

## Development and Implementation of An Administrative Internship Program

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### Abstract

This article describes the development and implementation of a pilot program to prepare teachers seeking New York state certification as school district administrators, by assigning them as administrative interns to a school district. The superintendent of a large urban school district and the director of a college program to prepare school district administrators partnered to design a pilot experiential course in which candidates for a master's degree and state certificate would have an opportunity to develop skills and learn by experiencing situations that support new learning (Kolb, 1984), to take the place of an existing internship course for eight candidates. The dual purpose was to provide an authentic learning experience for the candidates and to provide actionable information for the superintendent for improvement of the district instructional program. To identify areas of academic concern, the candidates reviewed the New York State District Report Card<sup>1</sup>, conducted research, and interviewed district personnel in order to be able to make actionable suggestions and recommendations to the superintendent that might result in academic improvement. Findings and recommendations to inform district improvement efforts and for improvement of the existing course were presented to the superintendent and his administrative staff. Recommendations are included.

### Keywords

Authentic learning, experiential learning, school administration, school district improvement, supervisory internship.

### Introduction

New York State requires candidates for administrative certificates to complete 250 hours in a supervised internship as part of their academic preparation to earn a certificate permitting them to serve as school district administrators. The superintendents of two large urban school districts in New York State were invited by Mercy College faculty to help to design and pilot an experiential administrative

internship course that would provide an authentic experience for interns (Kolb, 1984) and, possibly, provide actionable information based on their findings and reflection (Schon, 1983, 1987) for the superintendent to use to improve the academic performance of students in the district. One of the superintendents<sup>2,3</sup>

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recognized the need for the district to identify areas of strength and areas of concern in order to improve student performance. He agreed to welcome the eight interns, and to permit them to review reports and to interview administrative personnel as part of their research to make suggestions for improvement to the instructional program. The superintendent arranged for the department of human resources to process applications to permit the candidates to serve as interns.

## Methodology

### Program Design

The superintendent and the college program director met to discuss the needs of the district and of the college, to identify activities for the students which would provide an authentic learning experience for the students, satisfy state requirements and also provide a benefit to the district. Agreement was reached for the administrative candidates to work directly with the superintendent and his administrative staff on issues of academic concern.

The agreement was that eight candidates seeking New York State certification as district administrators would serve as district interns, and work directly with the superintendent and his administrative staff to identify and study issues of academic concern. Each intern, required to complete 250 hours under their supervision, was required to review the data from district's New York State Report Card and select an area of concern to conduct a research study.

The eight interns, paired in dyads, were to meet and interview administrators in charge of the designated areas, and propose recommendations and suggestions supported by literature that would be helpful in strengthening those areas in need of improvement.

The superintendent's administrative staff participated in planning sessions with each dyad as needed over a period of four months, and arranged interviews for the candidates with the administrators in charge of each area. They were

available to answer questions and to provide support to the candidates throughout the internship.

### Description of the Candidates

The eight candidates were all registered in a Mercy College master's degree program leading to New York State certification as School Building Leader and School District Leader. All were certificated, experienced teachers. Seven were women, two Hispanic, three of color, two white; the eighth was a white male. Their ages ranged from mid-thirties to mid-fifties. All of the candidates at the time of this internship were serving as practicing teachers. All had administrative duties assigned to them within their respective schools, in addition to the usual teaching load. Two of the candidates were employed in the district under study; the others were teachers in the New York City school district.

The three women of color were Luanne<sup>4</sup>, a high school biology teacher and dean; Naomi, a reading specialist in a middle school; and Karen, an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher in an elementary school. Margaret, an Hispanic woman, was an ESL coordinator, and Anne, the white woman, was a special education coordinator, both working in the same school. Harriet, an Hispanic woman, was a reading specialist in a charter school. Joanne, a white woman, was a school coordinator in a charter school that was located within the district. John, the white male, was a special education coordinator in a district middle school. John and Joanne were employed in the district under study, and the others were employed in the New York City school district.

The candidates formed four dyads to conduct their studies: Luanne (Biology), and Karen (ESL); Naomi (Literacy), and Harriet (Literacy); Anne (Special Education), and Margaret (ESL); John (Special Education); and Joanne (Supervision). Data about the candidates, how they paired, and their employment is summarized in Table 1.

Dyad	Intern	Race	Gender	District employed	Current assignment
Dyad I	Anne	White	F	NYC	Special education coordinator
Dyad I	Margaret	Hispanic	F	NYC	ESL coordinator
Dyad II	Harriett	Hispanic	F	NYC	Charter school, reading specialist
Dyad II	Naomi	Black	F	NYC	Middle school, reading specialist
Dyad III	Luanne	Black	F	NYC	High school biology, dean
Dyad III	Karen	Black	F	NYC	Elementary school, ESL teacher
Dyad IV	Joanne	White	F	YK	Charter school, school coordinator
Dyad IV	John	White	M	YK	Middle school, special education coordinator

Table 1 Candidates

### Description of the District

At the time of the study, the district employed over 1500<sup>5</sup> teachers, and provided services to over 26,000 students from diverse backgrounds in grades prekindergarten through 12. Over 80 percent of the student population consisted of a minority racial/ethnic group: 56 percent Hispanic; 19 percent Black; 7 percent Asian/Pacific Islander; 1 percent Multi-Racial; 17 percent White. Three-quarters of the student population were economically disadvantaged; twelve percent of the student population were English Language Learners (ELL); and sixteen percent were students with disabilities. Table 2 summarizes the number of students and the ethnic breakdown of the student body. Special learning needs of students is presented in Table 3.

Average class sizes<sup>6</sup> were substantially higher in the district than statewide; 25.9 and 22.5 respectively. The classroom teacher to student ratio of 16.6 was also higher than the statewide ratio of 12.5 students per classroom teacher. Pupil-teacher ratio and class size is shown in Table 4.

With less than a quarter of students achieving proficiency on the New York State

English Language Arts (NYS ELA) and Math Grades 3-8 assessments, student achievement scores were below statewide averages. Nevertheless, student growth was comparable to statewide growth with nearly 6 percent more students achieving proficiency on the NYS ELA exam in 2016 than 2015 and nearly 1 percent more students achieving proficiency on the math exam. Graduation data tell a similar story—growth has been significant and relatively stable over the past three years, yet achievement is too low. For example, 75 percent of the 2011 student cohort eligible to graduate in June of 2016 did so; this is a 4 percent increase from the prior year. However, of this graduation cohort, only 15 percent were designated College and Career Ready, as measured by the ELA/Math Aspirational Performance Measure.<sup>7</sup>

### Superintendent's Administrative Staff

The superintendent's administrative staff included an assistant superintendent; an executive director for language acquisition/bilingual/ESOL/LOTE; an executive director for school improvement, an executive director for secondary education; and a director for academic and behavioral interventions.

Table 2 <i>Number of teachers, students, student ethnicity</i>						
	Number	Ethnicity				
Teachers	1500					
Students	26,000					
Student Ethnicity		Hispanic 56%	Black 19%	Asian 7%	Multi-Racial 1%	White 17%

Table 2 Student ethnic breakdown

Table 3 <i>Percentages of economically disadvantaged, English language earners, students with disabilities</i>			
Student Needs	Economically Disadvantaged 75%	English Language Learner 12%	Students With Disabilities 16%

Table 3 Student learning needs

Table 4 <i>Pupil-teacher ratios, class size and state-wide averages</i>		
	Pupil-teacher Ratio	Average Class Size
Yonkers	16.6	25.9
New York State	12.5	22.5

Table 4 Class size, pupil teacher ratio

## Procedure

The superintendent and his administrative staff hosted the initial meeting with the program director, who also taught the interns, a second professor teaching the course, and the eight interns. The superintendent distributed the District Report Card, and asked the eight interns, who formed four dyads, to study the New York State District Report Card data to select areas of concern that would be of interest to them and to the district. Each dyad reviewed

the Report Card data and presented their intentions to the superintendent. The superintendent, his administrative staff, and the interns discussed the approach to follow to investigate each area of concern; literature and readings were also suggested and discussed at that time. The superintendent assured the interns that the district administrative staff would be made available to work with them. The candidates were asked to prepare a list of questions for the administrators.

The interns began with a review of the literature in the identified area of academic concern and developed a rationale for study with questions based on the district report card data. They worked with the Director of Academic and Behavioral Interventions to set up interviews with the administrators in charge of the respective areas to gain an understanding of and insight into the problem, as it differed from school to school and grade to grade. They were able to evaluate the problem from a global perspective, incorporate the research findings with outcomes from schools that had employed successful techniques, and combine their expertise and experience in the designated areas to arrive at conclusions and recommendations that would have positive impact on the area of weakness and ultimately have positive impact on student achievement.

The Director of Academic and Behavioral Interventions scheduled interview sessions for the candidates with administrators in charge of the areas of concern. After each interview the dyads transcribed their notes. Conversations continued with these administrators throughout the internship. Each dyad summarized its findings and discussed the suggestions and recommendations with the administrative team. At the final session, each dyad presented their findings in a power point summarizing their findings to the superintendent and his administrative team, highlighting the data, the method of investigation and the suggestions and recommendations for improvement.

### **Dyad's Focus**

Each of the four dyads identified a specific area of concern from the New York State District Report Card to conduct its investigation. The four dyads and the areas they chose to focus on were:

- Dyad I Anne and Margaret - Area of Concern: Students with Disabilities and English as a Second Language (ESL) students' performance on the New York State English as A Second Language Achievement Test (NYSELAT) grades kindergarten to grade five.
- Dyad II - Naomi and Harriet - Area of Concern: Grades three-five Reading Proficiency.
- Dyad III - Karen and Luanne - Area of Concern: Proficiency on the English Language Arts (ELA) Exam for Limited English Proficient (LEP) Students.
- Dyad IV - Joanne and John - Area of Concern: The Impact of the District Response to Intervention Program (RTI) on Grades 3-5 Measures of Academic Progress Assessment.
- Based on data made available to them on the New York State District Report Card, each dyad developed a list of questions for the administrators. The area studied by each dyad is summarized in Table 5. Each dyad's study is reported separately.

Table 5 <i>Area of concern studied by each dyad</i>	
<b>Dyad</b>	<b>Area of concern</b>
Dyad I	Students with Disabilities; ESL test performance, grades k-5
Dyad II	Grades 3-5 reading proficiency
Dyad III	ELA test performance, LEP students
Dyad IV	Impact of RTI program, grades 3-5
Table 5 Dyads and area of concern	

## Findings, Recommendations and Suggestions

### Dyad 1

Dyad I, Anne and Margaret, found that only a small percentage of students categorized as Students with Disabilities (SWD) and ESL, in grades kindergarten through grade five scored *Commanding* (passing) on the NYSESLAT (New York State English as A Second Language Achievement Test) though the percentage in Grade Four was slightly higher. The results are shown in Table 6.

The questions they asked after reviewing NYSESLAT results for Students with Disabilities and ESL students were:

1. Why is there only a small percentage of SWD/ESL students in Grade Kindergarten through Fifth grade scoring *Commanding* on the NYSESLAT?

2. Why is the percentage *slightly* higher only in grade 4?

After examining the test scores and interviewing district administrators, they agreed that quality professional development efforts could enhance student achievement. They decided to create a plan for professional development targeting general education teachers who have English Language learners in their classrooms. Based on a review of relevant literature, the decision was reached to develop a professional development series that would focus on topics which have been shown to be effective in improving learning outcomes for ELL's:

- Developing effective questioning techniques based on Bloom's Taxonomy (Toolbox for Planning Rigorous Instruction, 2009) in

order to develop student's higher order thinking skills, and to assist teachers to create strong questions for students at the appropriate depth of knowledge for the student.

- Helping teachers to understand the importance of linking formative assessments to instructional decisions (Hess, 2006) (Hess, 2016) (Black & William, 1998).
- Building a culture of collaboration to meet the needs of ELL students by using peer mentoring, recognizing that mentoring models for new teachers are often ineffective for experienced teachers (D'Abate & Eddy, 2008).
- Enhancing teacher-to-mentor transformations by introducing content knowledge and strategy building to promote changes in the prospective mentors' own practice.
- Training teachers in the use of collaborative peer mentoring in order to Prepare prospective mentors "to respond effectively to "mentorable moments" similar to how teachers respond to teachable moments (Spezzini, Austin, Abbott & Littleton, 2009).
- Help teachers to listen attentively as colleagues discharge emotions about an unknown, and empathetically encouraging theme in self-discovery (D'Áz Maggioli, 2004), recognizing that collaborative mentors can share what works for them and, in turn, provide personalized PD on effective ELL instruction.
- Train teachers to use authentic learning experiences and inquiry to enhance learning (Wells & Gordon, 2001) (Galileo.org, 2016).

Table 6 <i>New York State Report Card from the year 2014-2015 NYSESLAT Results</i>		
Grade	Number of ESL/SWD Students	Pct. Commanding Level
Kindergarten	53	2
First Grade	46	2
Second Grade	49	4
Third Grade	66	2
Fourth Grade	49	8
Fifth Grade	67	1
Table 6 Number of ESL/SWD students at each grade and percentage passing ( <i>Commanding</i> )		

### **Dyad II - Naomi and Harriet**

Of approximately 1900 students in Grade Three, the scores on the English Language Arts (ELA) exam showed a high number of students attained a level one score for the 2014 school years. This high concentration comprised the Black African-American and Hispanic-Latino students. In 2014, 52% of the Black African-American student population and 53% of the Hispanic/Latino population received a level 1 score. In the 2015 school year, there was a slight change with 46% of the Hispanic students receiving a level 1 score, while the African American remained at 52%. These data showed a significant number of students were unable to read at grade level. ELA results are shown in table 7.

As a result of analyzing the data from the district and interviewing district administrators about the reading programs in use in the district elementary schools, and the strengths and weaknesses of those programs, it was decided to target the methodology currently implemented in the district literacy program. We decided to focus on strengthening existing methodology and suggesting additional methods to improve the effectiveness of the literacy program in grades three to five.

### **Dyad II - Findings, Recommendations and Suggestions**

The importance of professional development (PD) for teachers on reading instruction has been underscored by the amount of funding provided by NCLB (NCEE, 2008) and while it has been reported that 80% of classroom teachers receive on average 24 hours of PD per year, it has not been found to be sufficient and that there is little focus on subject matter in it (Hill 2007) (Fletcher & Lyon 1998).

One strength of the reading program was that it supported the entire population of students, both English and Spanish, and the program extended its learning to meet the needs of the community in both English and Spanish. Professional development was provided to teachers to demonstrate the best practices for implementation in the classroom. However, more professional development specifically in reading should be provided, and it is recommended that the amount of quality professional development in reading be increased. Additional interventions/programs should be implemented to meet the needs of struggling communities, such as special needs, English speaking and ELA.

Active participation from the school community and parents was also visible. Lobbying was conducted in an attempt to provide the district with the financial support needed to implement the necessary programs. However, there was no evidence that sufficient data were collected to determine if the programs in use were successful. Casey, Robertson, Williamson, Serio & Elswick (2011) have noted the importance of evaluating the effectiveness of school-based interventions, and the efficacy of using on-line databases to support efforts in implementing evidence-based reading interventions was suggested by Coffee, Newell & Kennedy (2014). It recommended that school committees be formed to assess effectiveness of existing literacy programs. They should identify and address reading problems in grades one and two (Jacob, Elson, Bowden, Brooks & Armstrong, 2015) (NCEE, 2016). Research by O'Donnell and Kirkner (2014) suggests that students would benefit from the addition of intervention programs for students with special needs and limited English speaking ability.

The district should review different reading programs such as Core Ready, and computer based reading programs such as MyOn, ([myon.com](http://myon.com)) I-ready ([curriculumassociates.com](http://curriculumassociates.com)) and Achieve 3000 ([achieve3000.com](http://achieve3000.com)) that stimulate readers because they are based on the students' levels of

interest. They should also consider other programs such as SASF (Sports and Arts in Schools Foundation) <https://sasfny.org/> a program, which would provide interventions for leveled reading after school.

McMaster (2013) suggested that whole school re-culturing programs may help with the development of more inclusive value orientated schools. Dyad II's suggestions for reculturing include surveying to determine how to involve parents more in the learning process to work with struggling readers. Additional suggestions include inviting families to the school to observe how reading and writing skills are taught in the classroom, sharing articles on literacy topics in school and class newsletters, and using family and community members as reading partner volunteers and guest readers. More intensive strategies include referring families of students who need extra assistance in reading or writing to community agencies that provide services outside of school, and the use of family and community members as reading and writing tutors for students. A parent coordinator should be considered to participate in the district's literacy initiatives. Professional development is provided to teachers twice weekly, and all teachers receive assistance (modeling and coaching). School committees should be formed to review data starting with grades one and two to identify weaknesses as early as possible in order to address the weaknesses.

Table 7 <i>Grade 3 English Language Arts (ELA) exam for 2014 and 2015 by race/ethnicity</i>		
Year	Black African-American	Hispanic-Latino
2014	52	53
2015	52	46
Table 7 Percentage of students scoring 1 (lowest) on Grade 3 English Language Arts (ELA) exam		



### **Dyad III- Karen and Luanne - Area of Concern - Proficiency on the English Language Arts (ELA) Exam for Limited English Proficient (LEP) Students**

Recent data show that the percentage of proficiency on the ELA exam amongst LEP students is extremely low across Grades Three to Five. The data on the district report card show that in 2014 and 2015 only 1 % was proficient in Grade Three, 2% in Grade Four, and 1 % in grade five. The results are shown in Table 8.

After analyzing the data from district report card, the individuals responsible for supervising ELA programs were interviewed. The interviewer asked three questions:

- What of evidence-based resources, for literacy, are currently being used for grades 3-5?
- Is there a protocol for choosing resources to help Limited English Proficient students achieve proficiency on the ELA exam?
- Are there schools, within the district, that have a high-level of Limited English Proficient students who have achieved proficiency on the ELA exam?

This dyad decided to review the current resources implemented in the district literacy program for LEP students. The review focused on strengthening the existing resources that have produced positive literacy results for LEP students, also suggesting alternative resources to improve the effectiveness of the program. The purpose is to help LEP students master the ELA examination by strengthening their literacy skills through improvement of the district's use of resources.

### **Dyad III Findings, Recommendations and Suggestions**

- Use data to drive instruction - Use the most recent data from current programs to make changes for improvement for the next school year's program. If a program is ineffective, it needs to be replaced.
- Evaluate if "Journeys" is the best program for LEP students. "Journeys" is the most widely used balanced literacy program in the nation, with research and data-bases affirming its efficacy, however reading programs must be evaluated to determine its efficacy for this population so evaluation is in order (Casey, Robertson, Williamson, Serio & Elswick, 2011).
- We suggest assigning students to a tier, based on their needs and abilities, and tracking their progress as the first step in investigating why "Journeys" doesn't seem to be working to impact student achievement. This should help to identify subsets or pockets where it does not seem to be effective. Among the areas to be investigated in this regard to evaluate the quality of implementation in each school and classroom- perhaps the problem lies not in the program, but in the way that it is being done. While "Journeys" may be a good program for some students, it may not be effective for LEP/ENL students, in addressing their proficiency levels on the ELA assessment. Investigating the implementation of the program in each school's classrooms would be helpful in modifying the program to address students' needs.

Table 8

*Grade 3 LEP students' English Language Arts (ELA) proficiency in grades 3-5 in 2014 and 2015*

Year	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
2014	1	2	1
2015	1	2	1

Table 8 Percentage of LEP students scoring proficient on English Language Arts (ELA) exam

- There are established protocols that have been shown to be effective in second language reading acquisition. Protocols that have been shown to be effective in second language reading acquisition include repeated reading, assisted reading, phrased reading, modelling reading, guided reading, echo reading, paired reading, shared book reading, fluency development lesson, fast start, and readers' theatre (Yildirim & Rasinski, 2014).
- Set up a district-wide literacy committee to standardize a protocol for ENL instruction. Review the quality of professional development for teachers of ENL students. Work with school administrators to support ENL teachers in methodology and materials.
- Once the district-wide committee standardizes the program for the ENL population, they must continue to track their achievement in all academic areas in each of the schools. On-going monitoring of the data will identify areas of instruction that need modification and revision.
- Set up school literacy committees to suggest how to address the needs of the ENL students. The importance of involving the entire community in this effort cannot be minimized. Whole school and family involvement have been shown to be effective in encouraging Hispanic families, especially new immigrants (O'Donnell, & Kirkner, 2014). Restructuring for family involvement, can be helpful as shown by McMaster (2013) who suggested ways to identify indicators to help with restructuring and suggested several workable models. A questionnaire designed for the purpose of building partnerships among schools, families and communities has been developed by the Ohio Department of Education (ODE, 2016) which may be appropriate for Yonkers.

#### **Dyad IV - Joanne and John -Area of Concern - The Impact of District Response to Intervention Program (RTI) on Grades 3-5 Measures of Academic Progress Assessment**

Achievement in mathematics and English Language Arts in Grades Three-Five declined between 2014 and 2015 in the district as measured by the Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment. RTI is the approach used in the district as the model for improvement of reading.

In theory, RTI is thought of as a valuable model for schools because of its ability to provide appropriate learning experiences for all students and aids in the early identification of students as being at risk for academic failure. Research has proven that students need and profit from a precise match of their current skills and abilities with the instructional strategies and choices provided within the classroom. This study examines the Response to Intervention (RTI) model currently being used in 3 district elementary schools in grades three to five in the fourth most populated city in the United States.

This study seeks to determine if there was a noteworthy difference in assessment scores of students who received Tier II RTI interventions compared to those who received Tier I interventions. The study also seeks to examine procedural methodologies and the effectiveness of the systems currently in place. How does the pupil support team address student need? How is movement from tier to tier determined? How are teachers and support staff utilized when implementing the different tiers? It will also examine which changes/improvements can be implemented within the district to make RTI more efficient/effective for students, teachers, and support staff. Surveys were conducted.

#### **Dyad IV - Findings, Recommendations and Suggestions**

The results of this study show that students are being assessed with the MAP assessment three

times a year in a consistent manner. All three schools have access to the MAP data system to analyze and use the information.

The results of the school surveys show that administrators and teachers understand the importance of RTI and attempt to make a good faith effort to implement the RTI model. However, there is little evidence that supports that all three tiers of the model are being used with fidelity throughout all three schools. It is evident that schools have access to different resources and materials which include the number of teachers and administrators. The district has not yet identified a progress monitoring tool for student Response to Interventions in terms of level of performance and rate of progress.

The use of RTI strategies has had some success for the sample schools analyzed. The use of pupil support team meetings to address academic concerns and implement RTI based groupings indicates a positive trend within the three sites. Although there are inconsistencies within the schools that need to be addressed, the results show that schools are making strides with implementation and addressing student deficits.

Based on a survey of the targeted schools, the administrative teams are in agreement with the effectiveness of RTI based strategies. The survey of the three schools has highlighted an important finding. "All staff have received initial training or professional development relative to initial administration of screening methods at their respective grade levels" This particular question on the survey received inconsistent responses indicating the need for further professional development (Kratochwill, Volpiansky, Clements, & Ball, (2007). Overall the data show that the use of RTI strategies has led to successful results within the district public schools. One recommendation is that these data and information should be used by all principals when staffing their schools. In order for RTI

interventions to be effective, the schools must be adequately equipped with highly qualified support staff to deliver supplemental instruction (Sanger, 2013). Sanger also emphasized the importance of progress monitoring to track student progress and monitor growth. She proposed, and we concur, that the district develop an RTI manual to foster consistency across the district when implementing RTI, and that a similar manual be developed for individual schools for principals to distribute to their staff.

## **Reflections**

### **Karen's Reflection**

My experience within this new internship research project was the best experience I've had in the program. I was able to look at current data, investigate a problem, research and find possible solutions that could help a district that needs lots of educational help. It was also a great experience to work with people in a district that were open to change and willing to hear our discoveries. The process of interviewing members of district was eye an opener and made me realize that as an educator I need to always be at the forefront of research and developing new ways to implement solutions that could help our struggling students

### **Margaret's Reflection**

I started this reflection by looking back at how I began this course. I have worked for the New York City Department of Education for my whole career (16 years), many district level policy decisions and the general function of the school district office were foreign to me. School board meetings are few and far between and decisions usually come down from the Chancellor.

I looked forward to gaining greater knowledge about governance and policy through the district's perspective. As we approach the end of the course, I believe I have gained greater

knowledge not only about how the district works but the importance of using data and research based questions when making decisions. I also think our work in the district allowed me to look at the bigger picture in administration.

Decisions at this level must be based on the data, researched and followed up on. Choosing a small sub-group to focus on allowed for a more in depth project and hopefully an impact for those children.

Our goal was to help the English Language Learners who are also special education students reach proficiency on the NYSESLAT. After speaking with the Executive Director, Language Acquisition/Bilingual/ESOL/LOTE she commented that our work will go directly to helping the common branches professional development for the upcoming school year. Without Anne as my partner, the guidance of the Executive Director, Language Acquisition/Bilingual/ESOL/LOTE and the program director, none of this would have been possible. I am grateful for this internship experience and feel the program has successfully prepared me to dive into this grand field of school administration.

### **Harriet's Reflection**

After a thoughtful reflection of my experience researching data regarding the district report card I was informed of a variety of academic practices. These practices were in regard to student deficiencies, academic effectiveness, and possible solutions for the future. I noticed that perhaps by reaching out more to the parents, allowing those who are not involved, to begin to have a voice. After carefully reading and discussing evidenced-based research, teachers can make improvements in areas that may be lacking. Most importantly I learned that research and collaboration with other colleagues is an effective measure in itself to provide students with a more authentic learning experience. Further, after hearing presentations from my classmates, I noticed how effective

research can be when attempting to solve problems, and develop more ways to assist in creating a more effective means of education for children to meet challenges, as well as increasing assessment performance.

### **John's Reflection**

The leadership program assisted me in developing my leadership skill set and overall approach to education in general. The coursework has exposed me to elements within education that were previously unknown to me. The program also reinforced several key concepts such as the need to have well-developed people skills, open and clear communication, and to approach all decisions with what is best for the children. The two areas of the program that stand out for me and allowed me to succeed were the faculty as well as the internship experiences. The faculty had a wealth of knowledge they were very adept at sharing, and were always approachable. The internship experiences allowed me to apply the knowledge gained within the classroom. They also allowed us to develop our own unique leadership styles. The internships also allowed us as future leaders to practice and develop those important people and communication skills. I am 'very grateful for the educational/professional experiences afforded to me through participation in the Leadership program

### **Luanne's Reflection**

Finally, it was here, the first day of classes. I was ready to hear what I had already heard before, 250+ log hours, follow all of the ELCC standards, save all artifacts and build a 6000-page portfolio in the process. I entered the office sat down, rolled my eyes and said to myself, "here we go again." To my surprise, as the program director began to explain the course, it was the exact opposite. What she proposed for us to do this semester was new, unexpected, and brilliant. It was a refreshing twist on the norm and piqued my interest as soon as she began to

explain the requirements of the course. She asked us to do research! Real research, that could actually be used to help students in an entire school district. We were all definitely on board and couldn't wait to embark on our new adventure. I really have to say that I learned tons of valuable information and gained a wealth of knowledge of what it's truly like to be an administrator. This has been my best experience at this college thus far and I hope this continues to be the new administrative internship protocol. The knowledge gained from this one experience will definitely be used throughout my upcoming years as an administrator and I am thankful to the program director for taking a chance with something new. I always admire those who go against the grain and try new things. True leaders are willing to go out on a limb to do what they feel will be best for those whom they are leading. Therefore, it only seemed fitting that the program director would teach this course. She had taught me how to be a leader just by leading me, and I am grateful to her.

### **Naomi's Reflection**

After completing our "pilot" school district leadership program, I started to jot down important notes to use for my future endeavors. Articles such as "Exploring the Implementation, Effectiveness, and Cost of the Reading Partners Programs" by R. Jacob, D. Elson, B. Bowden, C. Armstrong (2015) and "Big Jump in Students Reading Scores" by Greta Palmberg and Kendra Rask, stood out to me the most. The articles stated, gave me a profound look on issues that are continuously surrounding our administrators, staff and students. "Exploring the Implementation, Effectiveness, and Cost of the Reading Partners Programs" spoke about the implementation of academic programs and how the programs are only as successful as you make them.

The District Superintendent acknowledged that program implementation

was the problem they faced as leaders. It is important to keep track of implementation of all programs in order to see if that program is best for the learning population. Staying consistent with the time dedicated to a program is needed to determine the success of the program.

So as a future administrator, setting aside scheduled time for training of the materials, with use of the materials, continuous collection of data, and ongoing review and revision of the program are all instrumental to the success of each program.

This SDL internship allowed me to understand all aspects of becoming a superintendent. It also helped me to identify areas of critical value such as parent involvement, and establishing an environment of a cohesive unit, which supports administrators, teachers, staff, students, parents, and the communities to ensure the progress of the children. I hope this program continues to provide other students with the learning experience it has provided me.

### **Anne's Reflection**

*"Suspecting and Knowing are not the same"* Rick Riordan, [The Lightning Thief](#). I find this quote sums up my experiences at Mercy College. Prior to diving into the administration field, I suspected about what should be done. In education today many suspect about what can be done. I feel I am ready to take on the challenge of administration and know what to do. I have the understanding and the knowledge to go forth. I have the program staff to thank for that.

### **Joanne's Reflection**

As I sit here and reflect on my experience, I feel a great sense of pride and accomplishment. I can remember sitting in on our first session and reviewing the syllabus with the program director and the other students in my class. Her vision for the course and expectations for our research project were very clear. Once class was dismissed, the excitement I was feeling quickly

faded and sheer panic and fear started to creep in. How was I going to accomplish all of this work and meet all of the expectations? Working a full time job as a quasi-administrator, being a mom of two little ones, and taking another district level course was only going to add to the work load and stress I was already feeling.

Studying district level information in a classroom is one thing, however being able to apply that knowledge and information to real life situations is completely different. After meeting with the district superintendent and being paired up with the Director, Behavioral and Academic Interventions, everything began to fall into place. This internship provided me with the opportunity to support what I was learning in my district level classes by allowing me to put my knowledge to work. I can officially say I have district level experience in evaluating programs and creating a districtwide RTI Manual. In addition, I was able to tap into a network of professionals that can offer references, advice and information about new job opportunities and professional development. This Internship allowed me to expand my background and understanding of how a school district operates making me more marketable to a possible employer.

### **College Faculty Member's Reflection**

On May 16, 2016 eight Administrative Interns in the School Building/District Leadership Master's Degree Program met with the superintendent of district schools and with several members of his senior administrative staff including the assistant superintendent, the executive director, language acquisition/bilingual/ESOL/LOTE, the executive director, school improvement, the executive director, secondary education and the director of academic and behavioral interventions.

These eight interns were part of a group of twelve who participated in a unique program in partnership with district schools.

The interns each engaged in authentic research, based upon the academic needs of the district, and conducted detailed interviews with district personnel to explore best practices.

As their culminating activity, each team of two Interns shared its power-point presentation, highlighting the research, findings and recommendations from the research project each conducted. One of the issues raised, for example, concerned the functionality of the Journeys literacy program, a program presently in use in district schools, and the possible reasons why it succeeds better in one school than another. The fact that the students picked up on this type of subtle issue is a credit to them. Anne's and Margaret's presentation was comprehensive and presented great ideas, which the administrative staff can utilize in their future staff development efforts.

John and Joanne really did a great job analyzing the data. They studied the question concerning the effectiveness of the district RTI model within three schools as measured by MAP assessment for the 2015-2016 academic year. They discovered that each school has access to different resources, which may be a major factor influencing consistency of program delivery.

Karen and Luanne focused their study on the low language proficiency among LEP students across grades three through five. They recommended that a committee be formed to develop a district-wide standardized protocol for ENL instruction. They also recommended that a review of the type and quality of professional development given to ENL teachers be conducted.

Harriet and Naomi suggested that district schools should focus on the literacy needs of their first and second grade students in order to build a strong foundation, which would serve to decrease reading deficits as students progress through the grades. They further recommended that programs to improve parental involvement, especially involving the families of struggling readers, be implemented.

Judging by all the questions and responses, the Interns' presentations were very well received by the Superintendent and his administrative staff. This was truly an excellent and authentic learning experience, one that would serve as an invaluable and unique addition to the Internship training program.

### **Program Director's Reflection**

It is not usual to see excitement on students' faces when a professor introduces a course on the first day of class. However, observing the reactions of eight candidates enrolled in their final administrative internship course for the master's degree program, I was greeted with shouts of joy and screams when I shared the connection made with the superintendent in district to pilot this new approach to their administrative internships.

The Superintendent welcomed these candidates as interns into the district to work directly with his administrative staff to review reports to identify areas of concern, and through their research processes, come up with recommendations for the district to consider for implementation. The students couldn't believe what a great opportunity they were being offered, work with real people, real problems, conduct an authentic research study. They were in awe.

As the teacher and partner of the superintendent and his exemplary administrative staff, this pilot was a unique initiative. The Superintendent gave of his time and committed his administrative staff's time to work and support these interns, individually and in groups, for a period of over four months. For the first time, candidates felt that their work had meaning, purpose, and importance. They were accepted as members of the district and treated in a highly professional manner. Their work, while challenging, was needed. The superintendent and his administrative staff anticipated the results of their studies for consideration of implementation in their schools

The interns raved about this approach and said the college must adopt this model. This unique experience will be indelibly imprinted in the minds of our eight interns. They and the college are most grateful to the superintendent and his administrative staff.

The experiential administrative internship pilot was deemed a success and will be replicated in future administrative course offerings.

### **Superintendent's Reflection**

Educators often speak about the value of authentic learning. I am one who strongly believes that authentic learning is diminished in classrooms unless the leaders responsible for creating this environment are offered the opportunity to learn utilizing this approach. This is especially true when one works with underrepresented students in a large urban community. The model described in this article offered candidates an opportunity to engage in authentic learning, research and practice.

Partnering with Mercy College allowed eight interns an environment to study, research and offer recommendations that, if implemented, will result in improved student achievement outcomes. In addition, this approach empowers future school leaders to engage in a model mired in action research and authentic learning. These are the leaders needed in today's schools.

As a superintendent, I have the responsibility to shape future leaders. As a result of this internship model, Mercy College and Yonkers Public Schools accomplished this goal. We were intentional, determined, and laser-focused on providing interns with an intern model wherein their recommendations were put into practice in the district. Their research and recommendations focused on student subgroups and instructional areas that present enormous challenges including students with disabilities and English language

learners whose reading proficiencies present challenges that may be addressed through an authentic Response to Intervention Program.

This model is aligned with the latest research on school leadership and must be afforded to all future candidates. The Mercy College Yonkers Public Schools Leadership Lab is a valuable opportunity for those committed to changing the way business is done in urban schools.

### **Summary and Recommendations**

The interns began with a review of the literature in the identified area of academic concern and developed a rationale for study with questions based on the district report card data. They worked with the Director of Academic and Behavioral Interventions to set up interviews with the administrators in charge of the respective areas to gain an understanding of and insight into the problem, as it differed from school to school and grade to grade. They were able to evaluate the problem from a global perspective, incorporate the research findings with outcomes from schools that had employed successful techniques, and combine their expertise and experience in the designated areas to arrive at conclusions and recommendations that would have positive impact on the areas of weakness and ultimately have positive impact on student achievement.

Paired into four dyads they lived the internship night and day, calling upon each other to explore as many ideas as possible to come up with the best recommendations as administrators.

The interns presented their research papers in thesis format, five chapters comprising the rationale/ questions, the review of the literature, the methodology, the findings, and conclusions-suggestions and recommendations. In addition, at the culminating session each dyad presented a power point that summarized its study to the superintendent, his administrative staff, two professors and the

eight interns. The discussion focused on the interns' findings and the suggestions and recommendations that would best address these areas of concern, for possible follow-up and implementation.

Their work was of superior quality with two dyads going beyond to design a handbook and manual as exemplars for the district. Even though the internship ended, the four interns continued working on these tools to completion, the interns, the professors, the superintendent and his administrative staff evaluated the pilot administrative internship program. Interns wrote reflections of their experience. The value for replicating this model for future interns was considered.

The thread throughout the four research projects is the need to increase pedagogical efforts to improve literacy in Grades Three to Five. They suggest early intervention, Grades One and Two, before mastery of literacy and math skills are assessed in Grade Three. The focus on the general population in Grades One to Five needs to include focus on the other sub-groups of children: children with special needs, children with limited English proficiency, and children for whom English is a new language, to give them their respective requisite supports. They found that teachers were not adequately prepared to handle literacy and math issues with children coming from these populations, and suggested alternative approaches, materials, resources, tools to be shared in the on-going professional development sessions and put into practice and monitored. Professional development requires consistent follow-up with modifications and changes to bring the teachers up to level of effectiveness. The implementation of these policies and best practices must be standardized throughout all the schools in the district, and observed, assessed, and modified on an on-going basis. Another recommendation is to form working committees with members from each school to assist district administrators with monitoring and modifying the programs



throughout the schools in the district on an ongoing basis. They also suggest setting up a district literacy committee for ongoing review. The suggestion was made to increase parent involvement in the early grades, by inviting parents to observe literacy activities in the classrooms to give them the skills to implement with their own children. They recommend extending these literacy efforts to the entire community.

## Notes

1. The Report Card is The New York State Education Department's public report of educational data. Data is reported for all students and schools by gender, race, ethnicity, language status for attendance and achievement in language arts and mathematics for grades 3-8.
2. Yonkers is the fourth largest city in New York State, with a population of 200,000. The district in this study was the Yonkers Public Schools district. The district serves 26,000 students in 40 schools (numbers rounded).
3. Dr. Edwin M. Quezada, Superintendent of Schools.
4. All intern's names are pseudonyms
5. Retrieved from NYSEDE IRTS 2014-15 PMF Report accessed at:  
<http://p12.nysed.gov/1rs/pmf/2015/2015PMF-Counts.pdf>
6. Average Common Branch class sizes in 2014-15 retrieved from  
<http://www.p12.nysed.gov.irs/pmf2015/2015Avg-Class-Size.Pdf>
7. The ELA/Math Aspirational Performance Measure is a performance measure aligned with college- and career-readiness that reflects the consensus among admission directors in New York State's two- and four-year colleges that students who are well prepared to enter college without the need for remediation score at least 75 on the English Regents examination and 80 on a Regents mathematics examination. Retrieved from  
<http://www.regents.nysed.gov/common/regents/files/documents/meetings/2011Meetings/May2011/511p12ccrd5.pdf>

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