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Filling in the Blanks

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Filling in the Blanks

What a _____ time to be teaching, learning, researching, or otherwise involved in education!

Why the blank in the sentence above? Because in the current politically-charged environment, filling that blank in meaningfully, in a mutually agreeable and action-oriented way would likely prove impossible. So, we leave it to you to fill it in for yourself, and ask that you take a moment to reflect on why you chose the word you chose.

Whether you are a practitioner involved in public education, a researcher in higher education, a policymaker, a proponent of privatization, a homeschool advocate, a concerned parent, or just an anxious taxpayer, the one adjective around which we could probably build consensus to fill the blank is “uncertain,” for uncertain is most certainly an apt descriptor of these times. Issues remain unsettled; courses of action remain undetermined; fundamental beliefs remain unresolved; and, emotions remain uneased. Some see a future fraught with rancor and divisiveness, while others simultaneously swell with optimism at the possibilities that lie ahead: polar opposite views in a polarized world.

While a the few articles in this issue of the *School Leadership Review* are unlikely to deliver a détente among the disparate views of the purposes and roles of educational systems, they can attempt to fill in some of the blanks related to best practices in teaching, leading, and learning, primarily focusing on leadership in school districts. The articles range from an examination of urban school leadership with community support and involvement, a review of leadership coaching as professional development, an investigation of school administrators as instructional coaches, to an identification of patterns of failures in Texas school improvement efforts. Additionally, this edition has one article on the learners preparing to be educational leaders and their persistence as learners in an online environment.

John A. Branch and Melissa M. Leigh provide an examination of failures in their article, “Patterns of Failures in Texas Urban Improvement Required Schools: An Equity Audit Expansion.” Their study looked at all 11 high schools in Texas with the designation for urban and schools identified as “improvement required.” The study was a qualitative study using the Qualitative Comparative Analysis approach. Their findings question the methods used to determine “improvement required” status in Texas public schools. The problems of high mobility rates and special education enrollment rates are not under the control of the schools, yet these two factors have a causal relationship to the improvement required status.

Mary Keller Boudreaux also examined the urban school but from the focus of the leaders’ role in community support and involvement with the urban school. Her article, titled “An Analysis of Urban School Leaders’ Role in Community Support and Involvement” looked at the teachers’ dispositions toward their school leader in this role of community involvement. They researched whether there were significant differences between the teacher’s perceptions and type of school level, differences between elementary and middle school. This quantitative study was a non-experimental design with a survey, Teaching, Empowering, Leading, and Learning Survey. There were 1,793 respondents from 282 districts. Their findings showed a significant difference

in community support and involvement between elementary, middle, and high school. Additionally, there was a significant difference in teachers' perceptions of their leaders' role in community support and involvement between elementary and high school, as well as between middle and high school. There was not a significant difference of teacher perceptions of the leaders' roles between elementary and middle school.

Beth Ray provides an article on the professional development of educational leaders in her article, "Educational Leadership as Professional Development." Her qualitative study of 16 coaches on consultant in a small suburban school district in north Texas provides their perceptions of the impact of shared leadership. The leaders for this study were teacher leaders, administrators, and central office personnel. All coaches had been trained by the district. Coaches saw the coaching as helpful in developing relationships. The importance of trust building was emphasized in this study. Additionally, the coaches understood the benefits of coaching; however, coaching conversations were not viewed as authentic or inclusive from those being coached.

Yanira Oliveras-Ortiz further examines the role of school administrators as instructional coaches, in the article, School Administrators as Instructional Coaches. This quantitative study explored the degree of 198 teachers' perceptions that administrators have the skills to be instructional coaches as well as the level of trust teachers have with their administrators as evaluators and instructional coaches. The perceptions were a total of 363 participants with the school principal and assistant principals combined as leaders. Most the leaders were rated a skilled or highly skilled in leading goal setting process and leading instructional coaching, and that teachers had a lower trust level in their leaders than how they rated their leaders' skills. This difference was explained as teachers sharing that some leaders have limited experiences and are not in their classroom daily.

Casey Graham Brown shows the importance of examining online learning from the attributes of the online learner in her article titled, "The Persistence and Attrition of Online Learners." Her phenomenological study of doctoral students' reasons for desiring an online format as well as reasons for obtaining the degree. Supports for continued enrollment were explored. The participants in this study were 75 doctoral students in one online doctoral program. The choice for an online program was often determined because of schedule flexibility and travel concerns. Attributes that led to continued enrollment included faculty support and familial support. Most of the participants enrolled in the doctoral program to advance their careers. The challenges of the online program were confusing information, the desire for more face-to-face time with fellow students, and the need for more guidance from advisors. Participants workload, poor communication, and time factors were reasons that participants gave for their consideration of leaving the doctoral program before completion.

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