAAR scores.	2.8
The pressure of having high STAAR scores has had NO impact on the way I lead.	1.6*

\*The statement was reverse scored.

The statement with the highest mean was “I feel that the importance given to the STAAR test has damaged the quality of instruction in our classrooms” with a mean score of 3.5; only one out of the participating principals (n=20) disagreed with the statement and none strongly disagreed. Similarly, a high number of principals indicated that they believe that the pressure of producing high STAAR scores has impacted the way they lead. The statement “The pressure of having high STAAR scores has had NO impact on the way I lead”, which was a reverse score, had a low mean score (1.6) or a reverse mean score of 3.4 with only one principal agreeing with the statement “The pressure of having high STAAR scores has had NO impact on the way I lead”.

Whereas the majority of the principals surveyed believe the implementation of STAAR has damaged the quality of instruction in the classrooms of their district, and the pressure of producing high STAAR scores has impacted principals' leadership, 18 principals (90 percent) agreed or strongly agreed that by focusing on improving instruction, the scores will take care of themselves, with a mean score of 3.2. Likewise, the statement “In 2014-2015, I worried about data and scores more than any other year in my career as a school administrator” had a mean score of 3.2. Although not as high a mean score, “because of the pressure I'm under to produce high STAAR scores, I have made decisions that I would not have made in my previous years as a school administrator” had a mean of 3.0. Sixty-five percent of principals agreed or strongly agreed that the pressure of producing high STAAR scores impacted principals' decisions and influenced their actions. On a related issue, 60 percent of the principals indicated they agreed or

strongly agreed with the statement “I regularly worry that I might lose my job due to my students’ STAAR scores,” resulting on a mean of 2.8.

Some of the participating principals provided clarifying statements as they answered the open-ended question, “If your leadership style or your focus as a school administrator has changed since the implementation of STAAR, please explain how.” A principal wrote, “While I am still very instructionally focused, I find myself losing time with students and with teachers while I am looking at data.” Another principal explained the implementation of STAAR has put “Much more pressure on staff to assure that students are successful and much more time trying to figure out how to keep the pressure from ‘killing’ all of us”. A veteran principal answered the open-ended question by stating:

I have the wisdom of experience to know how to appropriately balance the two (the high demands and level of stress with ensuring that my staff utilizes best practices for daily instruction). However, I still feel pressured to drive my teachers, sometimes to the point of exhaustion, just to get better scores. They give up everything, including family time, so they can continue to work with students to produce better scores so our school will not be labeled as a failure. I simply can't ask them to give any more than they are already giving.

The same principal, on her thirteen year as the principal of a large Title 1 school, added:

I feel that I have to constantly work on ensuring that my staff feels confident and supported just so they don't burn out and give up. The joy has been sucked right out of teaching because of the high demands of the test. Accountability is needed and is good. It does force us to work more diligently, but it has reached extreme levels.

Another veteran principal on her eleventh year as a principal simply stated, “One test cannot measure quality teaching and learning.”

In an effort to delve deeper into the principals’ perceptions and in an effort to gain a better understanding of their reasoning behind their agreement with the statements with higher means, interviews were conducted. Patterns were easily identified across the principals’ reflections.

### **How Testing has Impacted Instruction**

The importance of accountability was understood and regarded as an important component of the education system; however, principals considered the disproportionate weight put on the tests as a measure of educational excellence and success damaging to education. A participant in her fourth year as a campus principal said:

STAAR has damaged the quality of instruction by putting too much focus on a single data source instead of a portfolio of learning activities and formative, summative assessments, or other diagnostic tools that can help teachers help students progress. Students, parents and teachers experience undue stress about one test which leads to burn out.

A principal in her seventh year as a principal said “I definitely think the importance given to STAAR has damaged the quality of instruction. The emphasis has become only about getting students to pass.”

Another principal, in her third year as campus principal, explained her thinking regarding the impact STAAR has had on instruction by saying:

The focus on testing and on-going assessment is taking the joy out of learning for the students and the joy out of teaching for the teachers. It is the elephant in the room (when allowed to enter) steps on everything and makes a huge mess in the process.

When asked to further explain why she thought the focus on STAAR has damaged the quality of instruction, the same principal explained:

It seems that when a community focuses on assessment, they use excessive assessment progress monitor. We become obsessed with the ability to mark mastery on each TEKS (the state’s standard) rather than having a deep understanding of the objectives and determining best practices on how to teach the objective for mastery. We force ourselves to believe that we have to use a paper and pencil test to measure growth, when there are so many other alternatives for formative and summative assessments that would achieve the same goal but allow students to express their learning in more creative and individual ways, for example, portfolio’s, project’s, blogging, visual arts, debate, etc.

The pattern is clear; principals believe the pressure related to STAAR appears to have taken the joy out teaching as a result of the increasing pressure to produce high scores on a one-day assessment, which might not measure all content students have learned and deepened knowledge of over the school year. It is important to notice that none of the participants expressed disagreement with the importance of assessment and accountability, but rather with the disproportionate weight the state assessments carry within the school system.

### **Instructional Leaders**

All interviewed principals expressed their commitment to serving as instructional leaders and shared how these principals managed to balance their duties while monitoring and holding teachers accountable for student achievement. All the principals discussed the value they place on instructional leadership. One explained her efforts by saying:

At the beginning of the year we put our new teachers into groups based on the number of years of experience. Cohort 1 were our new teachers, cohort 2 were in their second year of teaching, and Cohort 3 were our teachers with 3-4 years of teaching experience. We planned out different professional development topics to cover with each of the groups. Some of the weeks cohorts attended the same professional development. However, we knew each group had different needs so we tried our best to meet those needs.

While another principal shared that her administrative team conducted over 1,300 walk-through classroom visits, in an effort to meet the district’s expectations of a weekly minimum number of

walk-throughs, the principal placed the value in the follow-up conversations about teaching and learning her team had with teachers following some of the observations. All the interviewed principals indicated that their efforts to serve as their campus instructional leader were unquestionably impacted by STAAR. They shared that they heavily focused on coaching and supporting STAAR-tested grade levels and content areas, even though they recognize the importance all content areas and grade levels have on the school's success. One of the participants indicated:

We worked with individual teachers and gave constant feedback but the push was in grades 3-5. We did pour extra support into the rooms and had all extra bodies working with small groups and providing tutoring outside the instructional day.

Mrs. White, an interview participant, is a well-respected, successful veteran principal, who was known for producing high test scores while coaching teachers to implement research-based instructional practices. Although still successful and young, Mrs. White decided to retire at the end of the 2014-2015 due to the unreasonable pressure to produce high-scores. She expressed her frustration by stating:

The pressure has reached a level that is driving good teachers and administrators to leave the profession. How will that benefit our students when all they ever have is a teacher who is in their first to fifth year of teaching because teachers burn out after a few years and leave? If we lose all of the veteran teachers and administrators there is no one to help grow the incoming educators. It is all too much. One test should not be the sole identifying factor of a child's education, the determinant of their future, and the sole accountability factor of whether or not a teacher or school is successful.

All principals shared Mrs. White's frustration and concerns about the future of education and educational leadership. They are troubled by the increasing focus on test scores and worry that it will only continue to increase with time.

### **Recommendations for Current School Leaders**

Although there are limitations in this study due to the size of sample population, there is an unquestionable agreement among the participating principals that the implementation of the STAAR tests has negatively impacted their leadership and the instructional practices being implemented in their schools. The influence the tests and the accountability system have on principals and their role as instructional leaders should not be dismissed by current administrators and principal preparation programs. Educational leaders must find a balance between the pressure to produce high scores and their responsibility as instructional experts in charge of building capacity among district teachers. Similarly, educational leadership programs must find ways to address and prepare aspiring principals for the inherent pressure and responsibility related to the STAAR tests and the Texas accountability system.

The principals who participated in this study understand the pressure all campus principals are under to produce high scores. However, the interviewed principals have made it their mission to find ways to work under the pressure of the new accountability system, and continue to promote



good instruction and what is right for children, without succumbing to the innate pressure of high-stakes testing. Some skeptics might say it is easier said than done; however, all the interviewed participants have found a way to establish that balance. Their schools have met or exceeded the state's accountability standards while staying true to their educational and instructional beliefs. Throughout the interviews, the principals shared how they have successfully found a way to balance their roles as principals in an era of accountability. Based on the findings of the study, the recommendations for current school administrators include: 1) establish systems that facilitate data analysis, 2) build principals' and teachers' instructional leadership capacity to enable shared responsibility and leadership, and 3) establish systems to monitor student performance and facilitate targeted instructional interventions.

### ***Recommendation 1.***

Principals need to develop systems in which data can be analyzed and used to guide instruction keeping in mind research-based instructional and assessment practices. Principals must build capacity among teachers to develop authentic assessments that measure the students' mastery of the standards without overly relying on multiple-choice test. The analysis of the data should facilitate instructional discourse between teachers and campus administrators with the goal of developing strong instructional plans and targeted interventions. By promoting data-driven decisions that support standards-based instruction, principals can monitor teachers' and students' performance and intervene when appropriately. A well designed data-analysis system allows teachers and administrators to engage in conversations throughout the year to ensure close standards-alignment and student success.

### ***Recommendation 2.***

Principals should take their own professional development as seriously as principals take teachers' development. Principals must find ways to build their own capacity to serve as an instructional leader to help teachers understand the importance of standards alignment and the use of research-based instructional practices. As instructional leaders, principals should serve as coaches to their teachers. When visiting classrooms, they should provide meaningful feedback for teachers to develop their instructional skills. Principals must be cognizant that "a teacher's effectiveness (is) the most important factor for schools in improving student achievement", (Weisberg et al., 2009, p. 3), as well as the impact their efforts as instructional leaders have on student learning. "Highly effective principals raise the achievement of a typical student in their schools by between two and seven months of learning in a single school year", (Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2013, p. 63). Therefore, principals must take their responsibility to develop their teachers' instructional skills seriously. In order to avoid the management of the school getting in the way of instructional leadership, campus leaders ought to develop a schedule to protect their time with teachers.

Instructional leadership goes beyond visiting classrooms and using data to drive instruction. Instructional leaders empower their teachers to be leaders and share the leadership responsibilities. Teacher leaders bring an irreplaceable set of skills that principals should leverage. Principals should not be the only instructional leader on campus; they must rely on teachers' expertise. Instructional leaders ought to empower teachers to lead and help each other.

Principals should establish leadership teams and empower teachers by developing their leadership and instructional skills, involving them in the decision-making process, so that the teacher leaders can in turn empower their colleagues.

### ***Recommendation 3.***

In an era of accountability, successful principals must also establish systems to monitor student performance. Not only should principals monitor the performance on assessments but observe students' performance in class and their educational history. It should be the principal's responsibility to oversee the intervention teachers are implementing to help struggling students. Additionally, principals should support teachers when students are struggling, particularly when the teachers are at a loss for what to do to support the students and help them be successful. The responsibility of identifying ways to help struggling students should not be the teachers' sole responsibility; as instructional leader, the principal should support teachers in the effort to close the performance gap of struggling students.

Although the impact of STAAR on the principals' leadership cannot be dismissed, the participating principals have successfully managed the pressure of the test and their role as instructional leaders by implementing the aforementioned recommendations. However, an important detail mentioned by the interviewed principals was the fact that they do not work in isolation. They all work with strong teams on their campuses and are all part of principal professional learning communities in their districts. Whether or not the district provides a structure for collaboration among principals, principals ought to take the initiative to reach out to others and develop collegial relationships among principals to support each other in their quest for educational excellence under the insurmountable amount of pressure to produce high scores.

### **Recommendations for Educational Leadership Programs**

Aspiring principals must enter school administration with an awareness of the realities they will face as school principals. Although educational leadership programs cannot dictate the type of data monitoring a future principal implements, the quality of his/her instructional leadership, or the way he/she monitors student performance, educational leadership instructors ought to help aspiring principals understand the importance of the previously mentioned recommendations. The implications of the impact of STAAR and state accountability have on the job of the principal cannot be overlooked by educational leadership programs. In an effort to begin creating an awareness and develop the required skills to succeed as a principal in the current education system, educational leadership programs should consider the following recommendations.

Educational leadership programs must educate aspiring principals in the current accountability system so they go into their first administrative job with an awareness of the implications the STAAR results have on their job and their schools. Future principals must understand the importance of the accountability system but also understand how to leverage the data received from the state to positively impact student learning and achievement.

While creating an awareness and understanding of the accountability system is critical to the

success of any future principal, educational leadership programs must also develop aspiring principals' instructional leadership skills. Principal preparation programs must develop future educational leaders who understand and are capable of balancing the pressure of producing high test scores with the implementation of research-based instructional strategies, while avoiding the excessive use of the “*decontextualized test preparation*”. Educational leadership programs can develop aspiring principals' skills by providing them with learning opportunities to develop a strong understanding of instructional models proven to prepare students for the future as well as for the tests. Future educational leaders need a strong curriculum and instruction background and it is the principal preparation programs' responsibility to develop such a foundation.

All principal preparation programs in the state of Texas aim to prepare future leaders for the state principal certification exam and the duties of the principalship. However, educational leadership instructors must find a way to prepare aspiring principals for the test while preparing them for the reality of job. We cannot ignore the heavy impact the STAAR test and the accountability system have on the principalship. Therefore, educational leadership programs must prepare principals to serve as instructional leaders. In 2016-2017, teachers and principals across the state of Texas will be evaluated using the new state evaluation systems. The Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS), and the Texas Principal Evaluation and Support System (T-PESS), will require principals to serve as instructional leaders. The success of the principal as measured on the new evaluation system will not heavily rely to STAAR scores or the accountability system; principals will be evaluated based on personal goal performance as set by the principal and the supervisor. Educational leadership programs must prepare future principals to serve and succeed in an education system valuing both instructional leadership and test scores.

By providing aspiring principals with opportunities to engage in the analysis of scenarios, the analysis of assessment and teacher observation data, educational leadership programs could begin to develop the future leaders' critical thinking and instructional leadership skills. If future leaders are going to be successful campus administrators, they must leave educational leadership programs with a strong understanding of effective instructional practices. Educational leaders must enter the field confident in their abilities to find a balance between the pressure of producing high scores and serving as instructional leaders.

Ultimately, educational leadership programs must find a balance as well. Aspiring principals deserve to be prepared for the principal certification test while experiencing meaningful, relevant learning opportunities that prepare them for educational leadership in an era when principals' and schools' success will be measured by state tests. If educational leadership programs succeed, future educational leaders will successfully balance the pressure of the job under a test-driven accountability system while advocating for children by promoting research-based instructional practices.

### **Closing Thoughts**

Current and aspiring principals must develop their knowledge and skills to effectively find a balance between testing and best practices of curriculum and instruction. Students enter school with a wide range of needs only addressable when teachers and school leaders focus on good instruction and what educators know is good for children. While relying on “*decontextualized*

*test preparation*” materials might prepare students for the tests, educational leaders have the ethical responsibility to answer the following question: Are we truly preparing students for the future by succumbing to the pressure of the tests and excessively relying on test preparation materials?

In order for principals to grow teachers and help teachers improve instruction, principals must find the balance referenced throughout this work. School accountability has its place in the education system; however, educational leadership programs and current school leaders must find ways to diminish the negative impact the pressure of producing high scores has on principals’ leadership styles and the instructional practices valued and implemented in their classrooms. Educational leadership programs have the responsibility to prepare aspiring principals for the reality of the job so principals do not find themselves asking an advanced academics teacher to stop instruction to practice for a test when the instructional leader strongly believes those practices are not in the students’ best interest. The STAAR tests and the accountability systems are here to stay. Educational leaders must find the way to succeed while continuing to advocate for students, keeping in mind the true reasons for the decision to become educators so many years ago. One would be hard pressed to find an educator who went into teaching to prepare students for a test!

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## ***The Augmentation of Bilingual/Bicultural Courses in Educational Administration Core Requirements***

*Ava J. Muñoz<sup>i</sup>*

*Texas A&M University--Commerce*

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“Cultural competence should be a fundamental aspect of school principals’ preparation and practice” (Hernandez & Kose, 2012, p. 513). However, educational leadership programs have been remiss, and somewhat lackadaisical, in exploring and including bilingual/bicultural curricular content in their principal leadership programs (Hernandez & Kose, 2012). Presently, few or minute advances in increasing bilingual/bicultural knowledge in the curricular content of educational leadership course requirements is the norm. Moreover, “when these topics are introduced, they are often special topics courses or seminars that are not part of the core curriculum of leadership preparation” (López, 2003, p. 70).

Although meeting the needs of all students (PL 107-110, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001) is a common outcry espoused by most legislators, educators and community action groups, some children are being left behind due to principals’ inability to recognize the needs of diverse students. Moreover, when principals were asked to list the reasons the principalship has become a less popular job, one of the answers found on a national study was “educating an increasingly diverse student population” (Owings, Kaplan & Chappell, 2011, p. 217).

The amount of Bilingual/Bicultural Course requirements currently included in Texas educational administration M.Ed., programs is not a high priority, as evidenced by the number of institutions belonging to the two largest Texas university systems [The University of Texas (UT) and Texas A&M University (A&M)], not including one or more bilingual/bicultural courses in their Educational Administration, M.Ed. core curriculum. Much needed, but abysmally absent, are unique courses such as, *Class, Gender, and Race in Schools*, a non-core course offered by a leading Texas institution which specifically addresses “the problem of the public educational system’s delivery of unequal academic results to students of different classes, genders, and races. It focuses on a comprehensive, research-based understanding of educational inequities and on methods to develop schools that give all students an equal opportunity for academic achievement” ([http://catalog.utexas.edu/graduate/fields-of-study/education/educational-administration/graduate-courses/.](http://catalog.utexas.edu/graduate/fields-of-study/education/educational-administration/graduate-courses/))

### **Review of Literature**

#### **Theoretical Framework**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) in education as defined by Delgado & Stefancic (2012), is a “scholarly movement that applies critical race theory to issues in the field of education, including high-stakes testing, affirmative action, hierarchy in schools, tracking and school discipline, bilingual and multicultural education, and the debate over ethnic studies and Western principles”

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<sup>i</sup> Ava J. Muñoz may be reached at [ava.munoz@tamuc.edu](mailto:ava.munoz@tamuc.edu).

(p. 161). The CRT framework is an instrument which assists in educating individuals, regarding the very real and often too common marginalizing and repressive societal practices imparted on certain ethnic groups (Rocco, Bernier & Bowman, 2014). Additionally, Critical Race Theory in Education views educational practices through the lens of equity and justice for all students (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

The 5 tenets of CRT in Education, as mentioned by Savas (2014), are as follows:

- (1) Intercentricity of race and racism with other forms of subordination.
- (2) Challenge to dominant ideology.
- (3) Commitment to social justice.
- (4) Centrality of Experimental Knowledge.
- (5) A transdisciplinary perspective. (pp. 210-211)

Looking through the commitment to social justice lens of CRT, one may ascertain that the offering of culturally sensitive core curriculum in the educational administration, M.Ed. program would indicate that a higher education institution was aware of and intent on providing an equitable education for all its current and future students.

### **Racial Diversity**

The United States of America's growing population is quickly increasing its diverse population. Throughout the next 20 years, Whites will incorporate a diminishing part of the U.S. population (Gollnick and Chinn, 2013). Presently, one-third of the United States' population identifies as African-American, Latino, Asian American, or American Indian (Gollnick and Chinn, 2013). It is estimated that ethnically and culturally diverse individuals will encompass half the United States' population within the next three decades (Gollnick and Chinn, 2013). Consequently, Davis, Gooden & Micheaux (2015) offer "that race as an educational issue may become even more pressing as the U.S. student population grows increasingly diverse" (p. 338). Due to the exponential growth to "society's diverse cultural backgrounds, it is natural that there will be cultural and ethical inconsistencies" and in terms of education, this means school administrators should instill that "students learn about the core democratic value of equality, which dictates that Americans have the basic right of equal treatment regardless of background, belief, economic status, race, religion, or sex" (Beyer, 2011, p. 7).

Students must learn that as Americans, they are entitled to equal treatment, benefits and rewards, regardless of their ethnic makeup (Beyer, 2011). Furthermore, Brookfield (2014) asserts that individuals must be ready to challenge the status quo or "grumble"; "when people really believe that they 'mustn't grumble,' then the system is safe" (p. 422). Making yourself heard, by making noise, helps to notify the organization you are not in agreement with current policies and/or practices and are seeking to bring about change (Brookfield, 2014). For children to fully integrate the mindset of equitable opportunities for all, the school leader must operate a school environment reflective of this practice.

### Texas Public School Enrollment (EE-12<sup>th</sup> Grade)

Besides substantially increasing enrollments by “more than 19%, over the past decade” ([http://www.tea.state.tx.us/news\\_release.aspx?id=25769810475](http://www.tea.state.tx.us/news_release.aspx?id=25769810475)), Texas public schools are steadily increasing their numbers of “ethnically and culturally diverse” students ([http://www.tea.state.tx.us/news\\_release.aspx?id=25769810475](http://www.tea.state.tx.us/news_release.aspx?id=25769810475)). As presented in the Texas Education Agency (TEA) report, *Enrollment in Texas Public Schools 2012-2013*, over half of the student population is currently Hispanic, a little over a fourth of the student population is White, almost thirteen percent are African American, less than four percent are Asian and less than two percent are multiracial (see Table 1).

Table 1

*Student enrollment in Texas Public School by Population Race and Ethnicity, EE-12<sup>th</sup> Grade*

Race and Ethnicity of Student Population	Percentage of Student Population by Race and Ethnicity
Hispanic	51.30 %
White	30.00 %
African American	12.70 %
Asian	03.60 %
Multiracial	01.80 %

TEA, 2012-2013

A significant increase in 4 of the 5 groups was observed, while the White group exhibited a steady decline in the number of public school students. Also, interestingly, “the number of bilingual or English as a Second Language increased by 46.9 percent” ([http://www.tea.state.tx.us/news\\_release.aspx?id=25769810475](http://www.tea.state.tx.us/news_release.aspx?id=25769810475)) between the decade starting on 2002-2003 through 2012-2013.

### Texas Public Universities Enrollment by Ethnicity of Student Populations (4 year institutions, only)

A little less than a fourth of White, high school graduates, enrolled in a 4 year, Texas Public University in 2010-2011, while a smaller fraction of Hispanic high school graduates, or 15.20%, enrolled in a Texas Public University, as well. African American high school graduates enrolled at a rate of 21.64 %, while Asian students had the highest rate of enrollment, 39.33%. Multiracial high school graduates' enrollment rate was that of 22.83% (see Table 2).



Table 2

*Student enrollment in Texas Public Universities Enrollment by Ethnicity of Student Population (4 year institutions, only) for 2010-2011*

Ethnicity of Student Population	Percentage of Students by Ethnicity
Hispanic	15.20%
White	23.69%
African American	21.64 %
Asian	39.33 %
Multiracial	22.83 %

TEA, 2013

**Texas Public Universities Enrollment by Level of Degree Conferred (4 year institutions, only)**

Texas Public Universities conferred a total of 22,586 Baccalaureate, 5,268 Master’s and 287 Doctoral degrees to Hispanic students during the 2011-2012 school year. White students had 44,634 Baccalaureate, 15,473 Master’s and 1,374 Doctoral degrees conferred, as well. African American students had 8,408 Baccalaureate, 3,000 Master’s and 193 Doctoral degrees conferred, while Asian students had total of 6,221 Baccalaureate, 1,679 Master’s and 74 Doctoral degrees. Students identifying themselves as other, had 2490 Baccalaureate, 1,597 Master’s and 74 Doctoral degrees conferred (see Table 3).

Table 3

*Texas Public Universities Enrollment by Level of Degree Conferred (4 year institutions, only) for 2011-2012*

Ethnicity of Student Population	Number of Students by Level of Degree Conferred		
	*B	*M	*D
Hispanic	22,586	5,268	287
White	44,634	15,473	1,374
African American	8,408	3,000	193
Asian	6,221	1,679	150
Other	2,490	1,597	74
Total	84,339	27,017	2,078

\*B: Baccalaureate, \*M: Master’s, \*D: Doctoral;  
TEA 2013

Although, more than half or 51.30% of the EE-12<sup>th</sup> grade student population identifies as Hispanic (Table 1). Only, 15.20% of Hispanic students enroll in 4 year, Texas Public University (Table 2). Consequently, 26.78% of Hispanic students earn a Baccalaureate degree, while, less than 20% or 19.50% receive a Master's degree, and 13.81% earn a doctoral degree (Table 3).

### **Principals**

Davis, et al. (2015) pointed out that school leaders who claim to address the needs of all students, regardless of their differences, are more likely to implement a “one size fits all” leadership policy in his/her school, benefitting no one, possibly, hindering all. Principals’ best practices include shaping school culture and creating an environment in which teachers are empowered (Mullen & Jones, 2008). “If schools are going to improve, principals must focus their efforts not only on student achievement, learning, and accountability, but also on facilitating the development of teachers as social justice workers committed to citizenship, ethics, and diversity” (Mullen & Jones, 2008, p. 331). “Successful principals must be examples of integrity, respect, fairness and trust at all times. They must be aware of the “importance of people in the school community; thus, they support and develop teachers, providing professional development opportunities” (Lumpkin, 2008, p. 23).

Magno & Schiff (2010) found that school leaders should maintain a student-centered focus when dealing with diverse populations, particularly schools with a growing immigrant population. It is acknowledged that school leaders are one of the most integral parts in developing and establishing a school’s culture, which is highly inclusive of respect and tolerance for all students’ beliefs and practices (Magno & Schiff, 2010; Mullen & Jones, 2008). In addition, “school leaders are essential in helping to raise student achievement and build successful schools in which all students thrive” and perhaps the key to this involves tapping into the contributions that the immigrant population can make to the school community” (Magno & Schiff, 2010, p. 87).

The culturally responsive school leader must be a catalyst for the equitable inclusivity of all students; allowing all students to feel welcomed and cherished and aware that they all are an integral part of the success or failure of their school’s culture. (Magno & Schiff, 2010; Mullen & Jones, 2008). The culturally responsive school leader must make the effort to know what programs are required for achieving student success. “Principals and teachers must work together to shape policy, create curriculum, enhance instructional practice, and, importantly, improve education for all children” (Mullen & Jones, 2008, p. 329).

### **Administrators’ Bilingual Education Knowledge**

*The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB)* declares that all students will be English proficient. Unfortunately, the route or process students will need to take does not encompass all students, especially those whose first language is not English. This leaves “English language learners and other diverse children” in a situation which “further legitimize(s) the dominant group’s hold over the educational process by perpetuating pedagogies that stifle minority cultures and affirm(s) the dominant culture’s values, interests, and concerns” (Garcia, 2004, p. 38). In

order to feel valuable, students must see all aspects of their culture as integral and of high value to all societies.

Although few administrators claim to be knowledgeable on how to efficiently monitor their ELL (English Language Learners) programs, it is critical that they expertly “observe classroom instruction on a regular basis to ensure that teachers are meeting the affective, linguistic, and cognitive needs of ELLs” (Seidlitz, Base, Lara, & Rodriguez , 2014, p. 17; ). An ELL program cannot be appropriately evaluated when the observing administrator has little to no knowledge of what objectives are encompassed in an effective ELL curriculum (Brookfield,2014).

Additionally, limited knowledge in addressing the needs of ELL programs hinders the campus administrator when attempting to hire the most competent staff for this program (Hernandez & Kose, 2012). “When hiring in the process of employing bilingual teachers, administrators must keep in mind the following criteria:

- Ensure that there are sufficient numbers of teachers assigned to bilingual/ESL programs
- Ensure that they hold the appropriate credentials to teach ELL students
- Ensure that everyone understands their role in supporting the ELL students and the bilingual ESL programs (Seidlitz, et al., 2014, p. 67).

### **Purpose of the Study**

All public school students are deserving of and must be offered an equitable education. Although research exists “concerning both school and classroom conditions that are helpful for students from economically disadvantaged families and those with diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds” (Wallace Foundation, 2004), little is mentioned in the literature regarding how educational administration programs are addressing the need for disseminating equitable practices information to their principalship students.

Unfortunately, diversity content related information has been infrequently included in university Educational Administration programs, which would be of great value to the aspiring school administrator when attempting to meet the needs of all the diverse student populations (Hernandez & Kose, 2012).

The purpose of the study is to inform educational administration educators of the minute number of bilingual/bicultural courses required in their current educational administration programs and the critical need for offering more numerous, in-depth, inclusive, and informative bilingual/bicultural courses. The following research questions guided this quantitative study:

1. What is the number of bilingual/bicultural courses included in universities belonging to the University of Texas or Texas A&M university systems’ current educational administration programs?
2. Do HSI (Hispanic Serving Institution) universities belonging to the University of Texas or Texas A&M university systems include one or more bilingual/bicultural courses in their current educational administration programs?

**3. Do non-HSI universities belonging to the University of Texas or Texas A&M university systems include one or more bilingual/bicultural courses in their current educational administration programs?**

### **Limitations**

This study is limited to reviewing primary sources of data from extant Texas A&M University system and University of Texas system educational administration program websites. No private universities or other universities outside of the Texas A&M University system and University of Texas system were included in this study.

### **Methodology**

The research methodology and design for this study is quantitative. According to Creswell (2009), utilizing a quantitative approach will allow for the exploration of numerical values or variables to compare entities in anticipation of forming a unique outcome. Additionally, Babbie (2010) stated that quantitative research design utilizes data “analysis, or the techniques by which researchers convert data to numerical forms and subject them to statistical analyses” (p. 422).

This study is designed to inform higher education, educational administration program educators, and to facilitate a more comprehensive understanding and of the minute number of bilingual/bicultural courses required in their current educational administration programs, as well as the critical need for offering more numerous, in-depth, inclusive and informative bilingual/bicultural courses. The primary sources of data will be retrieved from extant Texas A&M University system and University of Texas system Educational Administration program websites. An unpaired T-test will be performed by utilizing SPSS 22 software to determine if a statistical significance exists between HSI and non-HSI universities and the number of core curriculum offerings, as well as if a statistical significance exists between HSI and non-HSI universities and the number of bilingual/bicultural courses included in educational administration, M.Ed. programs.

### **Findings**

#### **HSI Universities**

The preliminary findings of this study, as indicated in Table 4, demonstrate that 6 out of 8 or 75% of HSI universities belonging to the two largest University systems located in Texas, offer 1 bicultural core course in their educational administration, M.Ed. program. Exceptionally, one of the eight or 12.5% of the HSI universities offers 1 bicultural core course and 1 bilingual elective course in their educational administration, M.Ed. program. None of the 8 HSI universities offer a core bilingual course in their educational administration, M.Ed. programs.

Surprisingly, 2 out of 8 or 25% of HSI universities belonging to the two largest University systems located in Texas offer 0 bilingual/bicultural core courses in their educational administration M.Ed. program. I found the results for these 2 HSI universities alarming. How

could we possibly offer an educational administration, M.Ed. program in a HSI and not include one Bilingual or Bicultural course in the core curriculum?

**Table 4**

*Bilingual/Bicultural Course Inclusion and the number of Courses offered in Educational Administration, HSI, M.Ed. Programs*

HSI University	Bilingual/Bicultural Course Included in Educational Administration, M.Ed., Core Curriculum	Number of Bilingual/Bicultural Courses Offered
Texas A&M-1	No	0
Texas A&M-2	Yes	1
Texas A&M-3	Yes	1
The University of Texas-1	No	0
The University of Texas-2	Yes	2
The University of Texas-3	Yes	1
The University of Texas-4	Yes	1
The University of Texas-5	Yes	1

### **Non-HSI Universities**

Five out of 11, or 45%, of the non-HSI universities belonging to the two largest University systems located in Texas offer 1 bicultural core course in their educational administration M.Ed. program (see Table 5). None of the 11 non-HSI universities offer a core bilingual course in their educational administration, M.Ed. programs. Consequently, 6 out of 11 or 55%, more than half of the 11 non-HSIs universities belonging to the two largest University systems located in Texas offer 0 bilingual/bicultural core course in their educational administration M.Ed. program. More than double the amount of non-HSIs contain zero bilingual/bicultural core courses in their Educational Administration M.Ed. program curriculum.

**Table 5**  
***Bilingual/Bicultural Course Inclusion and the number of Courses offered in Educational Administration, Non-HSI, M.Ed. Programs***

Non-HSI University	Bilingual/Bicultural Course Included in Educational Administration, M.Ed., Core Curriculum	Number of Bilingual/Bicultural Courses Offered
Texas A&M-4	No	0
Texas A&M-5	No	0
Texas A&M-6	No	1
Texas A&M-7	Yes	1
Texas A&M-8	No	1
Texas A&M-9	No	0
Texas A&M-10	Yes	1
Texas A&M-11	Yes	1
The University of Texas-6	Yes	1
The University of Texas-7	Yes	1
The University of Texas-8	No	0

### **HSIs and Non-HSIs**

Taking into account both tables 2&3, Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) and Non-Hispanic Serving Institutions (Non-HSIs) have much work to do before they are able to view the playing field, much less level it. The inclusion of Bilingual/Bicultural courses in their Educational Administration, M.Ed. core curriculum is abysmally low for non-HSIs. Although HSIs, overall, are demonstrating more inclusivity in their courses, they too have leaps and bounds to take when pursuing equitable curricular instruction. Overall, 75.0% of the HSIs offer a mandatory bilingual/bicultural core course while only 45% of the non-HSIs offer a Bilingual/Bicultural core course (see Table 6).

**Table 6**  
***The Percentage of Bilingual/Bicultural Core Curriculum Courses in Educational Administration, M.Ed., Programs offered by UT and A&M System HSIs and Non-HSIs***

Institutions	Percentage Offering Mandatory Bilingual/Bicultural Core Course
UT and A&M HSIs	75.00 %
UT and A&M Non-HSIs	45.00 %

An unpaired T-test was performed to determine the statistical significance between HSI and non-HSI universities and the number of core curriculum offerings. A value of 0.3075, which has no statistical significance between the number of HSI and non-HSI universities and the number of bilingual/bicultural core curriculum courses they offer in the educational administration, M.Ed. program was established. A value of 0.3758, which indicates that there is no statistical significance between the number of HSI and non-HSI universities and the number of bilingual/bicultural courses that are offered in the educational administration, M.Ed. program was reported, too.

### **Conclusion**

It is clear that America's public schools are becoming more diverse (López, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Hernandez & Kose, 2012). According to López (2003):

Clearly, what we teach in administrator preparation programs is insufficient—especially in this rapidly changing demographic and linguistically diverse society. School leaders must be prepared to work with individuals who are culturally different and help create learning environments that foster respect, tolerance, and intercultural understanding. They must also have an awareness of the effect of racism and how it intersects with other areas of difference such as gender, sexual orientation, disability, and class oppression (p. 71).

Keeping this in mind, the two largest Texas University Systems (UT and A&M) must proactively include and increase the number of bilingual/bicultural related core courses in their educational administration programs. Our future administrators must be equipped with the necessary tools crucial to leading a successful school community. Regardless of the recommendation or school of thought, researchers tend to agree; education reform is necessary in order to meet the needs of all students. Administrators must be prepared to cultivate the wealth of culture and personal history that students have to offer (Brookfield, 2014). When students feel valued and welcome, they will strive to achieve.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

It is recommended that universities closely examine their current educational administration programs and ascertain that core courses include bilingual/bicultural courses. We can no longer exclude bilingual/bicultural courses from inclusion in the core curriculum. Our school leaders must be afforded information which will assist them in operating culturally sensitive school environments. We can no longer take for granted that future administrators will eventually learn how to confront or resolve culturally related student issues, without prior training in this area. Time is of the essence, and we must not waste a second of it.

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## ***Measuring Up: Teachers' Perceptions of a New Evaluation System***

*Darnisha Rigsby<sup>1</sup>*  
*Aldine ISD*

*Jennifer T. Butcher*  
*Lamar University*

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Teacher appraisal and evaluation systems have increased the level of teacher accountability, resulting in increased pressure to be successful in the classroom (Benedict, Thomas, Kimerling, & Leko, 2013; Derrington, 2011; Glazerman et al., 2011; Papay, 2012). As a result, several states have begun to stray from the traditional methods of evaluating teachers, thus creating their own appraisal systems in an effort to increase teacher quality and teacher accountability of student performance and success (Anderson, 2012). This approach to transform traditional teacher evaluation methods has attracted both teachers and administrators alike (Derrington, 2011).

According to Derrington (2011), administrators and teachers, who no longer approve of the traditional process of teacher evaluation, are focused on changing the evaluation system with a renewed focus on the updated accountability requirements. Due to the Race to the Top initiative spearheaded by the Obama Administration, there has been an increase in the number of states deciding to link teacher evaluation to student achievement (Anderson, 2012; Hinchey, 2010).

### **Statement of the Problem**

According to Danielson and McGreal (2000), the effort to develop curriculum standards has transferred into ensuring that evaluations of teaching are accurate and reliable. Unfortunately, many of the traditional evaluation systems that have been used offer little to no support in assisting teachers, thus leading teachers to mistrust the validity and reliability of the ratings given. Moreover, the process of developing effective teacher evaluation frameworks is not new, and has been studied tremendously (Daley & Kim, 2010; Danielson & McGreal, 2000; Hinchey, 2010; Papay, 2012; Popham, 2013; Shakman et al., 2012).

### **Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

The purpose of this phenomenological narrative study was to explore teachers' perceptions regarding the influence of one southeast Texas school district's new appraisal system on classroom instruction and student issues. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do teachers' perceptions of the district's new appraisal system compare to that of their previous appraisal system?

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<sup>1</sup> Darnisha Rigsby can be reached at [drigsby26@gmail.com](mailto:drigsby26@gmail.com).

2. How has the new appraisal framework influenced teachers regarding classroom instruction?
3. How has the new appraisal framework influenced teachers regarding student issues, such as building relationships, implementing classroom procedures, behavioral management, and parental communication?

### **Summary of the Literature**

In addition to improving classroom instruction, teacher evaluation systems primarily serve two purposes: to guarantee teacher quality and effectiveness and to encourage professional development (Danielson, 2011). Hill and Grossman (2013) recommended the development of a teacher evaluation system that focuses on the improvement of teacher quality. Additionally, Shakman et al. (2012) suggested the need for teacher evaluation systems to differentiate among teachers and their classroom instruction and student performance. However, Hill and Grossman (2013) and Toch (2008) noted that traditional teacher appraisal systems that have been predominately based on the observations of administrators, have proven to be ineffective in determining the quality of teachers, and suggest a system that goes beyond utilizing traditional checklists and generic instruments.

*Teacher quality.* According to Looney (2011), previous research has confirmed that adequately developed teacher appraisal systems, combined with quality professional development, results in improved teacher quality and student success. Moreover, Hinchey (2010) suggested that teacher quality is strongly related to other components: teacher performance and teacher effectiveness, although other researchers may identify these all as the same. The New Teacher Project (2014) noted the importance of defining good teaching quality before one can assess it, and ensuring that all individuals (teachers and instructional leaders) are able to identify attributes of good quality teaching.

*Professional development.* Gartia (2012) defined professional development as “a commitment to structured skills enhancement and personal or professional competence” (p. 1). Brown and Inglis (2013) suggested that professional development offers a wide range of options and opportunities, indicating that educators are able to receive information and training through settings other than a formal face-to-face session. Other methods of delivery include: podcasts, independent studies, videos, online courses and observations (Gartia, 2012).

### **Teacher Accountability**

Due to an increased concern in accountability, there has also been an increase in measuring teacher effectiveness (Alvarez & Anderson-Ketchmark, 2011). Alvarez and Anderson-Ketchmark (2011) and Benedict, Thomas, Kimerling, and Leko (2013) suggested that current modifications to educator appraisal frameworks indicate a renewed focus on individual teacher accountability. State departments of education have since responded, resulting in statewide tactics to address the issue of measuring teacher effectiveness accurately (Alvarez & Anderson-Ketchmark, 2011).

### ***Evaluation Measures***

Shakman et al. (2012) argued “a performance-based teacher evaluation system includes multiple measures of teacher performance and provides a range of evidence, demonstrating teacher knowledge and skills, related particularly to student achievement” (p. 3). Additionally, Hill, Charalambous, and Kraft (2012) suggested that United States has historically attempted many efforts to assess teacher quality using a variety of instruments including portfolios, content-specific assessments, and value-added scores. According to Benedict et al. (2013), it is imperative for appraisal systems to be valid, consistent, and developed so that all teachers are supported in the area of professional growth.

*Classroom observations.* Observation checklists have been used for many years to assess teacher performance, with little regard to increasing teacher effectiveness and student performance (Hill & Grossman, 2013). Earlier instruments, which included checklists and surveys, mostly concentrated on increasing the productivity of campus systems, instead of student achievement (Sheppard, 2013). Observations can both be announced or unannounced and range from one to several within one academic year (Shakam et al., 2012). However, the utilization of the checklists in teacher evaluation has proven to be quite unreliable in determining teacher effectiveness, specifically when principals observe a lesson for a brief moment (Papay, 2012).

*Portfolios and self-reports.* The submission of portfolios and teacher self-reports, including documentation and artifacts as evidence of teacher performance and student growth during that particular academic year, has become a popular option in recent teacher evaluation systems (Hinchev, 2010). Attinello, Lare, and Waters (2006) viewed portfolios as a useful element in teacher evaluation. They indicated that, like students, teachers have different abilities and needs, and a generic, standard evaluation will not provide them with the proper evaluation and supervision needed to become successful.

*Peer evaluations.* According to Goldstein (2007), studies on teacher appraisal systems have rarely questioned the influence of campus administrators in terms of quality control, partly due to the unwillingness of teachers to accept the responsibility of evaluating their peers. However, conducting regular observations and providing meaningful and significant feedback to teachers can be quite difficult for administrators, considering all the other tasks they face on an ongoing basis. Peer evaluation and review occurs when teachers assess the quality and effectiveness of other teachers (Benedict et al., 2013, Goldstein, 2007).

*Student evaluations.* According to Sheppard (2013), although students evaluating teachers is more common in colleges and universities, it is, however, becoming increasingly popular in K-12 schools. Hinchev (2010) expressed that although there may be reservations regarding students' ability to accurately assess their teachers, previous research indicated that student surveys could actually be a reliable source of information. Ripley (2012) noted that student survey answers have been found to be more accurate and reliable than any other evaluation instrument, including student assessment data and classroom observations. Ripley suggested that student surveys offer information that other evaluation factors, such as assessment scores, cannot.

***The Teacher Advancement Program.*** The Teacher Advancement Program (TAP) is a teacher evaluation model that has garnered attention in several states, including the District of Columbia (Toch, 2008). Originated in 1999 by Lowell Milken and the Milken Family Foundation, it is now managed and operated by the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (Daley & Kim, 2010; Toch, 2008). Based on Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching, The TAP system evaluates its teachers according to the following: (a) designing and planning instruction, (b) the learning environment, and (c) instruction. The framework also utilizes "19 subgroups that target such areas as the frequency and quality of classroom questions and whether teachers are teaching students such higher-level thinking skills as drawing conclusions" (Toch, 2008, p. 33).

***The Professional Development Appraisal System.*** The Professional Development and Appraisal System (PDAS) was first implemented in the state of Texas in 1997, after having been developed in 1995. Prior to the PDAS, the state recommended teacher evaluation system was the Texas Teacher Appraisal System (TTAS), which began its implementation in 1985 (Robinson, 2009). PDAS evaluated teachers on the basis of the following eight domains:

1. Active, Successful Student Participation in the Learning Process
2. Learner-centered Instruction
3. Evaluation and feedback on Student Progress
4. Management of Student Discipline, Instructional Strategies, Time/Materials
5. Professional Communication
6. Professional Development
7. Compliance with Policies, Operating Procedures and Requirements
8. Improvement of All Students' Academic Performance (Professional Development and Appraisal System, 2014; Shakman et al., 2012).

***The Charlotte Danielson Framework.*** One common evaluation system is the Charlotte Danielson Framework (Benedict et al., 2013). According to Alvarez and Anderson-Ketchmark (2011), the Danielson framework intended for teachers' self-assessment, training, attaining and retaining, mentoring, observation, and appraisal. Since its introduction in 1996, there has been a renewed focus on the framework, particularly due to recent federal government funding and foundational grants that have been geared towards implementing teacher evaluation systems that precisely measure teacher effectiveness (Alvarez & Anderson-Ketchmark, 2011).

### ***Administrative Campus Support***

One factor that affects teacher evaluations and ultimately leads teachers to abandon the field of education is the lack of support from veteran teachers, and primarily, campus administration (Schlichte, Yssel, & Merbler, 2005). The principal is critical, and is sometimes the most significant person in the minds of new teachers, particularly in regards to the evaluation process (Derrington, 2011; Roberson & Roberson, 2009). Roberson and Roberson (2009) suggested that administrators can assist teachers best by: (a) providing instructive feedback, (b) meeting regularly to determine and attempt to meet individual needs and concerns, and (c) allow opportunities for new and veteran teachers to collaborate, discussing successes and addressing challenges.

***Teacher burnout.*** Several studies have supported the notion that teachers, especially those who are employed in urban campuses, are more likely to suffer from teacher burnout, leading them to

seek employment at other campuses or in a field other than education (Greenlee & Brown, 2009; Ng & Peter, 2010; Prieto et al., 2008). Prieto et al. (2008) suggested the importance of analyzing an individual's psychological welfare and determine stress and emotional factors that could potentially hinder an educator from being successful in the classroom.

*Impact on urban campuses.* In the United States, the stereotypical image of an urban school refers to a dilapidated building located in a deprived city neighborhood in which mostly African Americans or Hispanics reside (Jacob, 2007). According to Thompson and Smith (2004), every institution that provides teacher education faces the challenge of attracting, training, and maintaining educators in urban and high need campuses. Campus leaders have realized that individuals, who lived in the same urban areas when they were children, have a better possibility at becoming successful teachers because they are already aware of the challenges the students may face (Petty, Fitchett, & O'Connor, 2012).

### **Methodology**

This phenomenological study focused on the exploration of the perceptions of teachers regarding a newly implemented appraisal system. The rationale for utilizing this particular method of study was to investigate a specific group of people who all experienced a common phenomenon and to capture detailed accounts of the participants and their experiences (Creswell, 2013). It was important for the researcher to conduct face-to-face interviews with the participants during this study for the purpose of allowing teachers to fully describe their lived experiences regarding the district's newly implemented evaluation system, in an effort to determine how the appraisal system impacts the participants' classroom instruction and management of student issues.

### ***Participants***

This study focused on teachers in a large, predominately minority, urban school district located in southeast Texas. Prior to the full implementation of the new evaluation system, the district introduced the framework and tested the appraisal system in 34 schools, which were indicated as pilot campuses. Teachers and administrators at pilot campuses were provided with the opportunity to experience the new evaluation system one academic year prior to its full implementation in 2013. Participants selected for the study were teachers at a pilot campus for the new appraisal system during the 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 academic years.

Eight participants were selected from pilot campuses within the district. The researcher utilized criterion sampling when selecting participants, ensuring that all individuals have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Participants were also selected through the use of snowball sampling, as the researcher was able to gain access to other individuals who met the criteria from those who were already participating in the study (Creswell, 2013). The participants must have worked at the same campus from 2012-2014 to obtain purposeful information regarding their experiences by having participated in the new appraisal framework for two consecutive years. Additionally, participants must have been employed by the district at least one year prior to the pilot implementation.

## ***Results and Discussion***

Major findings from the study are organized and reported by each respective research question. Additionally, emergent themes for each research question are provided.

***Research question one.*** The first research question investigated teachers' perceptions of the district's new appraisal system compared to the previous evaluation framework. Participants provided their descriptions of both evaluation systems, identified any similarities and differences, and discussed strengths and challenges of the new framework. Additionally, participants provided their thoughts on their first evaluation from the new appraisal system. Emergent themes included:

- **Objectivity** - All participants described the district's previous appraisal system, PDAS, as being subjective and based on one rater's opinion of their teaching ability. Additionally, all the participants indicated that the newly implemented appraisal system allows more opportunities for objectivity.
- **Fear of the Unknown** – Participants mentioned that it was difficult to ensure that all teachers understood the new appraisal system. They indicated that administrators should have been able to explain it more to help teachers understand the expectations.
- **Professional Responsibilities** - The participants suggested that essentially the appraisal system is looking to rate teachers in terms of classroom performance and teacher attendance.
- **Specificity and Opportunities for Reflection** - Participants mentioned that with the implementation of the new framework, they are able to monitor progress and discern individual student capabilities easily. One participant stated, "Whether I agree or not, that's what they do, they look at more specific data records... specific information." Another participant noted that specificity was a benefit with the new appraisal system. One of the requirements was to provide evidence of what one is doing in their classroom.

***Research question two.*** The second research question investigated how the newly implemented appraisal system influenced teachers in regards to classroom instruction. Participants were asked about their feelings regarding the expectations and requirements of the appraisal system. They were also asked to describe their relationship with their appraiser, and their thoughts regarding observations and conferences. Lastly, participants were asked how their instructional practices changed as a result of the new appraisal system. The following themes emerged:

- **Clearly Defined Expectations** – The participants indicated that the expectations were clear and well defined. They mentioned that they were already meeting the expectations and requirements of the new evaluation system, however, and now justification must be provided. One participant stated, "It's exactly what you're doing, just put a copy of what you're doing into your binder. You're doing everything that you're supposed to be doing. They just want to see it."
- **Open Communication** - The participants expressed having favorable relationships with their rater, regardless of whether the administrators were very knowledgeable and able to

explain in depth the new evaluation system. They enjoyed conferencing (whether it was informally or formally) with their rater.

- **Effective Teaching** - Participants expressed that the new appraisal system has allowed them to reflect more on questioning strategies, fostering a classroom where students are comfortable enough to participate in classroom discussion, and provide opportunities for students to be leaders. The participants suggested that one of the facets in being an effective teacher, is knowing the students, and being able to adjust the instruction to fit their individual academic needs.

*Research question three.* The last research question investigated how the newly implemented appraisal system influenced teachers regarding student issues, such as building relationships, implementing classroom procedures, behavioral management, and communication with parents. Emergent themes included:

- **Respect through Building Relationships** - The participants discussed building student relationships. They specifically mentioned the importance of giving and receiving respect when asked to describe their relationship with students.
- **Setting High Expectations** – Participants expressed the importance of setting high expectations and letting students know that mediocrity will not be celebrated. Additionally, one participant mentioned how he continuously pushes the students in his class, which has resulted in “great gains” in terms of student growth.
- **Various Forms of Communication** - The participants discussed utilizing several different tools when communicating with parents, e.g. phone calls, text messaging, letters, face-to-face conferences, and emails.

### **Conclusions**

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that the district’s previous appraisal system allows opportunities for objectivity and mostly relied on administrators’ observations. This conclusion based on the findings is consistent with Hill & Grossman (2013) and Toch (2008), who noted that traditional teacher appraisal systems that have been predominately based on the observations of administrators.

It can be concluded that teachers and administrators both faced fear of the unknown with the new appraisal system. There were challenges in terms of understanding the implementation of the new evaluation system accurately.

Findings indicated the difference in how observations were communicated with the teacher. Participants admitted that communication with their appraiser in regards to classroom performance was minimal under the district’s previous appraisal system, which resulted in more professional responsibilities for the administrators.

As a result of the findings, it is concluded that the new appraisal system created specificity and opportunities for reflection. The participants agreed that the new appraisal system was much more specific than PDAS, and the system seemed to be truly based on student growth and results from various data.



Findings indicated the implementation of the new evaluation system was noted as a challenging experience. It was concluded that the new system provided clearly defined expectations. This study suggests the need for appraisers to maintain open communication by observing teachers on a regular basis and conferencing with them on what they can do to become more effective. These conclusions are consistent with Roberson and Roberson (2009), who suggested that administrators can assist teachers best by: (a) providing instructive feedback, (b) meeting regularly to determine and attempt to meet individual needs and concerns, and (c) allow opportunities for new and veteran teachers to collaborate, discussing successes and addressing challenges.

Additionally, based on the findings from the interviews, it can be concluded that the new appraisal system uses more than just teacher observations as a way of determining effective teaching. Teachers are required to provide additional documentation justifying their classroom practices, and student growth through standardized test scores are also taken into consideration when rating a teacher under the new framework. This conclusion is consistent with research by Glazerman et al. (2011), who indicated that teacher evaluation systems should include information from various sources other than just classroom observations, including assessment scores and surveys. Also, based on the findings, it can be concluded that when administrators communicate and support teachers, it increases effective teaching.

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that when building a classroom environment that promotes respect through building relationships, classroom discipline and student management issues are less likely to occur. This was inconsistent with several studies that have supported the notion that teachers, especially those who are employed in urban campuses, are more likely to experience difficulties, suffer from teacher burnout, and seek employment at other campuses or in a field other than education (Greenlee & Brown, 2009; Ng & Peter, 2010; Prieto et al., 2008).

Moreover, according to Toch (2008), it is best that several informal classroom observations are conducted throughout the year, focusing on teachers' knowledge of pedagogy, classroom management techniques, professionalism, and lesson delivery. The conclusions from the findings suggest that the new appraisal system encouraged teachers to set high expectations for students. This was done by teachers adjusting classroom management techniques, providing more opportunities for leadership, and allowing students to have responsibilities in the classroom. Based on findings from the study, it was concluded that the new appraisal system influenced teachers to use various forms of communication. This allowed more opportunities for parents to understand what was happening in the classroom.

### **Implications for Practice**

This study clarified that teachers desire to do what is best for their students, regardless of evaluation system implemented in the district in which they are employed. Additionally, Benedict et al. (2013) and the findings of this study suggest that when administrators and teachers are all knowledgeable about the expectations and requirements of an appraisal system, it allows for a smoother evaluation process, ultimately resulting in increased teacher quality. Lastly, although it was determined by the findings that administrators are often busy and unable to meet with teachers on a regular basis, previous research supports the communication between

the rater and the teacher, indicating its significance to successful implementation (Roberson & Roberson, 2009). Implications for practice should include the following:

1. Offer several different avenues of open communication between the rater and teacher, not just limited to face-to-face meetings
2. Encourage peer evaluations within the campus and district, and provide opportunities for teachers to engage in discussions that promote instructional best practices, and reflection on their classroom delivery and management of student issues
3. Offer opportunities in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) provided by teachers who have earned high ratings from the new evaluation framework, allowing them to share their instructional practices, behavioral management techniques, and their management of other professional responsibilities.
4. Offer ongoing sessions or webinars to assist teachers who are still experiencing difficulty understanding aspects of the teacher evaluation system.

### **Recommendations**

This study was conducted in one urban school district in southeast Texas, it is important to consider that teachers in other school districts may or may not share the same perceptions and feelings toward their district's evaluation system. Other recommendations for future research include:

1. Interview students to investigate their perceptions regarding teachers' instructional practices and management of student issues.
2. Interview administrators to determine their perceptions regarding their role in the newly implemented appraisal system.
3. Investigate teachers' perceptions regarding the evaluation framework after at least five years of implementation.
4. Conduct a quantitative study, in an effort to determine how many teachers have been able to increase student growth as a result of the new appraisal system.
5. Conduct a quantitative study, in an effort to determine if there is a relationship between the evaluation framework, teacher retention, and job satisfaction.

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## ***A Phenomenological Narrative Study: Elementary Charter Principals' Role as an Instructional Leader***

***Ahmet F. Cetinkaya<sup>i</sup>***  
*Lamar University*

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The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (NAPCS) (2013) defined charter schools on the company website as “independent public schools allowed freedom to be more innovative, while being held accountable for improved student achievement” (p.1). Although there might be differences in their structures depending on state charter school laws and agreement between their authorizers, charter schools have been shown to have more flexibility in their educational programs and management styles in comparison with traditional public schools.

The first charter school law, chapter 265 article 9 section 3, was passed in Minnesota in 1991 (Minnesota Legislative Reference Library [MLRL], 2012). Since then, charter schools have been serving increasingly more students in K-12 settings. According to the Public Charter Schools Dashboard provided by the NAPCS (2013), there were 5,997 charter schools in operation during the 2012-2013 academic year, serving 2,278,388 students. Charter schools became 6.3% of all the public schools across the country while serving 4.6% of students nationwide. Each year, there has been a growing demand for charter schools' selection as the school of choice by parents. Charter school growth was calculated as showing a 6.7% yearly increase for the 2012-13 school year, including newly approved and closed charter schools.

The charter school movement which has been linked to educational reform has become the focus of intense interest stemming primarily from academic-oriented parents (Knaak & Knaak, 2013; Walberg, 2007). Charter schools which have been promoted as being innovators in schooling leading to improved student achievement, offer an academic choice for parents (NAPCS, 2013). Thus, the purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to explore elementary charter school principals' perceptions of their role as an instructional leader.

### **Literature Review**

Principals' roles in schools have been investigated and studied based on contemporary schools' needs to address the complex demands of high stakes accountability (Clifford, Behrstock-Sherratt, & Fetters, 2012; Germeten, 2011). There are seven specific roles of principals which include: personnel management, student management, government and public relations, external development management, finance management, long term planning for promoting schools' mission and instructional leader (Hess & Kelley, 2005; Lynch, 2012; Portin, 2004).

Grissom, Loeb, and Master (2013) examined the associations between leadership behaviors and student achievement gains. Although the researchers found “no relationship between overall time spent on instructional activities and schools' effectiveness” (p. 440), they noted positive associations between school improvement and time spent for several instructional elements such as a school's education program, teacher evaluation, and direct teacher coaching. There also has

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<sup>i</sup> Ahmet F. Cetinkaya can be reached at [afc523@gmail.com](mailto:afc523@gmail.com).

been some suggestion that principals were aware of their responsibility to build and support an effective learning environment (Cisler & Bruce, 2013).

Leana (2011) discussed principal leadership efforts in relation to school reform and summarized the beliefs of such efforts. For example, Leana found that public school principals have typically been placed at the center of instructional practice in schools and were often multitasking and dealing with many unplanned activities each day. Leana suggested that principals recorded more than 60 different tasks in a given week. Further, principals spent 57% of their time in managerial tasks like facility management and paperwork, 25% in instructional tasks, such as monitoring teachers, and 14% of their time engaged in external relations, such as parent meetings and community outreach activities. In addition, increased time that principals spent mentoring and monitoring teachers tended to have no effect on student achievement. As a result of these outcomes, Leana defined an effective school leader as the one who becomes a facilitator of teacher success rather than using the term of instructional leader. In essence, principals should provide teachers with resources to enhance collaboration among the teachers, principals' roles were critical in building social capital in schools, and there is great importance inherent in supporting teachers.

There have been studies focused on charter schools and the roles of school leaders. For example, Cravens, Goldring, and Penalzoza (2012) argued that charter school principals were significantly more likely than traditional public school principals to focus on traditional school tasks, such as managing the school building and staff and monitoring instructional improvement and instruction. Stephens (2008) compared high and low performing charter schools and pointed out evidences of high academic achievement tied to the principal's ability to enforce accountability and high expectations within the school. Stoll (2004) noted that charter school principals reported fewer positive outcomes in administrative support, reinforcement, role clarification, and compliance issues.

### **Methodology**

The current study was a qualitative study utilizing a phenomenological narrative research design to investigate the instructional leadership role of elementary charter school principals. Creswell (2013) defined narrative research as collecting "stories from individuals about individuals' lived and told experiences" (p.71). In this study exploration of a single phenomenon, principals' roles as an instructional leader was explored while focusing more on the description of experiences of participants rather than interpretations of the researcher.

Participants were six purposefully selected elementary charter school principals in Texas who have previously worked as traditional public school principals. Convenience and snowball sampling were used to identify participants. Creswell (2011) suggested that convenience sampling be used when the participants were available and willing to participate in the study, and defined snowball sampling as asking participants to recruit new participants for the study.

Criteria for inclusion in the study included that participants must have possessed a minimum of one year of experience in a charter school setting as well as past experience in a traditional public school serving similar grade levels. Qualifying participants could be removed from the

traditional public school setting no more than 10 years in order to foster a better understanding of the contemporary roles of principals. Kindergarten through fifth grade (K-5) or kindergarten through eighth grade (K-8) schools were classified as elementary schools for the purpose of this study.

An email invitation was sent to elementary charter school principals who met the participation criteria. After identifying the first principal, he or she was asked to help recruit other participants among acquaintances until the expected number of participants had been reached. Names and e-mail addresses of the target population were obtained from the Texas Education Agency's (TEA) website and charter school websites. Six elementary charter school principals, three males and three females, participated in this study. Five of the principals were White and one was Black. All schools were located in an urban area and enrollment ranged from prekindergarten to 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Additionally, all schools were rated as Met Standard in 2013 based on the Texas accountability system. Principals had one to five years of experience as charter school principals and from two to 14 years as principals in traditional public schools. Collective demographic information of the schools which had participating principals is shown in Table 1. Pseudonyms have been used for each principal.

Table 1  
*Collective information of charter schools*

Principal's Name	Grade	Enrollment	African American	Hispanic	White	Asian	Two or more Races	Econ. Disadv.
Mr. James	PK-6	440	17.7%	16.4%	61.6%	2.5%	1.8%	55.9%
Mr. Carter	K-8	271	6.6%	18.1%	64.2%	6.3%	4.4%	16.2%
Ms. Hopkins	K-5	435	11.1%	85.6%	2.2%	0.8%	-	97%
Ms. Jackson	PK-8	658	0.2%	97.9%	1.2%	0.8%	-	98.6%
Dr. Marshall	PK-8	617	82.8%	16.5%	0.3%	-	-	65.2%
Dr. Spears	K-7	153	36.6%	27.5%	18.3%	15.7%	-	40.5%

The data were gathered through face-to-face or telephone interviews. The interview prompt included questions which addressed specific research questions. Open ended interviews were audio-recorded and notes were taken during the interview. Although interviewing was the main data collection tool, artifacts, documents, and field notes were also gathered to enhance data collection procedures. The content gleaned from the interviews was transcribed and the resulting data were analyzed by identifying emerging themes. The stories of the participants were revealed, retold, and rewritten in a chronological sequence to thematically analyze their content for textual and structural descriptions based on a thematic approach. To demonstrate credibility, the researcher triangulated data sources, implemented peer review, conducted member checking, and wrote in thick, rich, detailed description.

### Findings

This study investigated leadership practices of charter school principals regarding instructional leadership. Findings suggested that charter school principals perceived their role as instructional

leaders as being actively involved with instruction, providing professional development, and wearing different hats.

### **Being Actively Involved with Instruction**

All elementary charter school principals noted the importance of being actively involved in instruction. They put teachers at the focus of instruction and talked about their practices to support good instruction. The participants specifically emphasized practices which included the following: scheduling time for vertical team and data meetings, supporting teacher morale, focusing on student learning, and providing a viable curriculum.

### **Scheduling time for vertical team and data meetings**

Spending time with teachers and scheduling vertical teaming within departments was reported as a necessity. For example Mr. James explained his practice:

We certainly try to get teachers very, very involved in instruction and so my practice as a leader is to spend a lot of time with teachers. We do vertical teaming ... for example we all meet with all the math teachers at elementary level or all science teachers at the elementary level. We have a schedule to do that. We will sit and we will talk about, you know, good instruction.

Holding data meetings are important. For example, Ms. Jackson defined herself as “data driven.” She said, “I am very much data driven, I feel like data tells us where we are, what our strengths are.” At her school, they use student data folders that include report card grades and special education information. Teachers review these student data folders on an ongoing basis. The teachers conduct meetings with parents and students to let them know about their data. She found data interpretation important for teachers in driving their instruction.

Another principal, Ms. Jackson and her administrative team check the data to determine the deficits and what to strengthen within the charter school. She said, “What we noticed, since we have a higher population of Hispanic children and they are mostly second language learners; we definitely have to strengthen our bilingual and ESL programs.” So their campus plan included employing qualified teachers to address the deficits for all students to be successful.

### **Supporting teacher morale**

Several of the principals indicated the importance of supporting teacher morale. Principals believed that teachers would much more likely deliver instruction in such an environment for students to be successful. For example, Mr. Carter believed that the teacher is the key in instruction and it is the principal’s role to shape the environment for the teachers for them to deliver instruction successfully. He said:

It’s what the students are learning. So teacher is the key. Typically based upon my past experience, keep the teachers happy and provide with the tools they need, sharpen their tools that they need and then they deliver to do. Much more likely that they deliver what students need to be successful.



### **Focusing on student learning**

The principals emphasized that in elementary charter schools, a principal's focus must be on student learning. For example, Ms. Hopkins emphasized the following:

You know, they talk a lot about importance of instructional leadership and focusing on student learning in all schools but in a charter school it's particularly critical because if that is not the principal's focus, it's not going to happen. There's no other people around that really force that issue. It's really important for a charter school principal to have a focus on instruction and be able to participate in that.

Another principal, Dr. Marshall focused on "building the capacity" of his administrative team within the building to assure that "quality of instruction is at a high standard." He tied building the capacity and quality of instruction to professional learning communities within his charter school where they were constantly looking at data to make better instructional decisions.

### **Providing viable curriculum**

Existence of a viable curriculum was identified as a necessity for quality instruction with high standards. Elementary charter school principals were very specific when they mentioned their curricula such as project based learning, New Tech curriculum, and dual language programs.

Dr. Marshall listed the components of a good instruction starting with having a viable curriculum. He noted:

We do variety of things that I do for student learning. One of the things that we try to focus on is making sure that we have, what it is called a viable curriculum. And by doing that I believe in building the capacity of my leaders within the building to assure that my quality of instruction is at a high standard. And that goes, comes through professional learning communities. And within the professional learning communities, we are constantly looking at data to determine what kind of instructional practices that accrued within the building.

Dr. Spears also talked about her curriculum and explained the details of the different components of the curriculum. She specifically emphasized a project based learning initiative, dual language program, and New Tech curriculum. Dr. Spears mentioned that project based learning has been an initiative for 6th and 7th grade students as a part of New Tech program. She added that her 6th and 7th grades have been 100% project based learning (PBL) and the charter school has provided every student a laptop for their school work. She has been purchasing laptops continually. She noted that project based learning has been hard for teachers and that it has taken three to five years for them to be good at it.

Dr. Spears's school also has a special emphasis on "dual language." The school offers three languages, English, Spanish and Chinese, for all students starting the first day of school. Social studies and science have been taught in Spanish for students to retain language. Her yearly

expense for dual language programs has been around \$50,000 to \$75,000 for books and professional development.

### **Providing Professional Development**

Three charter school principals noted that they have been using a traditional model of the professional development and appraisal system in teacher supervision, known as Professional Development and Appraisal System (PDAS). Mr. Carter mentioned that PDAS is “pretty common and widely used by most of the districts” and he said that teachers were aware of it. Mr. James has been also using PDAS in the evaluation process of teachers. Through use of PDAS, Mr. James and his administrative team visited classrooms to observe and evaluate instruction as to whether or not it was aligned with what was expected such as Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) based instruction, by using lessons provided as an extension of professional development (PD) initiatives. Mr. James added that the PDAS evaluation system was a part of a teacher’s contract.

Besides using PDAS, which includes preset guidelines and forms, Mr. Carter has used five to ten minute walkthroughs to monitor instruction in the classrooms. He summarized his role as a supervisor as walking into the classrooms and spending time monitoring instruction. He listed the areas he was looking for in teachers’ instructional practices as building skills that promote higher level thinking and positive student interest towards the lessons. For instance, he emphasized he wanted the lessons in his school to be interesting. Although he did not often make corrections to the teachers’ teaching methods, he said that he often asked his teachers “What if” questions to trigger their thinking processes toward deeper understanding in building good instructional practices. More specifically, he typically asked his teachers, “What if you were to ask your students more higher-level thinking questions?”

Mr. James was very happy with the Texas Charter Schools Association’s (TCSA) efforts during the past couple of years in providing professional development for teachers to support instruction. He has taken advantage of these TCSA professional development opportunities by making sure that his teachers benefit in order to be involved in good instructional practices. He believed that good quality professional development would improve instruction. He listed several large training initiatives his school was implementing, such as the National Math and Science training initiative, also known as “Laying the Foundation,” and a writing training initiative which was called “Writing Academy.”

In explaining the efforts to provide better professional development opportunities, Ms. Jackson talked about various mandatory trainings offered, such as reporting child abuse and blood-borne pathogens. They have been using one of the Texas regional service centers as the professional development provider extensively. She was specifically enthusiastic about professional learning communities training and trainings addressing “how to develop higher order thinking questions, how to utilize strategies that help students who are coming from a diverse backgrounds especially with those language and reading deficits.” She plans to focus more on professional learning communities and mentoring program to support teacher growth since many of the teachers at her school are inexperienced.

Dr. Marshall implemented “Saturday institutes” that had taken place during the first semester of the school year. “Saturday institutes” were professional development days for staff. He has also organized new teacher orientation and all staff orientation prior to school starting at the charter school. They have monthly meetings called “instructional PDs.” In those meetings the charter school has been using Khan Academy videos which is a free online educational platform.

Dr. Spears has been very ambitious with professional development. She brought teachers in two weeks prior to the beginning of school for professional development. Besides the mandated compliance related topics such as handbook, team building, and insurance, there have been topics directly related to instruction such as PBL and differentiation training. Last year Buck Institute trained the teachers for three days on PBL. During those two weeks Dr. Spears scheduled orientation for new incoming students where the students spent a week at school to be introduced to the school culture before the school started.

In addition, Dr. Spears discussed the culture of Safety Trust Respect and Responsibility (STRR) training. She has shaped her school culture around STRR concepts and said:

We talked a lot about how to model the STRR cultural in classroom and how to treat kids with respect, how to talk to children in a nontraditional manner, because many of our teachers even new teachers who come from traditional educational setting they tend to yell at kids. We do not yell at [our school].

She also said that they had to really work on how to teach students from poverty feel empowered.

Dr. Spears also offered another training topic, Jensen’s brain-based teaching. The charter school had a curriculum for brain-based teaching where students would be more purposeful, mindful, sympathetic, and self-reflected. Students have been taught how to do breathing and “how to use their breathing to help them being more in tuned with themselves.” In addition, Dr. Spears also scheduled monthly professional development sessions, “touch backs,” throughout the year. She added four additional PD days built into the calendar and three or four early release days for reviewing of data.

### **Wearing Different Hats**

Several of the participants specifically pointed out the variety of roles of charter school principals that needed to be carried out because of limited personnel. The charter school principals had to perform different duties to manage the schools. In addressing this issue Ms. Hopkins tied it to limited resources and added that principals had to have their “fingers in many pies to keep things going.” She pointed out limited resources by saying, “It’s typical, at least at small charter schools that I have worked with, that the amount of extra staff you have is very limited.” She added that it was hard for charter school people to specialize in something because they had to “wear different hats” to keep things going.

Ms. Jackson clarified this concept, wearing different hats, more clearly with providing examples of roles that she assumed. She said:

You know campus administrators perform several duties that you may not have to perform in the independent school district (ISD) because there are other resources and

staff available to perform those duties. But in the charter schools you wear variety of different hats. You're over attendance, you have to keep with staff, personnel matters and you also have to perform parent-teacher conferences, and conferences with your teaching staff. You are the instructional leader on the campus, you are the manager of the attendance on the campus so all the roles that possibly would be divided among several departments in ISDs, it all collapses into one role for the administrators in the charters.

### **Conclusion**

A limitation of this study is that only six charter school elementary principals were included, yet findings within the scope of this study support that these elementary charter school principals consider the instructional leadership role as important to their leadership within their schools. They are actively engaged with instruction through scheduling time for vertical team and data meetings, supporting teacher morale, focusing on student learning, and providing a viable curriculum. As recommended by Clifford et al. (2012), they implemented a variety of professional development strategies to promote instructional improvement. This study suggested that charter school principals were typically placed at the center of instructional practice in schools but that principals were often multitasking because of time and man power restrictions. Consequently, elementary charter school principals assume many different roles. The most important role is that of being the instructional leader of their school, thus they prioritize their roles because of time and man power restrictions. It should be expected that some roles will be neglected or overlooked simply because they cannot handle everything at a limited time with limited resources and staff.

Since charter schools will continue to grow and serve minority populations while addressing their challenges to provide an option for parents, it is crucial that charter school principals are supported to do their duties effectively and efficiently. The following items are strongly recommended to assist charter school principals:

- Region service centers and TCSA can build and support collaborative efforts between principals of charter schools and traditional public schools.
- TCSA and charter school boards can provide peer support by establishing a network of charter school principals (Canales, Tejada-Delgado, & Slate, 2008).
- Region service centers and TCSA can provide more training for charter school principals based on their needs such as time management and prioritizing tasks (Canales, Tejada-Delgado, & Slate, 2008).
- Charter school boards and university principal preparation programs can provide mentoring programs for principals (Germeten, 2011).
- University principal preparation programs can increase training on specifics of instructional leadership (Lynch, 2012).
- Charter school principals can implement strategies to minimize managerial tasks.

By studying and understanding the roles of elementary charter school principals and their practices as instructional leaders, charter school boards, as well as university principal preparation programs, can offer focused training that is tailored to meet the needs of the charter school principal. Principals at charter schools serve children and thus it is important that charter

school educators have the knowledge and skills to do this with excellence. These findings also contribute to a better understanding of the role of the principal in other non-traditional school settings.

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## ***Five Critical Skills Necessary for the Interim Superintendent in Texas***

*Susan J. Nix<sup>i</sup>*

*West Texas A&M University*

*Gary Bigham*

*West Texas A&M University*

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### **Introduction**

“Schools are highly complex places” (Goodall, 2013, p.121) and school district-level leadership is integral to student success (Bigham & Nix, 2011; Fertig, M., 2012; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Norton, Webb, Dlugosh, & Sybouts, 1996; Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008; Wallace, 2002; ). Unfortunately, the mean tenure for superintendents is short - five to six years nationwide (Kowalski, McCord, Peterson, Young, & Ellerson, 2011) and three years in Texas (Bigham, 2011). Frequent leadership changes have the potential to disrupt the continuity of education for students in the school district. As these high level administrators move to other positions or retire, with them goes a wealth of understanding and expertise, hence, the need for increased emphasis placed on the most appropriate choice of an interim superintendent in transition to the permanent replacement.

A previous qualitative single case study on the interim superintendent was conducted over the expanse of a school year in a small West Texas community (Bigham & Nix, 2011) using phenomenological inquiry to facilitate meaning-making (Moustakas, 1994) during discussions between the researchers and case study participants. This case study offered an opportunity for the close examination (Kazdin, 1982) of the interim superintendent as he also facilitated the search for the permanent replacement for the position. Once the study was completed further interest developed regarding the skills exhibited by the interim superintendent, which led to continued discussion and analysis of data.

The conclusions reached by the Bigham and Nix (2011) single case study encompassed an understanding of the duty and role differences between the full-time and interim superintendent; the knowledge that while the duties are mostly identical, the roles differ, where the interim superintendent is typically a short-term position, but with potential long-term impacts on a school district (Bigham & Nix, 2011) thus, creating an interest in the skills that might also impact the interim position.

### **The Research Question**

The importance of the superintendent in the overall functioning of the school district cannot be ignored, especially because of the impact on student outcomes. (Bigham & Nix, 2011; Fertig, M. 2012; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Norton, Webb, Dlugosh, & Sybouts, 1996; Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008; Wallace, 2002; ). As a result of changes in the school district and demands from the state and federal government on education, skill requirements of administrators have increased

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<sup>i</sup> Susan J. Nix can be reached at [snix@wtamu.edu](mailto:snix@wtamu.edu).

according to Bolman and Deal (1991). And, since the superintendent of a school district has the potential for such a big impact on a school district, the need to identify leadership skills surfaced, in particular, the leadership skills that seemed to directly impact the interim superintendent's success. Therefore, the question guiding this paper was: What leadership skills surfaced to make the interim superintendent successful? Analyzing for skills occurred primarily during the reflections between the researcher (also serving as the interim superintendent), the incoming superintendent and the second researcher, who served to triangulate perceptions of the interim's experiences within the rich context of the previous case study (Bigham & Nix, 2011).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Leadership is a complex process that has been studied using both qualitative and quantitative approaches in an attempt to understand the leadership process (Northouse, 2013). The single case study of an interim superintendent (Bigham & Nix, 2011) offered a unique opportunity to study the skills necessary for a successful interim experience with a positive impact on the community of learners. Skills are often a "neglected component of educational leadership..." (Hoy & Miskel, 2005, p. 382). Using a skills approach to leadership facilitated a deeper analysis of the single case study of the interim superintendent. "...the skills approach suggests that knowledge and abilities are needed for effective leadership" (Northouse, 2013, p. 43). Importantly, "Skills are capacities developed over time" according to Bolman and Deal (2006, p.71). In other words, they can be learned to fulfill a role (Goodall, 2013). The single case study of the interim superintendent (Bigham & Nix, 2011) had a limited window of opportunity - one year - of examining the experience from a skills approach.

Northouse (2013) examined Katz's (1955) skills approaches which are named as: the technical skills approach, the human skills approach, and the conceptual skills approach. A person utilizing the technical skills approach would demonstrate an analytical ability and would have specialized competencies accompanied by the ability to use tools and techniques appropriately. A person using the human skills approach would have an extensive understanding of people and how to build trust creating a climate that would encourage relationship building. The person using the conceptual skills approach would work more with ideas and concepts; more abstractly than concretely. Leaders can use a combination of the approaches, but would most likely have a dominant skills approach as determined by personality. This skills approach facilitated the examination of skills identified in the Bigham and Nix (2011) single case study.

### **Methodology**

Phenomenological inquiry (Moustakas, 1994) facilitated the meaning making of the experiences within which the interim superintendent participated in Bigham and Nix's (2011) single case study. As events and activities, such as regular board meetings, personnel decisions and the myriad of other issues that occurred, they were shared to gain an outside perspective from the second researcher and to place the leadership of the interim superintendent within the context of interactions (Northouse, 2013). "The more comprehensive the researcher's contextualization, the more credible and meaningful the interpretations of the phenomena," (Bigham & Nix, 2011, p. 15), thus, the continued reflections facilitated the recognition of the skills associated with the duties and roles of the interim superintendent. Northouse (2013) placed leadership skills into



Katz's (1955) three categories associated with the effectiveness of leaders: technical skills, interpersonal skills, and conceptual or cognitive skills. The analysis of tasks and their interpretation from a skills perspective led to the emergence and identification of five critical skills, all of which fell into the three categories identified by Katz (1955) and examined further by Northouse (2013).

### **Five Critical Skills**

As a result of further discussion of the case study; the researchers identified five critical skills: (a) *experience* in Texas schools; (b) *time* and *flexibility*; (c) *attitude* and *commitment*; (d) *problem-solving ability*; and (e) *willingness to do the hard things*. Importantly, the interim superintendent in the Bigham and Nix (2011) single case study had no desire to fill more than the interim time period. Therefore, the skills presented in this study were contingent upon a person filling the position temporarily until a full time permanent superintendent was selected by the school board. Interestingly, Goodall (2013) identified flexibility and experience as critical to leadership teams, which would then indirectly impact school outcomes.

### **Experience in Texas schools**

One of the many benefits of teaching or working in schools is that when a move becomes necessary, one can investigate state certification, recertify if needed, and have the opportunity to work in education in another city or state. However, when considering an interim superintendent position, the best person for the job will most likely be a candidate who has experience and understands the intricacies of education in Texas at all levels – campus and district. Goodall (2013) noticed the importance of trust and the value for experience at the leadership level. Northouse (2013) categorized experience as a conceptual skill since it includes working with ideas. The skillful leader accordingly, would ably discuss district goals and economic principles affecting the school district (Northouse, 2013), particularly school law and finance.

Navigating the Texas education system successfully is highly contingent on understanding the legal framework guiding school district policy making, most of which results directly from state legislative action. In fact, the Texas Legislature is so involved that Walsh, Kemerer, and Maniotis (2014) claimed "...the legislature is the biggest player in Texas education" (p. 12).

Judicial action is another area of significance for Texas superintendents, especially in school finance. As this study was being conducted, the Texas school finance system was being litigated (Scharrer, 2011). The final decision rendered by the State District Court, which is currently appealed to the Texas Supreme Court, was that Texas schools are inadequately and inequitably funded (Texas Taxpayer & Student Fairness Coal. v Williams, 2014). At the superintendent level of administration, a sound understanding of the state finance system is crucial to guide district policies and procedures to maintain fiscal stability (Sanacore, 1997). Since judicial and legislative issues like school finance often become intertwined, an understanding of state level politics, a network of reliable contacts, and experience in Texas lend themselves to greater effectiveness in the interim position. Additionally, the school board will have a need to keep the district operating as smoothly as possible, and if the interim superintendent is well versed in

policy and politics, his or her attention can be focused on meeting the immediate needs of the district as opposed to having to learn a new system.

Also, of importance to the interim position is an understanding of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Success in the roles of Texas teacher, principal, and superintendent further enhances the interim experience. Any time a candidate has a clear understanding of the history of curriculum, instruction, and assessment, he or she will better facilitate education. Comprehension of the cycle of curriculum changes along with the accompanying textbook adoptions and mandated state assessments is important and can determine the fate of a district's autonomy or the resultant state oversight if a district fails to meet minimum state or federal expectations. Organizational culture (Bredeson, Klar, & Johansson, 2012) and district size also have the potential to impact curriculum decisions. Typically, the smaller the district, the more parent involvement and as a result, more questions about curriculum from school board members and the community at large.

Research shows that the licensure process amongst states varies widely (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). The educator certification system must be understood by the interim superintendent. Nationwide, under the impact of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act (2001), teacher certification changed to require the most highly qualified teacher to fill a position. Even if a district has a human resource officer managing teacher and administrator applicants, the interim superintendent must also guide that process. An understanding of the interpretation of NCLB within Texas is crucial to the interim.

These three examples demonstrate the importance of Texas experience to the interim superintendent. The more experience a candidate has in various positions, the more effectively he or she will likely be able to guide and maintain a district's viability until a permanent candidate fills the position.

### **Time and flexibility**

Goodall (2013) reflected on the nature of change inherent to schools, particularly in regard to roles. In the Bigham and Nix (2011) case study, roles were identified as how things were done. Additionally, Goodall (2013) saw flexibility as a dynamic process that responded to changing needs. Certainly, in the transition between the interim and the full-time superintendent, changes could require attention. Typically, interim superintendents from across the nation are retired superintendents (Sanacore, 1997). One advantage to hiring a retired superintendent for an interim position in addition to the knowledge and experience will be the time and flexibility necessary to devote to this endeavor. The interim superintendent (retired or otherwise) must have a willingness to spend the time needed to fulfill this position, and must be a skilled time manager. Northouse (2013) considered time and flexibility as technical skills because the interim superintendent should be knowledgeable about many types of work or tasks inherent to the administrative position. With this knowledge he or she would be able to use "appropriate tools and techniques" (Northouse, 2013, p. 44).

Research has implied that interim positions are more managerial in nature than leadership oriented (Farquhar, 1991; Pffiffner, 1988). Regardless, more than the typical forty hours is

required of the Chief Executive Officer of the school district. Situations often occur outside the normal school day. For example, inclement weather can spur a call late at night to determine if an announcement needs to be made about the status of school operation the next day. The school district could remain open but start late, or if the weather is too dangerous for buses transporting students, the school district could be closed. Board meetings can often continue into the wee hours of the morning depending on the importance of the agenda items being discussed. Attendance at a variety of district sporting, and academic events are expected. Honor banquets, cheerleading trials, parent issues, and board member issues, are all potential impacts on the time of the interim. Additionally, paperwork required for the state education agency may need to be completed. Therefore, when the interim superintendent accepts the position, there must be an understanding of the expectations on his time and as Northouse (2013) noted, he or she must have the appropriate knowledge base and skills for success at this level.

The interim superintendent must have a system of organization to minimize the time spent on menial matters in order to focus on the greater needs of the district. In-house delegation of certain tasks can relieve the drain on time and has the potential to feature administrators or teacher-leaders in areas outside their norms, providing an opportunity to demonstrate individual strengths to assist the district in the transition between permanent superintendents. Goodall (2013) saw the delegation of tasks as further understanding of the roles and skills needed by all members of school leadership.

In order to guide a district through the process of hiring a replacement superintendent, the interim must maintain a certain balance and efficiency to do all the things required for the district effectively. Whether the position is managerial in nature versus leadership-oriented is not as important as the ability to manage the daily demands on his or her time, using a strong strategy of organization and the “appropriate tools and techniques” (Northouse, 2013, p. 44) to accomplish the demands of the position.

### **Attitude and commitment**

Probably most important to the success of the interim for the district is attitude. Lay (2015) asserted, “Good attitude is also a job skill...”(para.5), one that can be developed over time. The position of superintendent is largely seen as equivalent to the CEO of a business with all the accompanying stressors and has the potential to exhaust the administrator. Perhaps this is one reason why the typical tenure is so short. The interim must understand the potential stresses involved and make a concerted commitment to fulfilling the position completely and with a positive attitude. The benefit to the interim in conducting him or herself in this manner is a sense of accomplishment for keeping the school district and education processes stable for the period of service. Northouse (2013) considered attitude a human skill, meaning the ability of leadership to achieve common goals because of the accompanying understanding of the needs of district employees and the school community as a whole. As Northouse (2013) explained, “being a leader with human skills means being sensitive to the needs and motivations of others...” (p. 45).

Additionally, Lay (2015) asserted, “A positive attitude thrives on trust, opportunity, commitment, and team involvement” (para. 9). Specific to team involvement, pursuant to TEC §§ 11.251 – 11.252, Texas school districts are required to implement site-based management

teams for district planning and decision-making. The interim superintendent plays a key role in the success of this process. The interim's approach can either maintain the team's effectiveness, or improve a previously dysfunctional team's process. In either case, the interim superintendent's attitude is critical. A positive attitude encompasses basics in interpersonal skills, largely including non-verbal communications; something as simple as how employees are greeted and treated during interactions can impart true caring and trust. Even though the interim superintendent position typically lasts a short time, conducting oneself with a positive attitude helps calm the potentially bumpy terrain smoothing the way for the incoming permanent replacement. The interim superintendent must be confident in his or her interpersonal skills, and must remain focused on district needs.

Perceiving the position of interim superintendent as temporary and short-lived is paramount to the interim's success. If a person is not committed to the job in this format and in a moral and ethical way, the job may seem easier than it truly is, which can facilitate the decline of the district's educational effectiveness. However, if the interim is committed to ethically and morally guiding the district daily in all aspects of the position, and in guiding the process for finding the best candidate for the permanent replacement, the quality of the outcomes will be more satisfactory for the school board, and most importantly, for the students being educated. Certainly conducting oneself with a moral and ethical compass has the additional benefit of a positive impact on the incoming permanent superintendent.

Too often, the easy solution to a problem would be to suggest the interim position is only temporary, minimizing the commitment to the position. Insight Assessment (2015) "... differentiated between someone who is more oriented toward the company, its people and its mission, versus someone whose goals are more self-focused" (para.1). Clearly, any interim superintendent would need to demonstrate a loyalty to the school district in order to maintain stability in the transitional time between permanent superintendents.

The school board must screen carefully the candidates who manifest this commitment. The Three Component Model of Commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991) is one tool boards might use in their screening process. The model considers organizational commitment a psychological state with three distinguishing components: (a) Affection for the job ("affective commitment"); (b) Fear of loss ("continuance commitment"); and (c) Sense of obligation ("normative commitment"). Affection commitment would be the emotional attachment to a position of employment. Certainly any person taking the interim superintendent position would have to believe in the goals of a district and be willing to articulate this regularly by his or her actions. The criticism of this dimension has been the difficulty to measure it. The second component, fear of loss, would be the commitment occurring within the interim knowing the position is only temporary, but regardless of that fact, still has the willingness to commit to the job because of the overall compelling desire to maintain stability for the district. The criticism of this dimension is that it typically occurs over a longer period of time than the interim position may allow. The final component, sense of obligation, can occur as a result of an internalized norm, meaning the candidate has experience as a superintendent and is compelled by previous personal experiences to commit fully to the interim position. Although criticized for its theoretical approach and measurement difficulty, the Three Component Model of Commitment is still considered a viable

tool by which school boards may assess the skill of commitment portrayed by interim superintendent applicants (Meyer & Allen, 1991).

### **Problem solving ability**

Problem-solving is an essential employment skill. Certainly, teachers in the classroom problem-solve every day and principals are met with the same challenge, often before reaching the door of the building upon arrival on campus. It stands to reason then, that an important skill for the interim superintendent would by necessity include the skill to problem-solve. According to Hill (2015) there are “four basic steps in solving a problem”(para.3) including: (a) defining the problem, (b) generating alternatives, (c) evaluating/selecting alternatives, and (d) implementing the solution.

When defining the problem, analysis of the purported problem must occur. Because schools serve people, problems can be complex in nature. What is presented as fact from a parent perspective may not be so when the problem has been clearly defined. For example, a student may report to the parent that a teacher does not like the child. The parent may report this to the superintendent, as so often happens in small towns. The interim has choices. The parent can be referred to the principal of the campus on which the child is registered or the interim superintendent can explain policies and procedures related to complaints and appropriate chain-of-command related points of contact. However the situation is handled, the interim must notify the principal of the complaint, who in turn will notify the teacher. At that point, the interim superintendent should remove himself from the situation since it is a classroom/campus level problem. If informal campus-level processes fail to result in a resolution and a formal complaint is filed, the interim would then be appropriately positioned to address the complaint if pursued to that level in the complaint/grievance policy. This is an instance where experience with Texas school district policy is a must because human nature has the potential to attempt the solution of the problem immediately without regard for policies that may be in place to guide such processes.

Northouse (2013) considered problem-solving a technical skill since it includes an analytical ability. Primary to problem-solving is the recognition of the necessity of situational analysis. More complicated problems may also occur, bordering on ethical dilemmas. State mandated assessments are required of students across the nation pursuant to requirements of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Under this high-stakes system of accountability, incidences of cheating have been documented. If an incidence of cheating is witnessed, the test coordinator must report the situation to the superintendent. If this happens during the tenure of the interim superintendent, it will be important for him or her to follow the appropriate policies and procedures and problem-solving methodology to analyze the situation to protect the test integrity and district reputation. Most importantly, the first step is to define the problem to see if cheating occurred and follow the process from that point to its resolution.

Another strategy, similar in nature, is the Dilemma Management Process (Siccone, 2012). This method of problem-solving includes three steps: identifying, analyzing and managing a dilemma. Problems are referred to as dilemmas, primarily because a problem “presupposes there is a solution.”(Siccone, 2012, p.99). The dilemma regards choosing between two “equally

undesirable alternatives” (Siccone, 2012, p.99). For example, a primary-aged child categorized as one receiving special education services generally disrupts class by hurting other children consistently. Parents of hurt children wanted the child expelled but the response from central office is not forthcoming, causing a dilemma for campus officials. They cannot allow a child to hurt others, but they also cannot deny a child access to an education. Guidance is needed from central office so that policy and procedures are following appropriately. Statutory assistance from the Texas Education Code (TEC) would guide this decision-making process since TEC §37.007(e)(2) specifies that a student younger than ten years of age shall not be expelled, but removal to a Disciplinary Alternative Education Program (DAEP) is an option. Regardless of the problem-solving methodology employed, interim superintendent knowledge, skill, and judgment is integral to deriving an appropriate solution. If the interim superintendent does not have the requisite knowledge and experience in Texas, this situation may remain a dilemma, whereas the Texas Education Code clearly states acceptable alternatives.

Inherent to all leadership positions is the ability to “think on one’s feet,” sometimes in the absence of key information, such as a situation immediately impacting student safety. Decisions are made quickly when possible and more deliberately at other times. Problems can range from simple to complex. The dilemma with problem-solving is making a decision that sets an unacceptable precedent. Therefore, an interim superintendent should have a method of problem-solving, a procedure that can function in multiple situations. As one principal asserted, “... one of the key responsibilities for an interim is quickly assessing the issues within the system and decide [sic] which program or policy is central to the district... a core value...and decide what stays...”(Mugits, 2009, p. 89). This clearly demonstrates the need for district-level problem-solving skills to aid in the smooth transition between positions by resolving issues as they occur instead of leaving them for the incoming superintendent.

### **Willingness to do the hard things**

While some interim superintendents might be tempted to do the bare minimum necessary to keep the school district functioning since the position is short term in nature, the interim superintendent whose moral code is steeped in ethics and integrity willingly makes the tough decisions as required. By making those determinations, the interim facilitates a smooth transition for the incoming permanent superintendent who can assume his duties unfettered by decisions some might label as unpopular or difficult. Although some may consider this willingness as an attitude, this study’s researchers perceive it as more related to work ethic with the determination and skill to accomplish those things deemed especially difficult. Northouse (2013) considered this a human skill since it takes into consideration the needs of others. Leaving situations unanswered also leaves them to grow in difficulty, whereas, the willingness to do those difficult things during the interim period, will demonstrate the interim superintendent’s capacity to work well with others with immediacy.

The preceding four skills embodied in the interim superintendent – experience in Texas schools, time and flexibility, attitude and commitment, and problem-solving ability – facilitate the accomplishment of difficult tasks. Experience in Texas schools brings awareness on a level necessary to understand the cycle of activities inherent to education. For example, the budget typically must be decided in the early spring or summer, which means there are specific tasks

necessary to the process that can facilitate the efficiency of the budget process. Therefore, the interim must communicate those expectations to the principals in order to have the necessary information to complete the budget with expedience (Norton & Kelly, 1997). This is just one example of an expectation for the district's continued stability in the transition between superintendents.

Time and flexibility facilitate difficult decision-making. Time management skills used by the interim superintendent set an example for other administrators, especially if a dilemma occurs for which an administrator is ill-prepared. For example, no one feels particularly prepared to deal with child molestation and when there is the potential that it is perpetrated by an employee, a dilemma is presented that requires a method of investigation in order to protect the child and a potentially mistaken maligning of an employee. Clearly, the ability to prioritize the issue is a critical skill that cannot be put off for a later date.

Attitude and commitment skills demonstrate the ability of the interim superintendent to address difficult issues due to school district loyalty. Depending on the nature of a dilemma presented to the interim, he or she may or may not involve other members of the school district administrative team. Instead, if the issue is dire, and confidentiality is critical, the district's legal council may be consulted for a solution to the problem. There would be a sense of obligation to resolve this issue as effectively and quickly as possible.

Problem-solving skills are integral to dealing with any serious issue faced by the interim superintendent facilitating the willingness to do the right thing and make the hard decisions, because of moral and ethical imperatives. The result may not be popular with other district employees. For example, in an alleged molestation issue, there may be lifelong friends of the employee who do not believe the situation occurred making the work environment tense and uncomfortable for the interim. However, the interim who embraces the opportunity to resolve issues immediately and embodies these five critical skills will function well and will ultimately leave the district in good shape for the incoming superintendent.

## **Conclusion**

The five skills found in the continued dialogue between researchers cannot be generalized to other interim superintendent experiences because they come from a single case study, however, it is hoped that further research will examine the interim superintendent experience for additional data.

Reviewing the five skills that emerged through the single case study of an interim superintendent (Bigham & Nix, 2011) used the lens of Northouses' (2013) examination of Katz's (1955) Three-Skills Approach to effective leadership framed and validated this analysis. The Three-Skills Approach to school leadership (Katz, 1955) included: technical skill, human skill and conceptual skill. These five skills are of particular importance to administrators and school boards in Texas, in part, because local control is critical to community members. In the absence of the knowledge of the requisite skills for the interim superintendent, school board members may be less able to choose the best candidate or help that person maneuver within the vacuum left by a vacating

superintendent. The five skills identified in the Bigham & Nix (2011) were validated as a result of the how easily they fit into the Three-Skills Approach.

Table 1 shows the three skills identified by Katz (1955) and providing the definitions for each, followed by the five critical skills that emerged from the continued discussion of the interim superintendent research experience (Bigham & Nix, 2011). Two of the five fit neatly into each of the technical and human skill approaches and the remaining skill fit into the conceptual skill approach. The interim superintendent in the Bigham and Nix (2011) study used all three of the skills approaches based on the needed responses to a variety of situations that occurred over the expanse of the year.

Table 1

*Correlation of Five Critical Skills with Katz (1955) Leadership Skills Approach*

	<b>Technical Skill Approach</b>	<b>Human Skill Approach</b>	<b>Conceptual Skill Approach</b>
<b>Definition</b>	“competencies in a specialized area, analytical ability, and the ability to use appropriate tools and techniques”	“Knowledge about and ability to work with people” “...creates an atmosphere of trust...”	“..ability to work with ideas and concepts” “...works easily with abstractions.”
<b>Skills</b>	Time/Flexibility  Problem-Solving	Attitude/Commitment  Willingness to do hard things	Texas Experience

*Note.* Skills approach definitions are cited from Northouse (2013, pp. 44-45).

Also important to remember, time is of the essence in filling the vacancy left by the outgoing superintendent, but considering the impact of school district leadership on student outcomes, filling it with the person devoid of the necessary skills, could have a negative impact on the district. The interim is the buffer between the outgoing and incoming superintendents and if chosen with knowledge and intent, can work him or herself right out of a job and feel good about doing so. As a result of the Bigham and Nix (2011) single case study on the interim superintendent position, these five skills proved necessary and critical to this interim superintendent’s success. Considering again, that a single case study cannot be generalized to other situations, more research is required in other interim superintendent experiences to test these findings.



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