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CHALLENGES OF LEADING DURING COVID-19: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF
K-12 ADMINISTRATORS

A Dissertation
presented in partial fulfillment requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Department of Educational Leadership
The University of Mississippi

by

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ABSTRACT

This research discusses the impact of environmental and social crisis events, how these events affect schools, and how administrators can make informed decision in response to those events. The qualitative phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of K-12 administrators in Mississippi Public Schools and how their perceptions of planning for the 2020-2021 school year differs from past school years. The study is based on open-ended, in-depth interviews of K-12 administrators at the elementary, middle and high school levels in Mississippi Public Schools. The researcher examined the data and search for emerging themes. The data can be used to inform administrators of future school decisions. Findings revealed the need for proactive approaches to virtual learning, increased crisis management training, and increased collaboration among school staff.

Keywords: Qualitative, leadership, phenomenological, COVID-19, K-12, administrators

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife, Mary Ann, who inspired and guided me throughout this entire process. I would also like to dedicate this journey to our son, Stephen, who makes us extremely proud. In particular, I dedicate this dissertation to my mother and late father who always supported my dreams and believed in me.

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First, I would like to express my gratitude to my advisor and committee chair, Dr. Douglas Raymond Davis, without whom this journey would not have been possible. It has been an honor to work with you throughout this journey.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Research Problem

During the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years, COVID-19 severely disrupted the educational environment. Educators in all levels of education, including elementary and secondary schools, were forced to develop non-traditional educational environments new to many faculty and staff (Middleton, 2020; Pattison et al., 2021). By June 2020, an estimated 55 million students in the United States had missed several months of face-to-face instruction (Pattison et al., 2021). Lack of in-person learning forced faculty, students, and parents to meet the challenges of transitioning from in person learning to virtual learning (Wyse et al., 2020). As time passed, excessive student and teacher absences due to COVID-19 infections or fear of infections also wreaked havoc on student learning. In addition, students, parents, and educators were poorly trained in the virtual learning platforms utilized in virtual and face-to-face learning. Shamir-Inbal and Blau (2020) state, “The challenges for teachers were caused by insufficient technological and pedagogical support or by inexperience in using online tools on a daily basis” (p. 4). Students’ access to virtual learning was limited due to lack of devices and Internet access. Areas in the most rural parts of Mississippi lack appropriate broadband Internet as well as cell phone coverage reception which make accessing online learning activities difficult or almost impossible. All of these issues created challenges in providing effective learning opportunities for all students.

Middleton (2020), “Learning...may have been impacted more than typical by stress, anxiety, illness, being forced to learn in a method that was vastly different from what they

were used to, and the potential to fall behind due to the lack of access to the materials to learn Internet, quiet space, etc.” (p. 41). Hence, lack of Internet access and/or electronic devices available for students can severely interrupt the student learning process as technology is a key component in the success of Internet-based virtual school programs (Toppin & Toppin, 2015). Middleton (2020) indicated many teachers were not prepared and had no training to teach students online (p. 42). Also, a large percentage of students had no experience learning from an online platform and were unable to complete assignments from their online platform. As such, many schools without the capability to provide students equitable virtual platforms created and implemented methods of delivering high quality instruction to their students who opt out of face-to-face schooling.

Teachers managed dual roles as both face-to-face and online instructors in the 2020-2021 school year. In many school districts, teachers have been mandated to simultaneously provide student instruction in both traditional and virtual platforms with little or no training on the virtual platforms themselves. Additionally, students who chose virtual learning in the 2020-2021 school year also have been thrust into the world of virtual education with little or no training on the virtual platforms as well.

In addition to the lack of educator training on online platforms, the change to virtual learning brought a variety of learning issues. Middleton (2020) indicated no new material was taught in some schools from March until the end of the 2019-2020 school year. Instead, the end of the school year was basically a review of the previous material from earlier in the school year. Additionally, very little if any virtual learning opportunities were offered at the end of the 2019-2020 school year as parents and students had no choice of learning options because schools were completely shut down statewide.

Teachers implemented and uploaded asynchronous videos to teach new skills to their students who were now struggling to learn from home. Some educators also initiated synchronous videos in which students and parents could participate. Middleton (2020) stated students with “varying academic abilities” were trying to learn from the same synchronous videos and faced difficulties grasping the new material at the same rate as other students. This issue created new problems for teachers because differentiated instruction in the classroom was almost impossible to implement while using synchronous videos. As a result, many parents and students chose virtual learning without grasping the sacrifices and requirements accompanying virtual learning.

This study examined the lived experience of K-12 school administrators during the first year of the unprecedented global pandemic, COVID -19. This study also explored the challenges the COVID-19 Pandemic presented to the day-to-day operations of K-12 Mississippi schools. Finally, the study explored how COVID-19 has informed needed long-term responses in K-12 schools in order to build resilient leadership.

The Research Problem

Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, school officials in the United States had to make many changes in the daily operations of their respective districts. However, the need for school administrators and teachers to respond to external disruptions in their schools is not new. Historically, major events have caused American K-12 schools to alter their current practices to meet their students’ needs (Alzarhani, 2018).

Providing students with a quality education in the traditional school environment is challenging. However, these educational challenges were compounded during the 2020-2021 school year as health concerns amid the COVID-19 dominated decision making in every area of

the school system. Health concerns caused by COVID-19 caused major disruptions and changes in the daily routines of school administrators, teachers, students, parents, and local communities.

In the future, educators must be flexible and ready to adapt to external disruptions in the learning environment by implementing creative learning opportunities for students. School officials have to ensure teachers and administrators are prepared to provide effective learning opportunities for all students regardless of the COVID-19 Pandemic or other disruptions to the educational environment. For instance, after assessing risk factors, schools facing reopening plans in the 2020-2021 school year mainly used one of three models: virtual, hybrid (a blend of virtual and traditional), or traditional (Liu et al., 2021). Therefore, teachers had to become proficient teaching in a virtual learning setting and managing their face-to-face students simultaneously with little to no training. Parents, students, and educators alike were struggling to return to “normal” as in pre-pandemic. Schools were under a lot of pressure to return to conventional learning, but also having to follow government guidance. Participating in conventional, in-person, learning, provides students with opportunities continue to develop their much needed social skills as well as return to a “normal” routine. Also, educators, parents, and students were coping with constant changes while students still had to receive appropriate learning opportunities.

Teacher proficiency in learning strategies in both virtual and in-person teaching plays a major role in student academic growth. As discussed by Wyse et al. (2020), “A key component of a curriculum, and particularly important during school closing, is tools to facilitate student practice of key skills” (p. 63). Mastery of these skills is necessary for adequate student growth and appropriate performance of the state-mandated, end-of-the year student assessments.

Mastery of these key skills is also necessary for students to succeed in school as pupils progress to the next grade level and beyond.

As a result of constantly changing conditions in the learning environment, school officials must provide ongoing teacher training focused on resilient responses to external factors. Training needs to reach beyond simply learning how to navigate virtual learning platforms. Vital training must include building curriculum-based lessons compatible in both face-to-face and virtual environments and ways to increase engagement of virtual students. Teacher created assignments must have the flexibility to be able to transition from an in-person to virtual learning platform with little to no troubles in the event of school disruptions similar to those of COVID-19 or any others.

However, even with all of these available options, some schools did not possess the overall technological capability to provide their students the resources needed for any mode of virtual learning. In fact, Chellman et al. (2020) found, “22% of American schools, the majority of which are in rural locales as identified by the National Center of Education Statistics, do not meet the FCC’s connectivity goal (100 Mbps per 1,000 users).” In addition, for those students attending traditional and hybrid classes, educators struggled with consistent student attendance. Students contracting the virus have had to switch to virtual learning for a minimum of fourteen days after diagnosis. Students not testing positive for the virus but who had been within close proximity of students in their classes testing positive had to quarantine for fourteen days as well.

Other issues and/or disruptions arose in school districts. Some districts lacked the technological resources, such as devices for each student, to accommodate effective online learning. Other districts have already begun planning for continued online school (Singer, 2021). Schools that committed to continuing online learning face a certain amount of risk. Singer (2021)

suggests online learning could normalize remote learning approaches that have already had poor results for Asian, Black, and Latino families.

With online school learning platforms becoming more prevalent in 2020-2021, school administrators and teachers created and implemented more ingenious and effective means of lessons and delivery methods to ensure students continue to grow academically and recover as much of the lost learning time as possible. Educators will have to create learning options to allow equitable learning opportunities for students participating in both virtual and in-person learning. Administrators and teachers also must ensure all students receive effective instruction at all times, whether involved in either in-person or virtual learning platforms.

Additionally, school districts will need to be prepared for anticipated academic setbacks for students as a result of the lack of effective, teacher-led instruction during the last quarter of the 2019-2020 school year. According to Binsak (2021), “students in grades 3-8 started the 2020-2021 school year almost half a year behind relative to grade-level expectations” (p. 64). Binsak (2021) suggests a large part of students achieved less than three-quarters of their expected goals in reading and less than half of the expected goals in math. Teachers and administrators will have to implement creative and effective means of teaching and learning to negate the effects of the lack of academic growth.

As with past external disruptions, the COVID-19 Pandemic did not negate the responsibility of schools to provide all students with a free and appropriate education (FERPA). Exploration of these issues is needed to inform educators of appropriate preparedness for future external disruptions. This preparedness will help educators in providing equitable learning opportunities for all students regardless of the type of disruption.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of K-12 school administrators during the 2020-2021 school year of the unprecedented, global pandemic, COVID-19 in the public schools of Mississippi. Mississippi is a predominately rural state consisting of several metropolitan areas, including the state capital of Jackson. Mississippi consists of 162 public school districts, most of which are located in rural areas. Educators had to learn to create a resilient learning environment adaptable to changes caused by external factors. Regardless of disruption, students were entitled to an equitable educational environment best serving their academic, social, and emotional needs. As such, educators should establish meaningful, long-term goals to focus on the needs of their students.

This study was a qualitative phenomenological exploration of the experiences of school administrators in Mississippi during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The phenomenon in this instance is the COVID-19 Pandemic, which affected almost every aspect of education. The researcher interviewed K-12 administrators in Mississippi and sought to tell the stories of administrators and their challenges during the pandemic. The study focused on the knowledge gained by administrators during the pandemic and how this knowledge can help school leaders prepare for external disruptions in the future.

Significance of Study

This qualitative study explored the impact of the significance of natural and man-made disasters on school leaders' ability to meet the educational needs of all students. The desire was to gather information to appropriately prepare schools, staff, and students for possible threats with the potential to negatively affect the ability of schools to provide students a quality education. School administrators, students, staff, parents, and communities are still reeling from

the effects of COVID-19. The study will provide insight as to how we can develop a proactive plan to combat educational disruptions in the future.

This study was appropriate and timely as school leaders, not only in the United States but globally, are facing unprecedented times and struggling to make the best decisions possible for teachers, students, and parents regarding educational opportunities. Since the study examined individual practices of school leaders, a phenomenological study targeted and described lived experiences of school-level principals in Mississippi during the 2020-2021 school year.

The results of the study have the potential to affect future decision-making abilities of school administrators, not only in Mississippi, but nationwide. Additionally, the study may affect school leaders' ability to increase and improve teacher retention rates and student learning opportunities by providing ideas and suggestions for resilient leadership in times of crises.

There is relevant research (Burnham & Hooper, 2011; Picou & Marshall, 2007) exploring the effects of external factors such as gun violence, natural disasters such as Hurricane Katrina, and man-made disasters such as the September 11 attacks on student learning. All of this research is vital in driving preparedness for building overall resilience; however, a significant gap exists in the literature concerning the ability of schools to cope with disruptions caused by external factors.

The impact of Hurricane Katrina on the Gulf Coast of the United States resulted in approximately 350,000 students and their families becoming displaced from their homes and thus their schools in Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana (Picou & Marshall 2007, p. 773). As a result of the displacements, students and their families relocated to new communities, forcing students into unfamiliar schools. This process caused issues for the students and their new school teachers.

As schools were inundated with new students from the Hurricane ravaged Gulf Coast, teachers were tasked with teaching new students who were suffering from “emotional, cognitive, interpersonal, and physical problems” (Picou & Marshall, 2007, p. 773). Additionally, in order to meet the needs of the new students, teachers were tasked with creating and/or modifying existing lessons to meet the students’ varying levels of academic abilities. Unfortunately, some of these teachers were facing trauma themselves.

In addition to the vast numbers of students and their families displaced by Hurricane Katrina, approximately “25,000 K-12 teachers and staff in Mississippi and Louisiana” also were displaced (Burnham & Hooper, 2011, p. 1). These displacements not only created major problems for school-based teachers and staff but for school administrators as well. School staff faced issues similar to those of displaced students, including excessive absences and work fatigue (Burnham & Hooper, 2011). In spite of these issues, school leaders had to ensure both existing and new students were receiving appropriate educational services.

In addition to natural crises, man-made crises also affect students’ physical and emotional well-being, which in-turn could possibly affect their educational outcomes. For example, the tragic events of September 11 also disrupted student learning. According to Lengue et al. (2005), even though not all students were personally involved in the incident, “Children across the county were affected by the attacks” (p. 640). Although the majority of K-12 students were not physically injured, many students did demonstrate signs of worry and psychological trauma similar to individuals who personally experienced traumatic events (Lengue et al., 2005). Students who suffer from these types of trauma do experience disruptions in the learning process and school teachers, staff, and leaders must provide the appropriate levels of support to ensure students receive adequate education services and do not fall behind in their studies.

Research Question and Sub-Questions

The central research question for this study explored the phenomenon of the COVID-19 Pandemic and the effects on K-12 school leaders. The study focused on school leaders in different areas of the state including rural, semi-rural, and suburban. The research study also endeavored to understand if and how school leaders in Mississippi were prepared for the pandemic and how school leaders can prepare for similar scenarios in the future.

To fulfill the goals of the research study, the researcher began with a central research question and follow with multiple sub-questions. The central question was: How did the COVID-19 Pandemic affect the lived experiences of K-12 administrators in the 2020-2021 school year?

Sub Questions:

1. How did the COVID-19 Pandemic alter the day-to-day experiences of school administrators in the 2020-2021 school year who participated in the research study?
2. According to school administrators interviewed, what changes need to occur to prepare administrators for similar disruptions to the learning environment in the future?
3. According to administrators interviewed, what changes need to occur to prepare administrators to assist teachers, parents, students, and their school as a whole for similar disruptions?
4. According to the participants interviewed, how has the COVID-19 Pandemic experience changed the education field?
5. In what ways did participants prepare for the difficult challenges faced during the past 2020-2021 school year?
6. What were some positives experiences participants encountered during the past school year, 2020-2021?

This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of K-12 administrators during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Creswell (2009) states in a phenomenological study the researcher will intentionally select participants allowing the researcher to best understand the phenomenon for the proposed research study (p. 178). Creswell explains that using one-to-one interviews helps the researcher to gain in-depth information from participants. Participants engaged in interviews via Zoom. With participants' permission, audio-recording devices were used for Zoom interviews. The researcher took both descriptive and reflective notes during the interviews to identify and describe the physical settings as well as personal reflections of the participants' responses to the interview questions. Creswell (2009) also that utilizing open-ended questions assists with acquiring unaltered views and opinions of the research participants as much as possible. To analyze the data, the researcher used the coding process and identify relevant themes in the data. The researcher will analyzed and interpreted the meaning of the data.

Definitions

The following definitions guided this research:

1. COVID-19. "COVID-19 is a new disease, caused by a novel (or new) coronavirus that has not previously been seen before in humans. Because it is a new virus, scientists are learning more each day. COVID-19 can cause severe illness and even death. Some groups, including older adults and people who have certain medical conditions are at increased risk of severe illness" (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021, para. 1).
2. Phenomenological research. "Phenomenological research is a design of inquiry coming from philosophy and psychology in which the researcher describes the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by participants. The description culminates in the essence of

the experiences for several individuals who have all experienced the same phenomenon” (Creswell, 2014, p. 14).

3. Saturation. “When gathering fresh data no longer sparks new insights or reveals new properties” (Creswell, 2014, p.189).

4. School Administrator. “A school administrator works with the school superintendent and those who he/she supervises to articulate and promote the school systems’ vision of learning and teaching” (Mississippi Department of Education, 2021).

5. Hybrid learning. “Hybrid learning combines face-to-face learning with online activities” (Penn State, 2019).

6. Virtual learning. “Virtual Learning is defined as a delivery model that is an interactive computer-based and internet-connected learning environment in which students are separated from their teachers by time or location or both and in which a Mississippi-certified teacher is responsible for providing instruction.” (Distance Learning and Online Courses, n.d.).

Summary

COVID-19 has caused many issues and disruptions to the educational environment. This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of K-12 administrators during the first year of the COVID-19 Pandemic. This study provided insight to future school leaders as to how to build resilience, manage, and cope with external disruptions to student learning.

Chapter II discusses relevant, historical research regarding or in relation to external factors and what affects those factors had on the educational environment in the United States. Specific events addressed include Civil Rights Era legislation providing more equitable learning opportunities for all students as well as more recent legislation such as No Child Behind and Every Student Succeeds Act mandating end-of-course state assessments for elementary and high

schools. Other relevant research references safety concerns for K-12 education due to gun violence and both natural and man-made disasters.

Chapter III describes the methods and procedures involved in the research study designed to examine the lived experiences of K-12 administrators during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The study focused on how school leaders will learn how to create a more sustainable learning environment as a result of the disruptions caused by the pandemic. The chapter will discuss the design of the study as well as elements such as population, sample, data collection, and data analysis. The chapter also addresses ethical considerations of the study as well as validity and reliability concerns.

In this study, the researcher explored the effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the K-12 educational environment and how well participating school administrators were prepared for the severe disruption to the educational system. The researcher attempted to identify areas in need of improvements as noted by participating school leaders as well as how school administrators can prepare for similar events in the future.

As previously noted, Chapter II will discuss pertinent, historical data and research and how this information has affected education in the United States. Chapter II will provide the reader with appropriate knowledge and background and some insight as to the necessity of the research study. Additionally, results of this study will inform and influence school leaders of solutions to problems they faced in their schools during the 2020-2021 school year. The results will hopefully provide a guide for creating better support systems for teacher, staff, students, parents, and communities.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Past major historical events have caused American K-12 school systems to alter practices in order to evolve and meet students' needs (Alzahrani, 2018). Similarly, the COVID-19 Pandemic has demanded an alteration in the operation of K-12 school systems. In order to address these needed changes, this review explored the responses of K-12 administrators in Mississippi to events such as the Civil Rights Era, gun violence, and Hurricane Katrina as well as current issues surrounding educational needs during this unprecedented pandemic.

Educators must have the tools and resources to adapt in order to provide equity in educational opportunities for every student regardless of socioeconomic status, cultural/racial background, or gender identity. Over the past 100 years, schools have faced challenges and implemented many changes to daily practices. Some positive changes such as integration were needed and implemented with the goal of bringing equality for all students. Other changes were implemented out of necessity due to natural or man-made disasters, and even public health crises (Auger et al., 2004; Kolbe, 2019; Scott, 2008).

Currently, educators are transforming learning environments as a result of disruptions caused by the 2020 Global COVID-19 Pandemic. Several immediate issues of concern for K-12 administrators are centered in the technological gaps in the educational system as well as in community settings the pandemic exposed. For example, when schools moved to virtual instruction at the start of March 2020, some schools were able to provide technology for students to complete work remotely. The lack of Internet access for students who live in more rural areas

made the process of accessing online school materials more difficult than for students who live in more suburban or urban areas.

Further, districts mandated educators, the majority of whom were not adept to teaching online, to develop a plan for virtual student learning. In order to meet these demands, administrators and teachers faced the challenge of creating a plan to respond to these issues ensuring all students still received a quality education whether learning virtually or in person. In addition, administrators had to ensure schools continued to address not only academic needs of students but also the social, emotional, and physical health of all students (Picou & Marshall, 2007). In short, in order to successfully educate all students, K-12 school districts' virtual learning plans still needed to encompass all of these areas. However, due to limited training and time constraints, educators struggled to create and implement policy and plans to effectively address all of these issues.

Education, Legislation, and Court Cases

Impact of Supreme Court Legislation

Two U.S. Supreme Court cases, *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) and *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* (1954) had significant impacts across the nation. Logan et al. (2012) explained both of these cases challenged the constitutionality of separate but equal treatment under the Fourteenth Amendment. Cornell Legal Information Institute (2020) state the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution mandates “Any person within the jurisdiction of the United States will not be denied equal protection of the laws” (<https://www.law.cornell.edu/constitution/amendmentxiv>).

Plessy v. Ferguson (1896) originated from an 1892 incident in which Homer Plessy, a passenger on the East Louisiana Railway, entered a passenger car reserved for Whites only. After

Plessy told the conductor he was not a hundred percent white, the conductor ordered Plessy, who was of “seven-eighths Caucasian and one eighth African blood” to surrender his seat (Cornell, 2020; O’Neill, 1995 p. 13). Plessy refused; therefore, he was arrested, put in jail, and “there held to answer a charge made by such officer to the effect that he was guilty of having criminally violated an act of the General Assembly of the State, approved July 10, 1890” (*Plessy versus Ferguson*, 1896, p. 1). Attorneys for Plessy lost their local case to New Orleans Judge John Ferguson, the Louisiana Supreme Court, and, eventually, the United States Supreme Court (O’Neill, 1995).

Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas (1954) challenged the separate but equal legislation upheld in *Plessy versus Ferguson (1896)*. In this case, Logan et al. (2020) stated “The U.S. Supreme Court officially declared the ‘separate but equal’ doctrine established 58 years earlier in *Plessy v. Ferguson (1896)* had no place in the field of education” (p. 288). This monumental case called for equal treatment for public school students and enforced the idea state sanctioned segregation in public schools violated the Fourteenth Amendment (Watras, 2013).

Civil Rights Era

As a result of *Brown versus Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas (1954)*, America began its track to desegregate the public school system with the goal of increasing educational opportunities for both Black and White students. Watras (2013) noted, “As part of this process, President Harry Truman created the U.S. President’s Committee on Civil Rights, and in 1947 The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) announced news of this committee to Congress” (p. 113). As Orfield (2014) discussed, “the ground- breaking U.S. Civil Rights Act of 1964 afforded federal officials and politicians the opportunities and tools to bring about the desegregation of American schools” (p. 73).

In addition to the new laws, there was the recognition school districts needed to reach beyond legislation to appropriately respond to new laws. Orfield (2014) explained, “In the midst of enforcing changes in race relations, there was recognition that it was hard, that people would need to be retrained, that institutions needed help, and that the government must play a major role in those efforts” (p. 75). As a result of this understanding, President Johnson’s administration went on to enact many education-friendly federal laws. Additionally, as Orfield (2014) stated, “The 1964 Civil Rights Act provided technical assistance for school districts” (p. 275). Orfield (2014) further explained, “The education laws enacted by the Johnson administration also created opportunities for low-income students by establishing scholarships and work-study opportunities for poor students as well as created the Head Start, funded preschool programs, and expanded affordable housing on a large scale” (p. 275). Inclusion of these resources was vital for administrators striving to create equitable environments for all students.

Paul (2016) stated the Johnson administration ratified the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1965 and mandated legislators to reauthorize the ESEA every five years. The law’s purpose has been to combat poverty and create equal access to a quality education for all students. Paul (2016) explained the ESEA was again reauthorized in 2001 by President George W. Bush’s administration under the name *No Child Left Behind*, and more recently, ESSA in 2015.

No Child Left Behind

The 2001 *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) legislation promoted intent to increase educational opportunities for all students (Kantor & Lowe, 2006). The law mandated end-of-

course state tests for elementary and secondary students to measure students' adequate yearly progress (AYP) and penalized schools not meeting these benchmarks.

The mandate for schools to meet AYP standards placed administrators and teachers under intense pressure (Genao, 2013). Per NCLB mandate, schools failing to meet AYP requirements for two consecutive years were placed under sanctions (Mitani, 2019). Administrators began constructing academic plans used to guide or modify instruction in the specific tested areas. Schools also began to rely more on educational research to improve the quality of teacher professional development and improve academic interventions for low-performing students (Stecher et al., 2010).

Schools also began to allocate more time to reading and math instruction at the expense of other subjects such as science and social studies (Dee et al., 2013). Jennings and Renter (2006) noted the social studies classes suffered the most of the disciplines as time and resources have been allocated to reading and math. In addition to more testing, school administrators began closely monitoring subgroups such as socioeconomically disadvantaged students, English Language Learners and students with disabilities (Genao, 2013).

In 2015, the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) replaced NCLB (Paul, 2016), provided state education agencies the autonomy in how to hold public school students accountable. Each state can create its own education standards and create and implement support plans to assist struggling schools. This legislation allowed states to create curricula to better meet the needs of each state's diverse population (National Association of Secondary School Principals [NASP], (2020).

Charter Schools

In 1991, federal entities decided one way to increase academic achievement was to offer “Alternatives that emphasized a free market approach to schooling” (Watras, 2013, p. 14). Proponents of this federal legislation intended to promote equity among all students in public education. With this legislation came a great deal of money intended to offer public alternatives to traditional K-12 programs (Watras, 2013). As of 1999, U.S. Congress dedicated one hundred million dollars to the creation of charter schools as an alternative for parents unhappy with the local public school system; in 1994, Congress implemented multi-million dollar appropriations for the creation of charter schools (Watras, 2013). As a response to the creation of charter schools, proponents maintained local school districts created and implemented diverse curricula, increased staff training, and created public magnet schools in an effort to make desegregation more successful. However, critics note charter schools have resulted in more student segregation, setting back the efforts of *Brown V. the Board of Education (1954)* (Watras, 2013; Frankenberg, 2003; Lee, 2005).

Public school administrators need to understand the long-reaching effects of charter schools in their communities. In fact, superintendents and principals “slow to react to the effects of charter schools in their areas have been replaced with individuals more open to change” (Bohte, 2004, p. 503). Administrators had to adapt to the changes charter schools brought to their own schools.

One such change was the loss of funding due to students leaving traditional schools for charter schools. Bohte (2004) found such losses “lead to cutbacks in teaching staff and administrative personnel” (p. 502). However, in several instances, districts and administrators combatted this issue by showing parents their public schools were high performing through

marketing campaigns highlighting areas ranging from teacher training initiatives, advancements in curricula, and after school programs (Bohte, 2004).

Safety Concerns Affecting K-12 Education

American schools are regularly plagued by issues such as school violence, natural and public health disasters, and are deemed safety concerns for students. Administrators have had to formulate plans ensuring student safety. School crisis plans and interventions to the aforementioned problems/disasters determine how students respond to the ever-changing landscape of K-12 education.

Gun Violence

A major issue plaguing K-12 schools in recent decades is gun violence. By definition, school related gun violence expands beyond the school campus. Kolbe (2020) defined school related gun violence as “occurring among students, staff, and others; in public and private on the way to and from school and during or on the way to and from school-sponsored events” (p. 240).

Thomas’s work, *A History of Violence: Guns, U.S. Education, and American Exceptionalism* (2018) stated the media attention surrounding tragedies such as Columbine have led Americans to believe there are more instances of violence in schools than actually occur. Price et al. (2015) adds though uncommon, school violence is most disturbing due to the young age and innocence of the victims. Thomas (2018) argued this perception has resulted in “focusing exclusively on how to create safe schools, instead of recognizing schools as microcosms of a larger culture of violence and guns most will not confront” (p.10). Kolbe (2020) added less than two percent of all youth homicides occur in U.S. K-12 schools, (p. 245). Specifically, Goodman-Scott (2020) reported currently more than 21,000 youth are victims of gun violence each year, resulting in more than 3,000 deaths and 18,000 injuries.

Although rare, these tragedies do occur, and community members, educators, and students are well aware of the potential risks; therefore, it is vital administrators prepare for these emergencies and understand the potential effects on students, faculty, and staff. The threat of gun violence can create severe emotional and physical effects on students, staff, as well as the community. Auger et al. (2004) suggested these effects could range from the suffering of both short and long-term psychological episodes such as grief, anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic disorder (PTSD). Gun violence can have many effects on the school climate and the students and teachers within the school (Kolbe, 2020).

Beland and Kim (2016) stated students' "exposure to violence has long lasting mental health consequences ...and diminishes academic achievement" (p. 114). Among these effects are "decreases in student scores on Math and English standardized tests" (Beland & Kim, 2014, p. 114). Since standardized test results typically play a huge factor in school accountability, the declines in scores can severely affect school accountability ratings. Exposure to gun violence can also cause a decrease in classroom academic grades as well as an increase in destructive and/or disorderly student behavior (Beland & Kim, 2014).

Exposure to gun violence can drastically and negatively affect teachers and other school staff. According to Kolbe (2020), "Teachers can suffer from various issues such as prolonged illness, professional burnout and/or career change, in addition to divorce" (p. 246). These issues can produce additional costs for school and school districts in the form of increased insurance premium, and purchasing of training, safety, and technological services. Kolbe (2020) explained to combat or prevent gun violence, many schools and districts expended vast resources to implement intervention in hope to prevent or reduce the likelihood of gun violence incidents occurring on or near the school campus (pp. 246-247).

Kobe (2020) stated the following about gun violence interventions in addition to the previously mentioned guidelines issued by federal entities:

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in partnership with the U.S. Department of Education (ED) and the U.S. Secret Service to create a “threat assessment” model to impede school violence. This program attempts to identify students at risk for violent behavior and implement a series of interventions to lower, eliminate, or manage the risk. (p. 247)

In response to multiple school shootings and other incidences of school violence, schools in the U.S have initiated school lockdown drills for students and staff. As discussed by Goodman-Scott and Eckhoff (2020), the purpose of lockdown drills is to prepare both students and school personnel to safely react to a possible school shooter or other threats of violence. Although lockdown drills are conducted in most U.S. schools, Goodman-Scott and Eckhoff (2020) also discussed the lack of research to support lockdown drill protocols and notes lockdown drills have a potential to cause harm to the participants, i.e., students and staff.

Implications of September 11 in schools

Auger et al. (2004) explained much like exposure to gun violence or other traumatic events, students who witnessed the 9/11 attacks suffered from bouts of depression, anxiety, and other dissociative problems (p. 238). Mann et al. (2014) asserted there is extensive documentation concerning adult trauma as a result of September 11 attacks; however, there is limited literature on how children were affected (p. 121). Auger et.al (2004) asserted school-age children found the events of 9/11 even more difficult to discern due to their lack of development of both their cognitive and verbal skills. School officials were met with the daunting task of meeting the psychological, physical, and academic needs of the students under their care.

As a result of these events, school administrators implemented policies and procedures allowing school counselors to actively seek out students, teachers, and other staff members in need of counseling or mental health services after a traumatic event has occurred such as the 9/11 attacks, school shootings, natural or other public health crises. School counselors, administrators, and teachers began receiving training in identifying signs of personal distress, anguish, and anxiety as well as repeatedly visiting and observing students in the classroom, hallways, cafeterias, and during recess time. It was also suggested counselors should make efforts to address the social, emotional, and academic needs of students and staff witnessing traumatic events such as 9/11 and school shootings (Goodman-Scott & Eckhoff, 2020; Auger et al., 2004).

The terror attacks of September 11, 2001, also led to a rethinking on how to protect schools. Districts had to change their crisis management plans to include procedures, policies, and drills to anticipate the next domestic terror events. School counselors, nurses, administrators, teachers, and other staff members now are expected to meet students' physical, mental, and academic needs in the event of another attack. Auger et al. (2004), suggested school counselors, administrators, and teachers were thrust in the position of responding to a traumatic situation of previously unimaginable proportions after the 9/11 attacks. Even though the actual events were confined to New York, Pennsylvania, and Washington D.C., the effects reverberated nationally and have expanded to include a variety of threats. In addition to the victims who were personally involved in the attacks, countless millions watched the attacks via live television. Many school age students were traumatized by the chaos, which took place on their television screens. School officials were not prepared for the long-lasting effects caused by the viewing of these horrific events. Auger et al. (2004) explained, "School counselors should make special efforts to reach

out to those students who are already dealing with unusual stressors or who have existing health issues” (p. 229).

Hurricane Katrina

Goodman (2008) affirmed on August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina made landfall on the Gulf coast region of the United States (p. 3). As discussed by Burnham and Hopper (2001), Katrina is “often considered one of the most-devastating disasters in the history of the United States.” At the time, Goodman (2008) described Katrina as the “costliest natural disaster in U.S history” (p. 3), with the damage estimated upwards of 100 billion dollars. The damage to the U.S Gulf Coast was catastrophic. Barrett et al. (2012) characterized New Orleans and parts of the U.S Gulf Coast as temporarily uninhabitable.

As a result of the devastation caused by hurricane, approximately 370,000 K-12 students were displaced from schools in Louisiana and Mississippi and dispersed to 47 states, including other counties and parishes in Mississippi and Louisiana (Burnham & Hooper, 2011; LaPrairie & Hinson, 2007; & Reyes, 2010). The impact of Katrina caused over 50 levees in New Orleans to fail, which resulted in flooding nearly 80% of the metropolitan area and destruction of the majority of the public school buildings (Beabout, 2010; Jabbar, 2015; Lincove, Barrett, & Strunk, 2018).

As a result of the catastrophic flooding, structural damage, and student displacements, in September 2005, the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB), placed all school employees on leave without pay (Dixson et al., 2015; Lincove et al., 2018). According to Lincove et al. (2018) “all employee contracts were terminated March 24, 2006” (p. 192). As described by Barrett et al. 2012 and Burnham and Hopper (2011), students in post-Katrina New Orleans and Mississippi Gulf Coast area suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as well as other mental

health issues. As an aftermath of school closures and lack of school personnel, Barrett et al. (2012) found students received little mental health support. Even after schools began to reopen, mental health aftereffects were still present in students, as well as adults, causing added stress to school leaders.

As a result of devastation and school closures caused by Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans Public Schools experienced many changes. Beabout (2010) found over 90% of the schools in New Orleans were taken over by the state, resulting in “the nation’s first majority charter urban school district, and a little noticed state-funded voucher program” (p. 404). As a result of the school district reform, a market-driven school system was established, creating extra pressures for school leaders to promote changes in how the school system would operate.

Beabout (2010) discussed the increased work pressures and decreased job satisfaction among school administrators in New Orleans post Katrina (p. 408). According to Burnham and Hopper (2011), administrators faced many problems such as increased paperwork, hiring additional staff, and lack of necessary school and facility supplies such as cleaning supplies (p. 2). Beabout (2010) also stated school principals were “being rapidly forced into instructional leadership roles that they neither wanted nor had the skills to perform” (p. 408). Not only did school leaders face increased pressures to change and improve the schools, but teachers also experienced their own challenges as a result of Katrina. Teachers suffered substantial grief, loss and pressures of their own (Burnham & Hopper, 2011; Lincove et al., 2018). According to Burnham and Hopper (2011), teachers suffered from increased workloads, job dissatisfaction, professional development needs, and personal trauma caused by Katrina.

As a result of the loss of school buildings, increased student and staff mental anguish, employee dismissals, and student displacement (Dixson et al., 2015) asserted public education

and other aspects of the public landscape helped to usher in an era of “change” and “rebirth” to the New Orleans’ School (p. 188). The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, as well as other philanthropic organizations, helped to open the door to the free-market and charter school market (Dixson, 2015, p. 290). As of the 2012-2013 school year, Jabbar (2015) found “72 out of 90 schools” in the New Orleans Public School District were charter schools (p. 1096). School leaders were expected to respond to the pressures of the competition of the free-market and influx of charter schools. Jabbar (2015) also maintained school leaders were charged to increase the effectiveness of instruction in their schools to combat declining public school enrollment.

Public school leaders not only struggled with the pressures of student and staff mental health issues, charter schools, lessening student enrollment, structural damage, etc., but also had to initiate plans for future disasters. District-level personnel, school leaders, teachers, staff, as well as students, had to be prepared for the next impending disaster.

School Emergency Guidelines

Although no school districts could have adequately planned for September 11, Hurricane Katrina, or any other natural or man-made disasters, districts and individual schools should have guidelines and contingent plans in place to address the impending school emergencies. Each school district, in coordination with local law enforcement, medical, and other emergency management agencies, should have created a crisis management plan containing contingent plans for addressing not only gun violence but also any other conceivable disaster or emergency. School administrators and other personnel should have uniform safety procedures in place ready to implement at a moment’s notice in the event of an emergency. School staff and students should implement regular emergency practice drills as well as have maps, drill procedures and other relevant information readily available to every person on school campus. These pre-

planned procedures could potentially save lives and prevent long lasting physical and mental anguish, not to mention save the school district money and other resources to use in other areas to benefit students and staff (Kolbe, 2020).

Virtual Education

Virtual classes have been a part of both the secondary and K-12 education setting for years. Virtual classes have also been synonymous with college education for a number of years and have become more prevalent in recent years, especially since March 2020 when COVID-19 forced school buildings to close. As a result, K-12 educators have been forced to undertake virtual learning quickly and with limited resources to make it feasible and successful. With school districts and administrators struggling to meet both the academic and mental health needs of their students and staff, virtual school platforms have become commonplace for schools and districts having the financial and personnel resources to purchase and implement the platforms. Toppin and Toppin (2015) discussed with the introduction of virtual classes come challenges to the students, teachers, and parents who have to choose the best option for their children and family. Parents may choose virtual learning options for a variety of reasons, including COVID-19, which currently seems to be the primary reason for parents choosing the option for virtual learning.

Shamimr-Inbal and Ina Blau (2021) discussed multiple distance learning models: synchronous, asynchronous, and hybrid models. Each virtual model has pros and cons for students' families, and each family must choose which option best serves their needs, if available.

According to Toppin and Toppin (2015), parents may choose virtual learning as an option in the midst of increasing social concerns such as bullying, peer pressure, safety issues, or other

public health issues such as the current global COVID-19 Pandemic. As previously stated, some school districts may have neither the financial nor personnel resources needed to implement a virtual learning platform. In these cases, schools and districts may distribute paper packets to the students, creating an additional problem of how students will receive and return the assignment to their respective schools (M. Ruff, personal communication, March, 2020). Students may also rely on parents to pick up and return assignments to their school.

Schools and districts, especially in rural settings, capable of purchasing virtual learning platforms face their own challenges. In many areas, students do not have appropriate access to Internet services in addition to electronic devices to access the virtual learning platform. In many cases, schools in more rural areas may not be able to provide students with devices to conduct their virtual classes due to limited resources. Toppin and Toppin (2015), stated, “Technology is a key component in the success of Internet-based virtual school programs. A robust technology infrastructure is the single most important investment in the virtual school is to function” (p. 1575). As a result of COVID-19, the federal government has implemented programs intended to provide schools with the resources needed for students, such as laptops for access to the virtual learning platform. Although this may be a good plan in theory, many school districts still have not received their devices (MPE newsletter, 2020). This creates problems for the students who are involved in virtual learning as well as the teachers who are trying to provide the students with the appropriate curriculum and educational services.

COVID-19

Shamir-Inbal and Blau (2021) asserted maintaining the appropriate level of academic instruction during the COVID-19 or other widespread disruption has created major challenges for educators. In addition to coping with students dealing with traumatic events and providing

required services to help students cope, education agencies had to move to emergency online learning or other alternative delivery methods to best serve students' needs.

Additionally, as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic, teachers in some districts were suddenly thrust into teaching both virtual classes as well as retaining their face-to-face students. This situation created a plethora of problems for the students, teachers, and parents. Kaden (2020) explained teachers had to find new ways of connecting to and teaching students.

Teachers were propelled into teaching virtual classes with little or no training or time to plan (Shamir-Inbal & Blau, 2020). Teaching and planning for conducting face-to-face classes while simultaneously having to plan and teach virtual classes placed unneeded burden on the classroom teachers as well as the students. Teachers, who were already devoting much personal time and resources to their students prior to COVID-19 and the introductions of their virtual learning platforms, were now spending an inordinate amount of time planning, teaching, grading, and contacting virtual students.

Some schools/districts attempted to alleviate the overbearing stress of teachers who served both face-to-face and virtual students and scheduled teachers to either only teach virtually or face-to-face, not both. Mississippi's Oxford School District online learning plan (2020) states teachers will use virtual platforms to instruct students by posting assignments, instructional videos, and activities. Per the learning plan, teachers implemented video conferencing to interact with students. However, administrators in schools/districts such as the district where this researcher currently lives, chose for to have teachers simultaneously instruct both virtual and face-to-face students in the majority of schools with little or no training extra time to prepare, teach, or grade.

Virtual teaching, if performed correctly, is challenging. Engaging virtual students in the same fashion as face-to-face students is quite demanding and at times impossible. Toppin and Toppin (2015) asserted teachers who teach virtual classes have a sense of disconnect from their students (p. 1576). Limited teacher/student interaction as a result of virtual learning can create learning barriers for the students. Some services provided to the child in the face-to-face setting may be impossible for the schools to replicate during online learning. Additionally, student engagement is sometimes difficult to manage or monitor, especially if the students' cameras are not on.

However, some students and parents may prefer virtual learning to the face-to-face option. Virtual students may not necessarily have the time constraints students in face-to-face classes have. Students who have the appropriate personal equipment and Internet services may have access to the instructional material any time of day. This option may better meet the needs of families with a more dynamic schedule. Additionally, virtual school options may provide needed options for at-risk students or failing students who may use the virtual learning platform in addition to face-to-face learning. The virtual option may have a significant, positive impact in reducing K-12 failure rate and/or increasing graduation rates (Toppin & Toppin, 2015).

Not only have COVID-19 effects been noted in school classrooms, but also in student athletics and other extracurricular activities. In most school districts, sports and other extracurricular activities were either postponed or cancelled altogether for the foreseeable future. Even if districts chose to continue sports, coaches and students have had to modify practice schedules to allow students to socially distance as much as possible. Band camps and other competitions were either been cancelled or postponed. Students may not have been able to practice their craft and/or hone their skills as much as in school years previous to COVID-19.

The opportunity for parents to attend school events was also greatly altered. Stadium/gym attendance capacities have been reduced, in some cases to 25-50% capacity. Per state and high school athletics associations' mandates, attendees are also required to wear masks and social distance as much as possible while attending extracurricular school events. (D. Case, personal communication, August 2020). Additionally, special classes such as physical education, were not taught synchronously. Videos were provided for students to follow at home which reduced or eliminated social and peer interactions.

Summary

K-12 schools have seen major changes in educational practices over the past several decades. Some changes were implemented in an effort to promote equitable educational opportunities for all students. Other changes in K-12 schools were results of unprecedented disasters, natural and/or man-made disasters, while other changes were the results of public health crises. Regardless of the reason for the changes in K-12 practices, administrators and teachers have attempted to meet the challenges and are making strides in improving K-12 education. Although educators have many more challenges ahead, educators are capable of overcoming these challenges and providing the best possible education for our students.

CHAPTER III: METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Chapter III describes a study designed to examine how COVID-19 has altered the day-to-day operations of K-12 school-based administrators. The study includes sections addressing the design of the study, population, sample, participants, data collection instruments and procedures, ethical considerations, validity and reliability of the study, data analysis, and study limitations.

Research Design

Because the goal of the research is to understand how school leaders respond to the phenomenon of an unprecedented global pandemic, the study utilized a qualitative research design. The phenomenological study focused on the lived experiences of a group of school administrators who all experienced the same phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). In this case, the researcher explored the phenomenon of being a Mississippi K-12 public school administrator during the COVID-19 Pandemic and how the pandemic affected the day-to-day operations of the administrators' respective schools.

Patton (2002) indicates the goal of phenomenology is to “gain a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences” (p. 104). The goal of a phenomenological study is to understand the participant's experiences while, at the same time, trying to exclude one's personal experiences. As indicated by the definition of phenomenology, the goal of the research study is to discern an understanding of how COVID-19 affected the day-to-day activities of K-12 school administrators. Patton (2002), describes phenomenology as a “philosophical tradition first used by the German philosopher Edmund H. Husserl” (p. 105). Per

Husserl, our understanding can only come from using our senses and experiencing an event or phenomenon.

The researcher utilized one-on-one, open-ended, in-depth interviews conducted via Zoom and followed an interview protocol. As suggested by Patton (2003), the interviewer used predetermined phrases and categories to guide the respondents' answers to the interview questions. The researcher was careful not to lead the respondent in the answering of the interview questions. In addition, the research questions were designed based on Creswell's qualitative research question design (Creswell, 2014).

Creswell defined a number of phenomenological research design characteristics. The study must take place in a "natural setting," the researcher must play a key role in the research, data must come from multiple sources, data must be both deductively and inductively analyzed, focus on the participants' meaning of the problem, the study must have an emergent design and be reflexive, and lastly, the researcher must take a holistic account of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2014).

Participants

A purposeful sampling procedure was used for the study. Participants were selected who had the knowledge or experiences to answer question central to my research. Participants were interviewed via Zoom. Patton (2002) suggests purposeful sampling can allow the interviewer to gain a great deal of knowledge centrally relevant to the research (p. 46).

In addition to incorporating purposeful sampling, the researcher attempted to interview participants in their natural setting. Interviewing participants in their natural settings made the participant more comfortable and allowed a more natural or accurate response from the participant as opposed to interviewing in an unfamiliar location. Creswell (2014) and Patton (2003) also suggest using a stratified purposeful sampling method to observe and analyze

variations among the sample of participants. This method is appropriate because the researcher sought to compare the experiences of elementary, middle, and high school administrators during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

The researcher selected school administrators from all school levels of K-12 education: elementary, middle, and high schools. The researcher interviewed eight school administrators in Mississippi public schools. Research participants were selected via networking, professional organizations members, colleagues, and associates from previous graduate school courses. Research participants were contacted via email, LinkedIn messaging, and/or phone call to determine their interest in participating in the research study.

The researcher sought to achieve a variety of perspectives from his choice of participants. The study included participants from diverse backgrounds who work in different schools throughout Mississippi. Participants had attended various administrative preparatory programs and have differing levels of higher education and years of experience. The researcher used the previously mentioned participant selection criteria to obtain a general consensus of school administrators' reactions to COVID-19 in Mississippi and examined differences and similarities of administrative decision-making choices among the participants in the study.

For research studies utilizing qualitative interviews, Creswell suggests conducting between six to eight participants (Creswell, 2014). There are three represented groups (elementary, middle, and high); therefore, the researcher conducted between eight Zoom in-depth, open-ended interviews.

All participants selected for the study hold an Educational Administration certification and have a current Mississippi Educators Administrative/Teaching License. Each participant also

was serving currently as a school-based lead principal in a K-12 Mississippi public school. Participants were selected from schools representing districts throughout Mississippi.

Data Collection Protocols

Because the study focused on perceptions of the participants, the researcher utilized in-depth, one-on-one interviews. Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, the researcher adhered to The University of Mississippi Interval Review Board's COVID-19 protocols (Appendix A). The researcher also provided each participant with a Recruitment Statement and read aloud information specifying recording protocol. The researcher implemented two possible methods for conducting participant interviews, depending upon the location and preference of the participant: via Zoom. Additionally, the researcher purchased an electronic recording device and utilized the device to record the participant interviews. The researcher took physical notes in the event of a recording device flaw or interviewer error. Virtual interviews (Zoom) were conducted and the researcher recorded the interviews using the Zoom recording capability, but only with the participant's permission. Zoom interviews are preferred to ensure participants' safety and to allow the researcher to observe the mannerisms of the participants. The body language of a participant informed the researcher of how comfortable the respondent was with the interview.

During the interviews, the researcher utilized pre-determined open-ended questions. Per Patton (2003), the standardized, open-ended question format included exact wording and/or phrasing of the research questions for each respondent being interviewed. As the researcher advanced through the interview questions, follow-up questions were used to probe for and gather additional details and information; therefore, providing thick-rich descriptions to be included in the research data.

The same researcher conducted all the research study interviews. This choice of involving a single researcher conducting the interviews drastically decreased the variation among question delivery to the research participants and decreased or eliminated data interviewer effects on data variation.

Maxwell (2005) noted the research questions are central to a qualitative study and should create a clear path to the research study goal of examining the lived experiences of school administrators during the COVID-19 Pandemic and also connect all components of the study. Fundamental to the purpose of this study is to examine the lived experience of K-12 school administrators in the first year of an unprecedented COVID-19 Pandemic. Therefore, the researcher selected the following open-ended interview questions to determine the lived experience of school administrators in their first year supervising a Mississippi K-12 public school in midst of the COVID-19 Pandemic. The interview questions are listed in Appendix B in this document. Each question plays a vital role in answering the question.

For example, in asking the question, “How has planning for the 2020-2021 school year been different than other school years?” The researcher aspired to explore what changes, if any, administrators anticipated and noted for the current school year. Another question, “What sort of virtual learning training for administrators was implemented in your district” attempts to explore how school administrators were prepared for supervising the virtual learning environment in their respective schools. Further, in asking the question, “What additional training do you recommend for future crisis management professional development?” Attempts were made to understand what type of crisis management skill set administrators would like to see in their faculty and staff and how those skills would benefit student educational opportunities in the event of future crises.

Trustworthiness

The researcher used a variety of strategies to ensure the honesty and integrity of the study. Creswell (2014) suggested integrating a variety of strategies in the research to ensure the accuracy of the results of the study. The researcher incorporated the strategies of member checking, incorporating the use of rich, thick description, personal interviews, and school data.

The researcher was aware of personal biases as a current employee of the Mississippi Public School System. In member checking, the researcher provided the participant copies of the transcribed interviews, which afforded participants the opportunity to review and examine the findings and or themes of the research and to verify the accuracy of their comments, interviews, and other data. This process reassured the research participants of the trustworthiness of the research process. The researcher requested further interviews for up to 30 minutes in length to gather additional information from the participants to develop the thick, rich description for the research study. The researcher also incorporated school data from participants' individual schools, which will protect and ensure the accuracy of the research.

Brinkmann and Kvale (2017) stated, "Good qualitative researchers master what has been called the art of thick description." The researcher utilized thick, rich description to illustrate the research findings. Patton (2002) advocates the use of rich, thick language in qualitative research as the language provides a foundation to support qualitative analysis and reporting. The researcher provided a "detailed description of the setting" (Creswell, 2014, p. 202). Creswell (2014) and Patton (2002) state this type of language can increase the trustworthiness of the research study.

The researcher included triangulation of data in the findings of the study by examining multiple sources of information and examining themes formed from this information.

Triangulation of data will improve the trustworthiness of the data and research. Patton (2002) stated triangulation can examine the “consistency of different data sources with the same method” (p. 556). To achieve triangulation, the interviewer examined and compared data from the open-ended interviews, the consistency between interviews of the same participants, and individual school data such as state test scores and/or district crisis manuals from the participants and Zoom interviews.

Data Analysis

The researcher used the qualitative research data analysis process as defined in Creswell (2014). First, the researcher transcribed the Zoom interviews and examine interview notes. Next, the researcher examined the compiled data to gain a sense of the prevailing ideas or notable phrases the participants’ state during the interviews. The researcher attempted to gain an understanding of what the participants were saying and the ideas and concepts leaders were trying to convey. The researcher also examined the personal notes taken during the interviews describing the participants’ demeanor, tone, etc. The researcher also kept notes of other influencing factors such as time of day, day of the week, etc. These factors played a vital role in how the participant responded to the interview questions. Patton (2002) suggests the practice of making notes as the researcher reads through the data to provide suggestions as to how to use the different parts of the data. Therefore, the researcher made note of emerging themes throughout this process

Next, the researcher utilized the coding process to develop a general description of the participants’ perceptions of the phenomenon and identify different themes in the data. Creswell (2014) describes coding as “the process of organizing material into chunks or segments before bringing meaning to the information” (p. 186). For example, staff working together, increased

collaboration, and principal autonomy, were some of the codes identified. During the coding process, the researcher read through all the transcripts and made note of recurring ideas and/or themes. The researcher then clustered the similar ideas and themes together and created categories to better organize the participants' ideas. The researcher used handwritten notes to assist with organizing commonalities and themes. Themes were color coded to identify when themes answer specific research questions. Color coded themes were then analyzed and used to develop a narrative to answer the central research and sub-questions.

Next, the researcher conveyed the findings of the data through a narrative and created a description of each participant's setting and story. As described by Creswell (2014), the researcher did "interconnect themes into a storyline or theoretical model" (p. 188). The themes and storylines allowed the researcher to better understand and convey the participants' overall thought processes to the reader.

In the last step in the data analysis process, the researcher interpreted the meaning of the data. The researcher sought to understand and convey lessons learned from each participant. The researcher searched to understand the meaning of the data by comparing the participants' experiences. The researcher also examined the data and search for new questions not asked or foreseen.

Ethical Protocols

Brinkman and Kvale (2017) stated, "The researcher is critical for the quality of the scientific knowledge and for the soundness of ethical decisions in qualitative inquiry" (p. 8). The researcher further stated the researcher adhered to the following ethical protocols. The fields are as follows: informed consent of the participants, confidentiality of participant data, consequences, and finally, the researcher's role in the study (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2017).

The researcher conveyed to the participants a sense of trustworthiness throughout interviews and the research process by assuring to the participants that the data will remain confidential and secure. The researcher took notes on a password-protected computer and only the researcher had the password. No identifying information was included in research audio, transcripts, and notes. The researcher referred to participants as Participant I, Participant II, and Participant III, etc. Transcribed interviews were kept in a locked file cabinet. Only the researcher had access to the file cabinet key. Additionally, the researcher provided an awareness of some risk associated in the participation of the research study because of possible inaccurate comments or assertions made by the participants. These inaccurate remarks can be corrected through member checking. The researcher anticipated honest and truthful answers from the participants, but must also remain sensitive to ensure the research effort not portray the participants negatively.

Prior to any interactions with the participants of the study, the researcher obtained consent from The University of Mississippi Institutional Review Board (IRB). Then, the researcher will provide consent form. {See Appendix A} to all participants via email. The form will be sent to the participants provided an explanation of the prospective study and assurance participation in the study is voluntary. Additionally, the form will clearly state participants experienced no negative effects for declining participation nor was there be a benefit for participation.

Per University of Mississippi's IRB requirements, the researcher informed the participants the information provided to the researcher will remain strictly confidential, will be stored in a completely secure location, and no identifying information will be kept with the transcripts. The participant information was destroyed after the research is complete and

interviews were deleted from recording devices after a six-month period. The researcher is a key instrument in qualitative study; therefore, the researcher worked to reduce instances of bias.

Limitations of the Research Study

Patton (2002) describes how the researcher may contribute to limitations of the research study. Examples of the limitations in the study can extend to researcher observations, interviews, and document examination. Since the time span and time of year for the interviews was relatively short, this may be considered a limitation as well. This paragraph will focus on the limitations, observations, and interviews during the study. During Zoom interviews, the researcher had the possibility of “affecting the situation in unknown ways” (Patton, 2003, p. 306).

A delimitation of the study may be the mere presence, whether in-person or online, of the researcher may affect the behavior of the participant and the outcome of the interview. The participant’s physical behavior during the interviews may not be typical in the presence of the interviewer.

The data accumulated as a result of the interviewer being present during the interview, either virtually or in-person may not reflect the true perception of the phenomenon by the participant. Patton (2002) explains the participants’ responses to the interview may be altered by their “personal bias, difference in politics, anger, anxiety, etc.” (p. 307).

The length of the study ranged from January 2022 through May 2022. The methods and procedures used in this research study examined how Mississippi K-12 school administrators adjusted administrative practices to meet the challenges of COVID-19. The researcher explored how to better develop resilient leadership practices and how those practices can influence decision-making for future K-12 school leaders.

Chapter IV will discuss analysis of the data from the participant interviews. This data will include identifying and classifying common themes. The chapter will provide an overview of the analytic processes used in the research study as well as the results of the study.

CHAPTER IV: DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

I conducted in-depth interviews with eight K-12 principals representing elementary, middle, and high school levels of administration to determine how the COVID-19 Pandemic affected Mississippi K-12 school leaders during the 2020-2021 school year and how the COVID-19 Pandemic altered administrators' day-to-day experiences during the 2020-2021 school year. I sought to understand school leaders' level of preparedness for the pandemic and how school leaders can prepare for future similar situations. I also wanted to identify what changes in education are needed to prepare school leaders to assist teachers, students, and parents in the event of future educational disruptions. I further questioned school administrators about how they [administrators] prepared for the difficult challenges faced in the 2020-2021 school year as well as the positive experiences they encountered during the first full school year of COVID-19.

This qualitative study addressed the central research question: How did the COVID-19 Pandemic affect the lived experiences of K-12 administrators in the 2020-2021 school year? The study also addressed the following sub-questions:

1. How did the COVID-19 Pandemic alter the day-to-day experiences of school administrators in the 2020-2021 school year who participated in the research study?
2. According to school administrators interviewed, what changes need to occur to prepare administrators for similar disruptions to the learning environment in the future?

3. According to administrators interviewed, what changes need to occur to prepare administrators to assist teachers, parents, students, and their school as a whole for similar disruptions?
4. According to the participants interviewed, how has the COVID-10 Pandemic experience changed the education field?
5. In what ways did participants prepare for the difficult challenges faced during the past 2020-2021 school year?
6. What were some positive experiences participants encountered during the past school year?

Of the eight participants, three are elementary school level administrators, one is a middle school level, three are high school level administrators, and one is a combined middle and high school level administrator. Participants have varying levels of years of experience as a principal, ranging from three years to nineteen years. Half of the participants (four) had five to ten years of experience as a principal. Table 1 shows the descriptions of administrators who participated in the study and their school demographics. Each participant was asked ten scripted interview questions, some of which were multi-part questions. I prompted the participants as needed during the interviews if more information was necessary to answer the research questions. Interviews typically lasted 20-30 minutes each. The researcher asked for available dates and time from the participants and worked to schedule dates and time that were conducive to both schedules.

Table 1*Participant Description and School Demographics*

Participant Number	Years of Experience as a School Administrator	School Level	Grade Configuration	Number of Students in the School	Rural or Suburban	Title One Designation
I	13	High School	9-12	1350	Suburban	No
II	9	Middle School	7-8	295	Rural	No
III	7	Secondary	7-12	400	Rural	No
IV	N/A	Elementary	K-5	760	Rural	Yes
V	19	High School	9-12	860	Rural	No
VI	5	Lower Elementary	K-2	800	Suburban	No
VII	5	High School	9-12	500	Rural	No
VIII	18	Upper Elementary	5-6	260	Rural	No

Note. The table describes the participants who participated in the research study.

All interviews were completed via Zoom and were recorded using the recording option on Zoom as well as using a handheld electronic recording device. Prior to each interview, I provided each participant a Recruitment Statement and read aloud the information specifying the recording of the interviews via Zoom and/or a handheld device and the interview transcriptions. Also, I verbally informed each participant at the beginning of each interview they had the option to preview and amend their responses.

Once the interviews were transcribed, I read through each transcript and reviewed them for accuracy. I then analyzed each transcript for interesting phrases and sentences. Next, I analyzed the phrases for commonalities, developed themes, and color coded each theme. I

analyzed how each theme showed similarities among participants' responses to the research questions. Responses to the research question and sub-questions are presented in the following sections. Analyses of the themes led to the following responses to the research questions and sub-questions.

Difference in Day-to-Day Experiences

The first research sub-question is, "How did the COVID-19 Pandemic alter the day-to-day experiences of school administrators in the 2020-2021 school year?" Analysis of participant responses to interview questions revealed an alteration of planning processes and administrators' daily responsibilities. The key themes included an alteration of planning priorities, increased collaboration in planning, and an alteration of daily responsibilities.

Alteration of Planning Priorities

Seven of the participants stated a major difference in their activities was rooted in the focus of planning for the academic year. Whereas in past years, planning focused on academics and the accountability model, the priority of planning shifted to safety protocol plans. As Participant I explained, "The planning was, as far as the academics, not as much, but really it was more logistical stuff...cleaning rooms and trying to navigate the hallways and restrooms and the cafeteria...that was one of the bigger challenges." Participant III also said, "Planning for safety took precedence over trying to achieve the best goals and trying to squeeze every point out of the accountability model."

Participant III stated, "Sanitation was huge. That was probably the biggest thing that we spent time on [Summer 2020] was cleaning products and how to clean." Staff had to implement new cleaning and sanitation protocols. All rooms in the schools, classroom, cafeteria, etc., had to

be cleaned and sanitized between blocks and/or periods as students transitioned between classes, breaks, and mealtimes.

New safety plans also included many logistical changes. Administrators had to plan for changes in student class transitions, student breaks, and student cafeteria time. These student safety protocols differed from previous years due to CDC guidance on social distancing.

Participant VIII stated, “We were going to follow this district wide for each school, and we’re going to follow CDC guidelines.” School leaders tried to reassure parents of the changes from the ordinary in terms of the cleaning within the school and alterations of the class, breaks, and lunch schedules as well as changes to school events such as pep rallies, ball games, etc.

In some cases, logistical planning included creating additional pathways for students to safely maintain distance protocols as they transitioned from class-to-class. Because students at the high school level traditionally transition from class to class multiple times per day, this issue was even more challenging at the high school level. Participant V discussed the need to find creative solutions to satisfy Center for Disease Control (CDC) and district social distancing protocols and said of this experience, “We put in some sidewalk areas with some gravel and some railroad ties...we created several different routes for students that we have never thought about creating with regards to movements around our campus.”

Some of these changes included shifting to students eating lunch in their classrooms. Participant II shared, “We changed the way we entered school in the mornings, how we did break, ate lunches, changed classes, and how we arranged classrooms.” Participant VII similarly said, “We made sure social distancing was there and we changed to eating in our classrooms.”

Participants also had to create plans for campus organizational changes such as placing directional stickers and/or signs in hallways to control students’ flow during transitions between

classes, break, and/or lunch. Signs also were posted to remind students to remain at least six feet apart. Like Participant V, Participant II explained, “This type of thing...is something that you would have never thought of before.” Compared to pre-COVID, the importance of school transitions were amplified as districts implemented policies to satisfy CDC requirements.

Prior to COVID-19, school leaders typically planned how to best meet the academic needs of their students while also trying to either maintain or improve their school’s standing within the state’s accountability model. In planning for the 2020-2021 school year, when COVID-19 was at its peak, school leaders focused on adhering to new CDC and/or district guidelines. Following these new guidelines caused school leaders to make changes in their planning for the upcoming school year. As a result, additional responsibilities also were thrust upon principals.

Increased Collaboration in Planning

Six of eight participants discussed an increase in collaborative planning among administrators and even administrators from other districts. Participant VII said, “We as a district, we met...there’s no telling how many weeks we met trying to figure out what was best for our district and our school.” Administrators reached out to other districts in planning for the unknown.

Because no schools had experienced this type of pandemic emergency, many districts sought advice outside their own systems. Participant IV explained, “I don’t believe you can plan for what you don’t know...to make plans for something that had never been was kind of hard to do...” Participant II revealed everyone was learning at the same time; thus, administrators held discussions with outside support groups. Participant II further stated, “I particularly and a couple of other administrators went to lots of area principal meetings where we were all discussing the

same issues, but from different perspectives.” Participant V similarly explained, “There are only four principals, so we met exclusively together with the superintendent and associate superintendent. So we all did the same thing; we just did those meetings together and made decisions as a team.” Participants VIII and IV also noted there was a great deal of collaboration between schools. Participant eight noted all administrators in the district planned together to create district policy, but we had autonomy as to how to implement policies in our buildings. Participants went from independently planning for the school year for their respective schools prior to COVID-19 to planning collaboratively within not only their respective districts but with other school districts within close proximity.

Alteration of Daily Responsibilities

As the school year progressed, Participants I, II, III, and IV agreed the logistics involved in meeting the CDC and/or district safety requirements were quite a daunting undertaking. Implementing new policies such as students and staff maintaining appropriate social distance in the classrooms, hallways, restrooms, and cafeterias proved to be difficult at best, and at times appeared nearly impossible.

Administrators also had new daily responsibilities such as contact tracing, responding to changing CDC requirements, and documenting cleaning protocols. Daily cleaning practices were on such a large scale and so vital to student and staff safety, Participant V delegated all cleaning activities solely to an assistant principal in order to streamline the process. The assistant principal could oversee all cleaning activities and make changes as needed without consulting the principal for every decision.

Participant VII also explained these changes to previous normal daily responsibilities, stating, “I wasn’t able to do administrative instructional things: going into the classroom, helping

teachers with instruction. The majority of my day was spent tracing and tracking COVID cases.” Participants delegated previous responsibilities to other staff members such as assistant principals, lead teachers, etc. Participant II stated, “I have a couple teachers in my building with some leadership abilities, and I allowed them to take over after-school tutoring.”

Many parents were struggling to help their children with virtual learning, so parent meetings increased. Therefore, school leaders also covered classes for teachers who needed to meet with parents to assist with virtual learning. Participant IV stated, “Parents would come up here during the day with computers in their hands, crying, saying they don’t understand what to do.” When these situations occurred, Participant IV would cover the teacher’s room to allow the teacher to meet with the parent to explain the virtual lesson and platform because the teacher was needed to answer specific questions about the content or assignments. In some cases, there was only one administrator on campus, making navigating these responsibilities even harder. Participant II added, “Covering classes has been an issue lately...I’m the only administrator here. Sometimes I’ll line myself up to cover classes, and then school happens, and there are two kids sitting in the office...or there’s a mad parent at the door...” Participant II also subbed for the school secretary for a few days. Because school leaders were covering classes, regular administrative duties were often pushed to the side because of lack of time or changing priorities.

The changing logistical concerns along with the increased time away from administrative duties caused the day-to-day experiences of administrators to differ greatly in the 2020-2021 school year from previous years. After examining the changing responsibilities in the 2020-2021 school year, school leaders began to assess the needed changes in the event of similar future disruptions.

Needed Changes

The second sub-question is, “According to school administrators interviewed, what changes need to occur to prepare administrators for similar disruptions to the learning environment in the future?” Analysis of participant responses to interview questions produced a clear theme for the need to for prepare using virtual learning environments. Students, staff, and even parents struggled with new virtual learning platforms. Had students and staff been more familiar with virtual learning, the transition would not have been as challenging. A more proactive approach to maintaining students and staff familiarity with virtual learning is needed to lessen the educational impact of similar disruption in the future.

Sub-question two focused on what changes need to occur to prepare administrators for similar future disruptions to the learning environment. According to all participants, their school districts and school principals were not prepared for the type of disruption to the educational environments COVID-19 caused. Furthermore, school leaders needed additional planning time and resources to prepare administrators for the daunting task of appropriately educating and caring for the students in the 2020-2021 school year, the first full school year during COVID-19. School principals provided training for teachers prior to student arriving on the new virtual learning platforms acquired by their districts.

Virtual Learning Preparedness

One of the largest issues administrators faced was the transition of students to virtual learning. However, the participants reported their schools did not engage in virtual learning before the pandemic. Seven of eight participants stated they had no prior experience in supervising virtual learning environments. As such, the administrators were learning along with teachers how to support students in a virtual learning environment. Participant seven

revealed, “As an administrator having to deal with virtual students and administering those things to it, this was my first experience with that, and it was a learning experience...” Participant VI explained they had never heard of Zoom prior to the 2020-2021 school year and many of the teachers were not familiar with the technology needed to successfully teach online. “I immediately emailed them [teachers] to update their websites... we had to start there...I spent the whole day Zooming with different groups of teachers to start to learn how to implement that technology...we had no idea...a learning curve for everybody.”

Participant III differed from the other participants in that they [Participant III] had some experience with virtual learning prior to 2020-2021 as students in Participant III’s school were using Google Docs to submit class assignments prior to the onset of COVID-19. Participant III explained the scope of the virtual learning was limited as, “We had no experience in virtual learning except that we had already started, which was Google Classroom.”

Prior to COVID-19 Pandemic, none of the participants’ districts were one-to-one, meaning every student did not have a school issued computers for use in both school and home settings. Thus, many students were not prepared for the sudden onset of virtual learning and were not prepared to navigate virtual learning platforms. Participant V’s comments reflect this issue: “We did not have computers in the hands of our students, other than, you know, just some Chrome carts for different things, such as testing.” And Participant IV added, “We did not have computers—one-to-one situations; we did not have computers in the hands of our students.” As a result, school officials had to quickly navigate the logistics of issuing computers to the students in the midst of the chaos of Spring 2020 in addition to preparing students and faculty for virtual learning. Participant II commented, “We left spring break of 2020, and then we didn’t come back. We kind of scrambled, so it kind of changed all of our thinking. We moved completely to

an online learning management system.” Once schools were re-opened at the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year, principals and teachers struggled in their efforts to negate the learning loss as a result of school closures from the end of the previous school year. The struggle intensified with the implementation of virtual learning. Teacher, students, and parents struggled with virtual learning and many were not successful which resulted in many students returning to in-person learning.

Preparing for Future Disruptions

The third sub-question is, “According to administrators interviewed, what changes need to occur to prepare administrators to assist teachers, parents, students, and their school as a whole for similar disruptions?” Analysis of the participant responses to interview questions offered a clear theme of lack of crisis training effectiveness. According to administrators interviewed, there were needed changes in crisis management training which had not prepared them for COVID-19. Administrators were not ready to face the daunting task of coping with a world-wide pandemic. The key theme is a lack of crisis training effectiveness of a focus of proper training.

Crisis Training Effectiveness

All of the participants stated previous crisis training did not prepare them for the COVID-19 pandemic. Participant I stated, “We could not plan for something we couldn’t see.” Participant III expressed, “Because I was a student resource officer, you kind of prepare and plan for dealing with disasters, but there was no training in there on how to deal with a global pandemic.” Participant II said, “We felt like we needed to be absolutely prepared to shut school down.” However, all of the participants agreed none of them were prepared to completely shut down their schools but, their crisis management training should have prepared them for possible closures.

Changes to Education as a Result of COVID-19

The fourth sub-question is, “According to the participants, how has the COVID-19 Pandemic experience changed the education field?” Analysis of participant responses to interview questions produced a clear key theme of a shift to one-to-one devices within each school. Other notable responses included increase anxiety and stress among students. The participants interviewed all agreed post-COVID education looks different than pre-COVID education. Administrators have to focus on different aspects of education, aspects they never thought they would have to confront. Participant II explained, “Now we see education in a bigger scope.. we have to.”

For example, school officials had to meet students’ academic needs, but also had to meet increased social and emotional needs of students. Participant II explained students spent a lot of time alone at home, and “it caused a lot of issues, and students are still reeling from that.” In some cases, students were self-taught because parents were either working or, like the students, did not understand how to navigate the virtual platforms.

These difficulties caused high levels of anxiety and stress among students. Participant II discussed pre-COVID, one or two students talked about self-harm. During the first year back after COVID, 2020-2021, we had “probably six students before Christmas who expressed interest in self-harm...It changed the dynamics of kids.”

Shift to One-to-One

In addition to keeping students and staff safe, the face of education also changed as a result of COVID-19. All participants interviewed stated their respective school districts/schools went completely one-to-one. Participant I stated, “Federal money allowed us to change the way we do things.” Participant II explained, “We did something we had never done before, we

assigned Chromebooks to every kid in school.” Additional days were needed to disseminate the devices to students and/or parents, as well as train the students and parents on how to use the devices and navigate the new virtual learning platforms introduced by their respective districts. The majority of the participants districts pushed the start date of school one week to allow time for additional teacher in-service training on how to more effectively virtual learning platforms.

Preparing for the Challenge of 2020-2021

The fifth sub-question is, “In what ways did participants interviewed prepare for the difficult challenges faced during the 2020-2021 school year?” Analysis of participant responses to interview questions revealed a key theme of administrator autonomy. In response, participants noted the difficulty in preparing to meet the challenges during the past 2020-2021 school year. As discussed in previous paragraphs, each participant had to make drastic changes during the planning process for the 2020-2021 school year. Each participant also expressed their considerable involvement with other school leaders as well as district level officials in planning for the daunting task of having students and teachers back in school prior to missing the last nine weeks of the previous school year. All participants agreed they participated in numerous meetings and spent a considerable amount of time, much more than normal, during the summer prior to the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year. As Participant IV communicated, “We met together more and bonded more during that time than probably ever before.”

All eight of the participants agreed they had an integral part in planning for the 2020-2021 school year. All participants explained they were included in district-wide planning and policy creation with their respective superintendents as well as other district level officials and administrators. Participants created district COVID-19 protocols to meet CDC requirements.

Autonomy

All participants also agreed they had autonomy in their respective schools to implement district and/or state policies based on the needs of their schools. Participant II stated, “I don’t feel like my voice is not heard...especially in my building I feel like I’ve got a lot of say...I don’t think that I’m being micromanaged. I have a lot of freedom and ability to plan” Participant V stated, “I had as much influence as anybody in planning for the upcoming school year.”

The participants all agreed they did adjust implementation of their district COVID protocols to meet the needs of the students and staff in their respective schools. Participant seven explained administrators had a large role in creating district policies. However, since the student and staff make-up of each school varied, the implementation of the policies differed among different schools. For example, high students typically transitioned classes more often than elementary; therefore, more time and resources were needed for cleaning.

Not only did the participants face challenges, but students, families, and staff faced their own hardships as the 2020-2021 school year began. One of the biggest issues is that teachers had to cope with new district and/or CDC protocols, which changed periodically. Because of changing protocols implemented, daily routines changed along with them which caused an entire new set of challenges for school staff. Participant V expressed, “They [CDC] had to change something every week or every day, this kind of got us behind.”

Due to changing protocols or an upsurge in new COVID cases, parents, students, and staff had to be prepared for schools to alter their daily schedule. Some schools/districts opted for a hybrid schedule, mostly high schools. Other schools/districts opted to implement virtual learning. The type of schedule selected was dependent on the individual school’s need at the time.

Two of eight schools such as the one led by Participant V needed to employ both virtual days and hybrid schedules. The hybrid schedule consisted of school leaders dividing the students into two groups with groups attending two days per week and with one day reserved for faculty only. Simultaneously, many students were virtual learning only.

Research participants explained many students did not perform well in the virtual learning environment and were failing during virtual learning. Participant V noted, “We were not happy with the outcome of our instructional decisions for the kids who chose to be virtual. We were not happy. In fact, we would not want to do that again...” Participant II’s students also struggled with the onset of virtual learning, with eighty percent of virtual students failing very quickly.

Positive Experiences

The sixth sub-question is, “What were some positive experiences participants encountered during the past school year?” Analysis of participant responses to interview questions revealed three clear themes: strengthened educator relationships, increased teacher capacity as leaders, and increased skill sets for faculty and staff. Interviewees noted encountering some positive experiences during the past school year. Collaboration among educators increased as a result of the struggles each [educator] faced in the wake of COVID-19. Additionally, some educators exhibited leadership abilities as well as acquired new skills sets in the process.

Strengthened Educator Relationships

Even though educators were under a great deal of stress, many participants discussed the urgency of the situation leading to strengthened relationships among teachers. Participant I explained, “The staff has worked together better than the first two and a half years I was

here...helping each other out because we were trying to bail water. I've been very proud of how they worked together and helped each other out.”

Participant IV explained the time administrators spent together problem-solving led to strengthened relationships. “We met together more and bonded more during that time than probably ever before.” Administrators worked long hours collaboratively planned to the best of their abilities for the upcoming school year.

Increased Teachers Capacity as Leaders

As a result of being thrust into virtual teaching unexpectedly, many teachers also took on leadership roles. Participant II explained, “We had a committee of people that were technologically savvy...had a couple college professors that had done distance learning before and had done online learning, and they kind of pieced together a plan. Teachers were very flexible.”

Teachers who were more knowledgeable of the virtual platforms volunteered to conduct professional development sessions for other teachers and assist with the initial implementation of the platforms. As the school progressed these same teacher would volunteer to offer assistance during their planning periods to other struggling teaches. Teacher would also volunteer to cover or co-teacher classes when other teachers were either absent for health reason or struggling with the virtual platforms.

Three of the eight participant stated they had teachers who had some administrative experiences and volunteered to take charge or various activities in the school. For example, Participant II stated, “I had a teacher who volunteered to over our after-school tutoring program.” Participant IV also had teachers on their staff who often volunteered to assist with multiple

administrative duties during their planning and after school. These type of opportunities for teachers to increase their roles as leaders can lead to increased staff morale and productivity.

Increased Skill Sets for Faculty and Students

Faculty has also become more adept at teaching virtually. As Participant I shared, “Even the people that didn’t know how to turn on a computer before have gotten a little tech savvy.” In fact, some teachers have shifted from not wanting to utilize technology to embracing technology. Participant I added, “At the beginning, everybody’s like, ‘I don’t need a MacBook, when they started to transition out, they were like I don’t know how to teach without a MacBook.”

Another unexpected positive result of COVID-19 is students gained a new skill set of learning to operate online learning platforms. The majority of the participants agreed that nearly all of their students, from kindergarten to secondary levels, are more adept at navigating their respective learning platforms, a valuable skill set even if schools do not shut down again. Participant IV said, “What has changed more than anything is that every student now, even kindergarteners, can log into some type of online platform.”

The COVID-19 Pandemic affected the lived experiences of K-12 administrators in the 2020-2021 school year in the areas of planning, meeting student, staff, and parent needs, and adapting to safety protocols. Planning for the 2020-2021 school year was completely different from previous years because of the unique needs of students, staff, and parents during this unprecedented time. Participants had to adapt to changing federal guidelines and; therefore, had to adjust school protocol and policies to meet those changes.

Summary

The findings of my research have been presented and addressed the guiding research questions of how COVID-19 affected the lived experiences of K-12 administrators. Based on the

emerging themes from the study, participants' planning priorities as well as daily routines were altered. Collaboration among staff, schools, and districts dramatically increased, benefiting students, staff, and parents. Additionally, some positive aspects emerged among participants and their staff emerged from the data, such as increased positive relationships among faculty and increased knowledge of virtual platforms. In Chapter V, I will present a summary of experiences, analysis of findings, recommendations for future research and for practitioners, and a conclusion.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of K-12 school administrators in Mississippi during the first year of the global pandemic, COVID-19. This qualitative study addressed the central research question: How did the COVID-19 Pandemic affect the lived experiences of K-12 administrators in the 2020-2021 school year? The study also addressed the following sub-questions:

1. How did the COVID-19 Pandemic alter the day-to-day experiences of school administrators in the 2020-2021 school year who participated in the research study?
2. According to school administrators interviewed, what changes need to occur to prepare administrators for similar disruptions to the learning environment in the future?
3. According to administrators interviewed, what changes need to occur to prepare administrators to assist teachers, parents, students, and their school as a whole for similar disruptions?
4. According to the participants interviewed, how has the COVID-10 Pandemic experience changed the education field?
5. In what ways did participants prepare for the difficult challenges faced during the past 2020-2021 school year?

6. What were some positive experiences participants encountered during the past school year?

Chapter I introduced the goals of the study as well as established the significance of the research. Chapter II explored relevant research concerning how external factors historically have affected the educational environment in the United States. Chapter III described the methods and procedures involved in the research study. Chapter IV described the data analysis process and results of the data analysis. Chapter V will make connections between research in Chapter II and participants' responses to the research questions. In addition, Chapter V will discuss future studies and provide recommendations for future practices of school leaders and policy makers.

The results of this study tell part of the story of selected K-12 administrators in Mississippi during the 2020-2021 school year. The lived experiences of the participants revealed the COVID-19 Pandemic brought many challenges to school administrators due to the unknown nature of the pandemic and resulting impacts on schools. In addition to challenges, some positive attributes were identified by the participants. The research study findings are specific to the participants interviewed and are not generalizable. This section also includes a narrative of participants' experiences during the 2020-2021 school year, analysis of the findings, recommendations for future research, recommendations for practitioners, and the conclusion.

Summary of Experiences

The 2020-2021 school year was a challenging time for school leaders, teachers, students, and other staff as well as parents. School leaders were faced with the task solving problems and answering questions in the midst of a global pandemic for which no one had any experience. Schools were mandated to implement virtual learning with little-to-no training for staff and students. As a result of an influx of federal money, school districts were afforded the opportunity

to implement one-to one device initiatives. Properly implementing this initiative proved challenging for some districts. These challenges included ensuring all students had home Internet access and providing students, staff, and parents access to proper training to be able to navigate virtual learning platforms. Participants stated some of their districts provided Internet hotspots for students to use at home. Participants also stated they [school and district personnel] offered informational videos as well as hardcopies of instructions for them [parents] to navigate the new virtual platforms. School districts introduced new virtual learning platforms for which most administrators, teachers, students, and parents had no experience. Participants stated some students in some areas of their rural districts did not have accessible Internet connection. This lack of Internet infrastructure made accessing virtual learning platforms difficult, and in some case, impossible. Participants were faced with a plethora of additional responsibilities which made an already challenging position more difficult. Most importantly, participants had to safeguard the social/emotional, physical, and academic needs of staff and students under their care.

Although participants faced incredible hardships during the 2020-2021 school year, they [participants] gained some positives perspectives as a result of their experiences. Participants acknowledged strengthened educator relationships, increased teacher capacity as leaders, and an increased skill set for students and faculty. These positive perspectives will help make the participants more effective leaders as well as more empathetic to the experiences faced by students, staff, and parents. Based on their experiences throughout COVID-19, participant should find themselves more knowledgeable in virtual learning practices and should be able to more effectively and efficiently support teachers, not only during educational disruptions, but during every day practice. As a result of their experiences with COVID-19, participant should be

better prepared for future disruptions to the educational environments and be able to better support their students, staff, parents, and community.

Analysis of the Findings

After analyzing the data in the study and comparing the findings with the literature review of past events which affected education, the following findings are noted, Chapter II's review of the research revealed the need for schools to implement preplanned emergency drills and procedures in order to save lives and decrease emotional distress during emergencies (Kolbe, 2020). One clear research finding is previous crisis training was not effective in preparing for the COVID-19 Pandemic. Although the participants acknowledged the difficulty in planning for unforeseen circumstances, the need for additional crisis training was a clear theme throughout the in-depth interviews. Specific crisis training for COVID-19 should be included in current crisis training. All eight of the participants agreed future crisis training should include safety protocols related to how to properly clean according to district and CDC cleaning guidelines. Participants' responses also revealed the need for training related to creating logistical plans for student transitions when faced with additional protocols such as mandated by the CDC.

Another significant finding revealed through in-depth participant interviews was the need for establishing and maintaining efficient virtual learning environments benefiting students, faculty, and parents. Chapter II discussed K-12's emergency moves to online learning environments and resulting challenges of virtual learning (Toppin & Toppin, 2015). All of the participants shared there were many challenges throughout the 2020-2021 school year related to virtual learning. In the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year, assigning computers to students during the ongoing crisis was extremely difficult. First, districts had to wait for the devices to arrive. Then, districts had to establish plans to distribute the devices while ensuring safety

guidelines. Principals also had to make certain Internet infrastructure would support all of the devices. If districts already had one-to-one initiatives implemented, this transition could have been less challenging. Fortunately, participants explained federal funding in response to the COVID-19 Pandemic made these one-to-one initiatives possible in the 2020-2021 school year.

Participants also discussed at the start of the 2020-2021 school year, where the majority of teachers were unfamiliar with how to effectively transfer their lessons from traditional to virtual formats. Many students also did not know how to properly navigate virtual learning platforms or effectively learn in a virtual environment. Participants noted this led to many students struggling academically once the schools implemented virtual learning. In addition, parents became frustrated over their own lack of knowledge to help their children succeed and sought the help of teachers and administrators on a larger scale than before the COVID-19 Pandemic. The transition could have been easier if teachers and students had even minimal experience in the virtual learning environment. Leech et al. (2022) reported teachers experienced challenges such as “having few resources and training for online instruction” as well as “not knowing how to use online platforms” (p. 247). As stated in Chapter IV, a more proactive approach to virtual learning by better preparing staff and students prior to school closures would make transitions to virtual platforms much more manageable in the future.

Suggested future practices include maintaining one-to-one computer initiatives for students. Faculty and students also need ongoing practice to ensure they are proficient in shifting to virtual learning environments at a moment’s notice. Students need to have access to out of school Internet access, such as community hot spots and/or portable hot spot check outs from the school.

Finally, administrators need to increase effective parent and community communication. Specific areas of focus should include easily accessible information for parents on how to support their child's virtual learning success. School leaders should provide multiple avenues for parents to access school communication. These could include social media outlets, email, newsletters, Remind, etc. School districts should also partner with community leaders to develop support protocols in the event of future emergencies or school closures. Both school districts and local community governments should collaborate to implement proactive policies to protect the citizens in times of crisis. Productive and consistent meetings should be conducted between the two entities to ensure constant communication between the two to ensure the best outcome for all stakeholders.

Recommendations for Future Research Studies

For future research, in-depth interviews with teachers could identify opportunities to improve practice to make virtual learning more effective as teachers are the practitioners who have been at the forefront of implementing virtual learning. Many administrators have not taught virtually; none of the participants had experience in virtual teaching. Therefore, a focus group with both teachers and administrators could be effective in helping identify ways administrators could best support teachers and students in virtual learning.

Another suggestion for research is to interview administrators who have either retired or changed professions after the 2020-2021 school year. Results of the study revealed additional stress due to an increase in responsibilities and the stress of meeting students' and staff's social, emotional, and academic needs. This type of research could help with administrator retention and recruitment by identifying problems administrators faced as well as possible solutions.

Recommendations for Practitioners

Evaluation of the responses from this study can inform practitioners on how to provide an adequate educational environment in the event of future crises. This knowledge can benefit parents, teachers, and school staff by providing and maintaining an effective and appropriate education setting during emergency situations. It is imperative we as school leaders learn from our experiences during COVID-19 so we can better support the people who depend on us during the next emergency situation. Recommendations for practitioners include: maintain one-to-one initiatives, promote continued collaboration among school leaders, teachers, and district personnel, and increase social/emotional focus for staff and students. Cost is a major concern for districts maintaining one-to-one initiatives after federal money is no longer available.

The information gained from evaluating the results of this study shows school leaders should maintain one-to-one initiatives as well as provide ongoing trainings and practice for students, staff, and parents. School districts can justify one-to-one initiatives by reducing loss instruction during weather event such as ice storms, hurricane, etc. This continuous practice of students using their devices regularly could make transitioning to virtual learning much less complicated. Consistent use of the virtual learning platforms would also benefit students and staff by allowing them [students and staff] to remain familiar with any changes and/or updates with the platform.

School leaders should also promote continued extensive collaboration among teachers, schools, community, and district personnel. The majority of the participants stated collaboration between teachers as well as school and district personnel increased dramatically during the 2020-2021 school year. Teacher and school leaders learned from each other and worked together within their respective schools and districts as well as outside their home districts. This continuous collaboration among educators would benefit students and staff alike.

The majority of the participants in this study agree an increased and consistent focus on social/emotional state of staff and students is critical and necessary. Students and staff must feel emotionally and physically safe in order to perform well in school. This focus will allow school leaders to better serve the people in their charge and provide a more effective school climate conducive to more effectively educating students. Additionally, school district should garner support from their community engage in a system of community wide support for local schools.

Summary

School leaders encountered many struggles during the 2020-2021 school year as a result of COVID-19. In spite of the struggles, school leaders were tasked with providing and maintaining educational opportunities for students as well as provide emotional and physical support for staff and students. School leaders also were called upon to support parents and families as well as possible during the pandemic. While all participants confirmed their hardships during COVID-19, some positives aspects were revealed Most of us can look back though out the pandemic and realize problems we could have solved differently; however, we can also realize how we have grown as educators. These realizations will assist school leaders as we move forward from COVID-19.

After interviewing the participants, it is apparent school leaders are inclined to go above and beyond what is required on them to serve student, staff, and parents. It is crucial for school leaders to provide effective and timely learning opportunities for their students and staff. School leaders are tasked with establishing and maintaining positive school climates and environments in order for students and staff to grow and thrive educationally, physically, and emotionally. This proved to be a daunting task.

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LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT STATEMENT

Title: Challenges of Leading During COVID-19: A Qualitative Study of K-12 Administrators

Investigator

Jerry Bradford Parker
Ph.D. Candidate
School of Education
The University of Mississippi
(662) 589-0318

Advisor

Douglas Raymond Davis, Ph.D.
Department of Educational Leadership and
Counselor Education
School of Education
121 Guyton Hall
The University of Mississippi
(662) 915-149

INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING ONLY IF YOU ARE COLLECTING DATA EXCLUSIVELY FROM ADULTS. By checking this box I certify that I am 18 years of age or older.

Dear Administrator,

My name is Jerry Bradford “Brad” Parker, and I am a Ph.D. student under the supervision of Dr. Douglas Raymond Davis in the Department of Educational Leadership and Counseling, School of Education, at The University of Mississippi. I am inviting you to participate in a research project “Challenges of Leading During COVID-19: A Qualitative Study of K-12 Administrators. The purpose of the research study is to explore and evaluate the experiences of K-12 school administrators in Mississippi during the 2020-2021 school year.

Cost and Payments

Participation is voluntary, and you may opt to not participate without consequence. You will receive no compensation for your participation in this research study. Your participation will involve open-ended, in-depth interviews consisting of eight questions. Interviews will take place either via telephone, in-person, or Zoom according to your choice of format. Interviews typically last approximately twenty-five minutes. By participating in the interview, you are providing consent to participate in the study.

We do not think there are any other risks associated with the study. A lot of people enjoy the interview process.

No identifying information will be included in the study. Interviews will be recorded via handheld device or Zoom recording options. Only I will have access to the recordings. The interviews will be transcribed and recordings will be destroyed after a period of six months. No identifying information will be entered into the transcripts.

You do not have to take part in this study, and you may stop participation at any time. If you start the study and decide you do not want to finish, all you have to do is to tell Brad Parker or Dr. Douglas in person, by letter, or by telephone (contact information listed above). You may skip any questions you prefer not to answer.

IRB Approval

This study has been reviewed by The University of Mississippi's Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a participant of research, please contact the IRB at (662) 915-7482 or irb@olemiss.edu.

Statement of Consent

I have read and understand the above information. By completing the survey/interview I consent to participate in the study.

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol

Date: _____

Place: _____

Interviewer: Jerry Bradford Parker

Interviewee: _____

Interviewer Procedures:

A. Begin by restating the information on the recruitment statement Explain the procedures for recording the interviews, and reiterate confidentiality measures.

B. Ask the age of the interviewee.

C. During the interview, ask the questions in the order below. Refer to interview probe suggestions such as “please elaborate more,” “can we revisit your previous comment?” and “please explain in more detail” to ensure in-depth interviews are taking place.

D. Thank the respondent for his/her participation. Explain the participant will have a chance to member check the final data report.

1. Just to verify, you are eighteen years of age or older?

2. Describe your experience as a school administrator and describe non-identifying characteristics of your current school. (i.e., Title I status, student population). Were you in your current position during the 2019-2020 school year?

3. How has planning for the 2020-2021 school year differed from previous school years?

4. In what ways did you or your district implement virtual and/or hybrid learning during the 2020-2021 school year?

5. Describe your experience prior to the 2020-2021 school year in supervising the virtual learning process.

6. Did your district implement leadership training for virtual/hybrid environments for the 2020-2021 school year, and if so, how?

7. How have you addressed parental and/or community concerns with the implementation of virtual learning and COVID-19 safety concerns?

8. How has previous crisis management training prepared you to lead your school during the COVID-19 Pandemic? What type of training have you found beneficial? What

additional training would you recommend for future crisis management professional development?

9. How much influence did you have in planning for the 2020-2021 school year?

10. How are you navigating the delegation of new responsibilities during the 2020-2021 school year?

VITA

Jerry Bradford (Brad) Parker

119 Deer Park Dr.

Thaxton, MS. 38871

(662) 589-0318

bradparker60@gmail.com

EDUCATION

08/12-08/22

The University of Mississippi

Ph. D. Educational Leadership

Dissertation Topic: “Resilient leadership: What is the lived experience of administrators during the first full school year during an unprecedented global pandemic, COVID-19?”

Dissertation Chair: Dr. Douglas R. Davis

Dissertation Committee: Dr. Dennis Bunch, Dr. Susan McClelland, and Dr. Alicia Stapp

06/07-08/08

Mississippi State University

Master of Science in Education (Educational Leadership)

08/00-08/02

Mississippi State University

Bachelor of Science in Secondary Education (Biology Education)

LICENSES

Mississippi Professional

Career Level Administration, 7-12 Biological Sciences, 7-8 Mathematics, K-12 Mild/Moderate Disabilities

CERTIFICATIONS

Crisis Prevention Intervention

CPR/AED (Adult, Child, and Infant)
Suicide Prevention

PROFESSIONAL TRAINING

Extended School Year Training (ESY)
State Testing Test Security
Individualized Education Plan (IEP)
Mississippi Department of Education Division of Pupil Transportation School Bus Driver

ADMINISTRATIVE EXPERIENCE

07/22-Present

Administrator- School Principal

Supervised Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS).
Lead teacher professional development sessions.
Lead Professional Learning Communities.
School testing supervisor (district and state tests).
Agency Representative for Individualized Education Plan (IEP) Committee. Agency Representative for Disciplinary Hearing Committee.
Coordinated fixed assets, class scheduling, and student transportation, and professional learning communities.
Evaluated discipline needs of individual students.

07/21-06/22

Administrator- Assistant Principal

North Pontotoc Elementary

Supervised Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS).
Lead teacher professional development sessions.
Lead Professional Learning Communities.
School testing supervisor (district and state tests).
Agency Representative for Individualized Education Plan (IEP) Committee. Agency Representative for Disciplinary Hearing Committee.
Coordinated fixed assets, class scheduling, and student transportation. Conducted professional learning communities.
Evaluated discipline needs of individual students.

06/14-06/16

Administrator- School Principal

Davidson Elementary School, Water Valley, MS.

Observed and evaluated teachers in classroom settings.

Conducted new teacher, student teacher, and student orientations.

Elementary Committee Representative for Creating District Code of Discipline.

Established, implemented, and supervised Professional Learning Communities.

Established and implemented New Teacher Mentor Program.

Established, implemented and supervised Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports.

Established, Implemented and Supervised Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS).

Conducted school data and testing presentations to District School Board Officials. Created and implemented a variety of school fundraisers.

Supervised state mandated curriculum (K-6). Created and conducted multiple teacher professional development sessions.

Lead Student Awards Day Ceremonies.

Lead monthly Star Student Programs for Community.

Organized and Implemented School/Community Open Houses.

Established and implemented multiple community partnership projects.

Evaluated discipline needs of individual students.

07/12-06/14

Administrator- Assistant Principal

Horn Lake Middle School, Horn Lake, MS.

Supervised Science and Mathematics Curriculums.

Supervised Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS).

Lead teacher professional development sessions.

Lead Professional Learning Communities.

School testing supervisor (district and state tests).

Agency Representative for Individualized Education Plan (IEP) Committee. Agency Representative for Disciplinary Hearing Committee.

Coordinated fixed assets, class scheduling, and student transportation. Conducted professional learning communities.

Evaluated discipline needs of individual students.

07/10-06/12

Administrator- Assistant Principal

Horn Lake Intermediate, Horn Lake, MS.

Supervised fifth grade curriculum implementation.

Supervised technology, fixed assets, and student transportation.

Conducted teacher math curriculum, fixed assets, and technology professional development.

Supervised Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS).

Agency Representative for Individualized Education Plan (IEP) Committee. Agency Representative for Disciplinary Hearing Committee.

Evaluated discipline needs of individual students.

07/09-06/10

Administrator- Assistant Principal

Horn Lake High School, Horn Lake, MS.

Observed, supervised, and evaluated teachers in classroom and extracurricular settings.

Created and supervised Teacher Duty Schedule.

Completed New Administrator Leadership Training.

Supervised Biology Curriculum.

Agency Representative for Individualized Education Plan (IEP) Committee. Agency Representative for Disciplinary Hearing Committee.

Evaluated discipline needs of individual students.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

08/17-05/21

Classroom Teacher- Algebra, Geometry, Inclusion Math

Hernando High School, Hernando, MS.

Teach Algebra I, Geometry, and Inclusion Mathematics courses.

Draft student Individualized Education Plans (IEP's).

Conduct IEP meetings.

Construct student schedules.

School bus driver.

01/17- 05/17

Classroom Teacher- Algebra

Charlestown High School, Charlestown, IN.

Taught multiple Algebra I courses.

Tutored high school students in Algebra.

08/16-12/16

Classroom Teacher- Middle School Science

Western Middle School, Louisville, KY.
Taught Seventh Grade Science.
Tutored middle school students in Science.
Supervised local middle school science fair.
Conducted parent meetings.

08/05-06/09

Classroom Teacher- Fifth and Sixth Grade Math and Science
Vardaman Elementary, Vardaman, MS.
Taught fifth and sixth grade math and science courses.
Instructed students in English Language Learner Literacy Summer School Program.
Assisted principal in administrative duties.
Supervised student discipline procedures.
Conducted parent meetings.
Summer Maintenance Team.
School bus driver.

08/03-06/05

Classroom Teacher- Biology and Chemistry
Calhoun City High School, Calhoun City, MS.
Taught Biology and Chemistry courses.
Conducted parent meetings.
School bus driver.

08/02- 06/03

Classroom Teacher- Biology
Grenada High School, Grenada, MS.
Taught multiple Biology courses

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM ESTABLISHED AND IMPLEMENTED

2014-2016	Community and Elementary School Chess Club/Tournament
2014-2016	Milk and Cookie Community Open House for Davidson Elementary School
2015-2016	Computer Lab Fundraiser
2014-2016	Community Volunteer Reading for Elementary Students Initiative
2014-2016	Le Bonheur Community Fundraiser “Go Jim Go”
2014-2015	Le Bonheur Community Fundraiser “Go Jim Go”
2014	Water Valley Ambassadors Invited Speaker

PRESENTATIONS

Parker, B. (2020) “Major Events Mean Major Changes: Informing K-12 Educational Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic”
Society of Philosophy and History of Education Annual Meeting (Virtual)

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PRESENTATIONS

Parker, B. (2016) Mississippi Academic Assessment Program School Accountability to Water Valley School Board.

Parker, B. (2015) i- Ready Online Program for Reading and Math Presentation to Water Valley School Board.

Parker, B. (2015) i-Ready Online Program for Reading and Math Presentation to Davidson Elementary Teachers.

Parker, B. (2015) New Code of Discipline Implementation for Davidson Elementary Teachers.

Parker, B. (2015) New Teacher Orientation for Davidson Elementary Teachers.

Parker, B. (2014) Professional Learning Communities Implementation for Davidson Elementary Teachers.

Parker, B. (2014) New Teacher Orientation for Davidson Elementary Teachers.

Parker, B. (2014) Mississippi Academic Assessment Program Test Security.

Parker, B. (2013) Mississippi Academic Assessment Program Test Security.

Parker, B. (2011) Fifth Grade Math Curriculum Implementation.

Parker, B. (2011) Fixed Assets and Technology Usage.

INVITED SPEAKER

11/20 The University of Mississippi Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Leadership Course.

09/20 The University of Mississippi Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Leadership Course.

03/15 The University of Mississippi Administrator Forum.

12/14 The University of Mississippi Principles of Education Course.

AWARDS AND HONORS

2020 Gamma Beta Phi Society

2015 Administrator of the Year, Water Valley School District

SERVICE

2017 American Foundation for Suicide Prevention Out of Darkness Walk. Indiana University Southeast.

2016 Davidson Elementary School Playground Improvement
14-16 Lion's Club International Member
13-16 Water Valley Community Litter Prevention Campaign Committee/Volunteer
2013 Horn Lake Community Flood Clean Up Volunteer

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

08/05- Present Mississippi Professional Educators
08/09- Present National Association of Secondary Principals

REFERENCES

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