

# AASA JOURNAL OF SCHOLARSHIP & PRACTICE



*Research and Evidence-Based Practice Advancing the Profession of Education Administration*

*Spring 2017/Volume 14 No. 1*

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*AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice*  
2017-2018

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AASA, The School Superintendents Association

1615 Duke Street

Alexandria, VA 22314

Available at [www.aasa.org/jsp.aspx](http://www.aasa.org/jsp.aspx)

ISSN 1931-6569

## Sponsorship and Appreciation

The *AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice* would like to thank AASA, The School Superintendents Association, and in particular the AASA Leadership Development Office, for its ongoing sponsorship of the *Journal*.

We also offer special thanks to Kenneth Mitchell, Manhattanville College, for his efforts in selecting the articles that comprise this professional education journal and lending sound editorial comments to each volume.

The unique relationship between research and practice is appreciated, recognizing the mutual benefit to those educators who conduct the research and seek out evidence-based practice and those educators whose responsibility it is to carry out the mission of school districts in the education of children.

Without the support of AASA and Kenneth Mitchell, the *AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice* would not be possible.



## **Illinois Public School Superintendents: Influencing State-Level Education Legislation and Policy-Making In Illinois**

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### **Abstract**

Standards for superintendents of schools are clearly spelled out by The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) and the Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC) standards. ISLLC and the ELCC standards both address the political actions expected of today's district superintendents. Little scientific research has been conducted that demonstrates how superintendents have embraced this requirement. The purpose of this mixed methods study utilizing sequential explanatory design sought to determine the level of political involvement of superintendents in the state of Illinois. Our results identified key findings that have significant implications for Illinois superintendents of schools, which includes superintendents with more prior administrative experiences and those who work in high school districts who have more influence on political involvement and decision making, and superintendents who are actively involved in professional education organizations exert more influence on state-level education legislation and policy-making.

### **Key Words**

superintendent, evaluation standards, policy, advocacy

## Introduction

The job of a school district superintendent is naturally a political one. The superintendent must work both directly and indirectly with a number of constituencies in daily work, including administrative staff, parents, the teacher's union, the media, the community, along with local and state governments. It has been a common expectation of the superintendent to demonstrate the ability to work effectively with all of these groups to enhance student learning and student achievement and adhere to state and federal laws and mandates.

Standard 6 of the 2008 ISLCC Standards clearly states that the expectation of administrators is to lead by “understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context” (The Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008, p. 18). The ELCC Standard 6 expounded even further that the superintendent does this by “acting to influence local, district, state, and national decisions affecting student learning” (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2011, p. 23).

The collusive nature of these two standards serve as a clear statement that today's CEO of schools, the superintendent, must be involved in impacting educational policy making and in the future, federal level policies. While policy issues at all levels (local, district, state, and national) are important, the study focuses on state-level education legislation and policy-making.

The voices of the superintendents must be heard by legislators to ensure decisions are made that will be in the best interest of students in school districts across the United States of America. According to Standard 6, superintendents should be expected to play a

role in the development of policies, with the ultimate hope of garnering a result that will have a positive impact for all students in the school district. The superintendent of our time, as described, was expected to ride the waves of politics both inside and outside the district, but the time has come when superintendents need to adhere to Standard 6 and become politically involved at both the state and federal levels.

## Conceptual Framework

The role of the superintendent of schools in most states had been formally defined and informed by the six Interstate School Leaders License Consortium (ISLLC) Standards for School Leaders. The ISLLC standards were first developed in 1996 by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and were updated in 2008 (The Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008). The Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC) District-Level Standards were approved by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration in 2010. The ELCC standards were developed on the heels of the ISLLC standards and serve to define the role of an educational leader at the district level. The ELCC standards have been the framework upon which educational leadership programs were built.

Superintendents wishing to be effective in their jobs must identify with the roles expected in the ISLLC and ELCC standards, and as related to this paper, ISLLC and ELCC standards 6, related to the superintendent and politics. The superintendency has largely been defined by “emerging social, economic and political conditions” (Bjork, Kowalski, & Browne-Ferrigno, 2014). The politics of the superintendent's office were those of leveraging to provide for students' needs, in myriad modalities (Edwards, 2007). The reality was that policy-making had been moving inexorably

from the local board of education to the state and even the federal government, and influencing policy-making therefore implied as action at those levels, as stated in the ELCC standards (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2011).

It is important to note the new Professional Educational Leadership Standards, in Standard 8, back away from the specificity of ELCC Standard 6 of working to influence state and federal policies, but still presents the need for the superintendent to be politically active in such activities as “Advocate publicly for the needs and priorities of students ...” (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015).

The draft National Educational Leadership Preparation (NELP) Standards for District Level Leaders, Standard Seven, also maintains a distance from conceptualizing district leaders as influential in the educational legislation and policy-making process in statehouses and the nation’s capital, referring only to “... the capability to appropriately respond to local, state and national decisions” (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2016).

Edwards (2007) stated the politics of the superintendent’s office were those of leveraging to provide for student needs. A consortium of Illinois educational leadership organizations, including the Illinois Association of School Administrators (IASA) and the Illinois Association of School Boards (IASB), echoed ELCC standard 6 in the landmark Vision 20/20 agenda: “As a school official, your voice is needed in Springfield ...” (Illinois Vision 20/20, n.d.a, para. 1). “It is our responsibility as educators to reflect upon the current state of education in Illinois and take action to create an education system that meets the needs of all students. (Illinois Vision 20/20, n.d.b, para. 1).

Yet a 2009 study found novice superintendents recommended, among other items, improvement of preparation programs at the university level relating to the politics of education due to perceived lack of preparation (Kowalski, Petersen, & Fusarelli, 2009).

Within this framework, the state of Illinois had its own peculiarities related to the ability to influence state-level education legislation and policy-making. On the surface, Illinois politics seemed simple enough, with a constitutional framework of the legislative, executive and judicial branches laid out in the state Constitution of 1970 (Ill. Const).

On a functional level, however, the state was essentially run by the “big three” – the governor, the Speaker of the House, and the President of the Senate – as the House has ceded almost all power to the Speaker and the Senate has ceded almost all power to the President, including naming legislators to committees.

The Speaker and President also controlled all party funds, as did the minority leaders for their own parties, and could use those funds as they saw fit (Nowlan, Gove, & Winkel, 2010). As if the functional framework needed more complication, the state of Illinois also ranked high in political corruption, with the state ranking third in the nation in federal public corruption convictions in the time span 1976-2013 (Wilson, 2015).

This functional framework presented additional challenges to Illinois public school superintendents’ efforts to influence state-level education legislation and policy-making.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Superintendents carried an ever-increasing load of responsibilities (Carter & Cunningham, 1997), of which the role of being influential in

state-level educational legislation and policy-making were a part (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2011). It is important for superintendents to become politically involved in educational policy making, but how can superintendents increase their political influence?

Few empirical studies have investigated the possible pathways superintendents could utilize to influence state-policy making. This study attempts to address superintendents' leverage of state politics by way of involvement in educational organizations. Specifically, the purpose of this study was to determine educational organizations superintendents utilized in order to be influential in the Illinois educational political process, as well as how successful Illinois superintendents believed they were in achieving this goal. Demographic data were also collected to determine if demographics played a role in superintendents' perceptions of being influential.

## Methods

The study utilized a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design. Both quantitative and qualitative strategies were utilized, with an online survey followed by interviews of selected superintendents.

## Instruments

The survey was developed by the researcher following a review of the conceptual framework presented in the ISLLC and ELCC standards 6. The survey questions were first reviewed by a panel of three experts in the field. The survey questions were then pilot tested by asking five experienced superintendents to review for clarity and content. Feedback from the expert panel and superintendents was utilized to refine the survey. In addition to demographic information, the survey used Likert-type scales for responses and has the following components:

1. Superintendents' Educational Organization Affiliations – one survey item with twelve sub-responses that measure to what extent superintendents utilized specific educational organizations to influence the state-level educational political process. The Likert-type scale included responses of Always, Often, Occasionally, Sometimes, and Never.
2. Perceived Success of Superintendents' Educational Organizational Affiliations in Influencing State-Level Education Legislation/Policy-Making, which was measured by one survey item with twelve sub-responses. The Likert-type scale included responses of Highly Effective, Mostly Effective, Somewhat Effective, Neutral, Somewhat Ineffective, Mostly Ineffective, Highly Ineffective, and N/A.
3. Overall Perceived Success in Influencing State-Level Education Legislation/Policy-Making, measured by one survey item. The Likert-type scale included responses of Highly Effective, Mostly Effective, Somewhat Effective, Neutral, Somewhat Ineffective, Mostly Ineffective, Highly Ineffective, and N/A.

The questions for the follow-up qualitative interviews were developed from responses to the survey instrument, and were designed to further the information garnered from the survey. Three interview questions were asked of participating superintendents, one for each of the survey components to examine

how superintendents utilize educational organizations and their perceived success.

## Participants

The survey population consisted of 834 Illinois public school superintendents. The sample size for the survey was 201 unique superintendents. The sample was generally reflective of the study population. The sample was comprised of 24.9% female and 75.1% male superintendents; 44.3% were in the 40-49 age group, 37.8% were in the 50-59 age group, with less than 10% each in other age groups; 72.7% of the sample had been in the field of education for 21 or more years; 52.7% of them had been superintendents for at least 6 years and 47.3% for five years or less; and 77% of the study participants were from districts of 2,000 or less students.

Respondents indicated that 25 superintendents had only one prior administrative experience, 99 had two prior administrative experiences, and 50 had three or more prior experiences. Responding superintendents also reported 94 who were in unit districts, 81 in elementary district, and 23 in high school districts.

Six superintendents were selected by random draw from the self-selected list of those willing to be interviewed, which included 45 superintendents. The 45 superintendents' responses to the survey question, overall perceived success in influencing state-level education legislation/policy-making, were analyzed.

Due to a low number of superintendents endorsing some of the choices, response choices were combined into three broad categories: Effective, which included the original choices of Highly Effective, Mostly Effective, and Somewhat Effective; Neutral; and Ineffective, which included the original

choices of Somewhat Ineffective, Mostly Ineffective, and Highly Effective. Two superintendents were randomly selected from each of the broad categories.

All selected in the random draw were male, which was not unexpected, considering the fact that only five female superintendents indicated interest in being interviewed. The six superintendents selected came from different age groups. They differed also in the number of years in the superintendency, and in the size of school districts in which they were employed.

## Analysis

Survey responses were analyzed. First, descriptive statistics were computed to describe superintendents' modes of access to legislators and perceived effectiveness as a member of various educational organizations. Then, confidence intervals were used to compare the extent of utilization of the educational organizations and perceived effectiveness.

Finally, the overall perception of success influencing state-level education legislation and policy making was examined. Chi square tests were used to identify key demographic variables which were related to the overall perceived level of success.

Interviews were analyzed utilizing the coding process for qualitative data as described by Creswell (2009). The data was transcribed and organized for analysis.

Then transcripts were read to derive a general sense of meaning. Following that, the interview data were coded by breaking the information into segments by topic. After the coded information was described to develop themes useful as major findings, a determination of how to present the description themes was made; and the data were interpreted for meaning.

## Results

### Superintendents' organizational affiliations

The survey results, as well as the follow-up interviews, indicated Illinois' public school superintendents use professional organizations as the primary method in their efforts to access state legislators and influence state-level education legislation and policy-making. The extent of superintendents utilizing specific educational organizations was rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale: never = 1; sometimes = 2; occasionally = 3; often = 4; and always = 5. Superintendent responses were then weighted

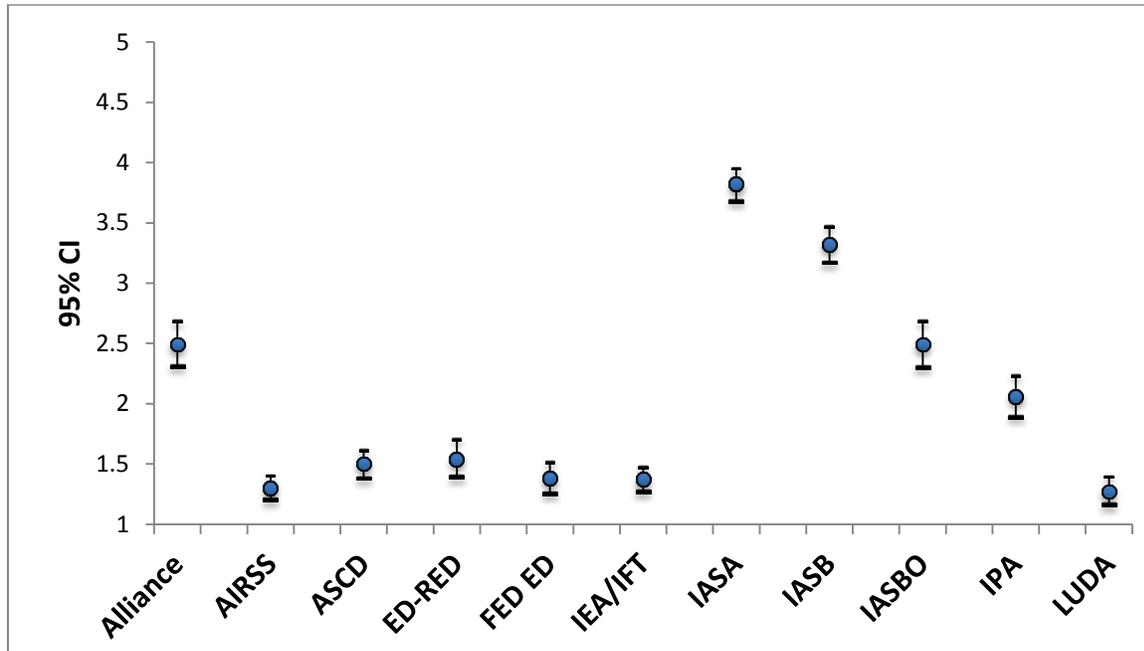
based on the scale score and the number of responses in the response category. The top two educational organizations that superintendents relied on to influence state-level educational political process were the IASA with a mean score of 3.82, followed by the IASB at a mean score of 3.32. Means, standard deviations, and 95% confidence intervals of superintendents' ratings of other educational organizations are listed in Table 1. Ninety five percent confidence intervals of superintendents' ratings of educational organizations were further illustrated in Figure 1 for comparison.

Table 1

Weighted Average Table of Educational Organizations

Educational Organization	M	SD	95% CI
Illinois Association of School Administrators	3.82	1.00	3.68-3.95
Illinois Association of School Boards	3.32	1.08	3.17-3.47
Illinois Association of School Business Officials	2.49	1.38	2.30-2.68
Alliance (Illinois Statewide School Management Alliance)	2.49	1.33	2.31-2.68
Illinois Principals' Association	2.06	1.21	1.89-2.23
Education Research Develop (ED-RED)	1.54	1.11	1.39-1.70
Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development	1.50	0.84	1.38-1.61
Federal Representation, Education and Communication	1.38	0.93	1.25-1.51
Illinois Education Association/Illinois Federal of Teachers	1.37	0.72	1.27-1.47
Association of Illinois Rural and Small Schools	1.30	0.71	1.20-1.40
Large Urban District Association	1.27	0.81	1.16-1.39

Figure 1. 95% confidence intervals for educational organizations.



A review of Figure 1 showed a clear separation of educational organizations utilized in efforts to influence state-level educational legislation and policy-making at the 95% confidence level. Two organizations, IASA and IASB were utilized by Illinois superintendents more frequently than other organizations.

### Superintendent's interview responses related to organizational affiliations

Superintendents who were interviewed echoed the data regarding their professional organizational affiliations. The interviews showed that superintendents found the IASA in particular to be the most valuable organization with which to be affiliated.

Superintendent C noted that IASA's value goes beyond just access to legislators:

"I think it's important to be as proactive

as possible in the IASA and some of those other groups that I've belonged to ... have allowed me to be a bit more proactive because you get an idea what other schools are doing and what might be coming down the road."

Superintendent E also found the IASA to have value beyond access and relationships:

"Being involved in IASA ... I think they do a really good job of encouraging superintendents to reach out to their legislators."

Superintendent F followed, as related to IASA:

... I feel like there's a lot of effort to get us to write a letter, come to some sort of meeting or some sort of statement being

made or some bill being sponsored or something ... So I would say there's a lot of efforts ...

Superintendent D also found multiple organizations that provided assistance:

“So I look to my own organizations ... IASA, IASB, IPA ... those are the organizations that I look to quite a bit. And I definitely look to them to help guide me through legislative changes.”

**Perceived success of superintendents' educational organizational affiliations in influencing state-level education legislation/policy-making**

Survey data show that superintendents ranked the IASA and the IASB as more effective than

other educational organizations for wielding superintendents' influence.

Superintendents were asked to rate the effectiveness of various educational organizations in influencing state-level education legislation and policymaking. Responses were rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale: Highly Ineffective = 1; Mostly Ineffective = 2; Somewhat Ineffective = 3; Neutral = 4; Somewhat Effective = 5; Mostly Effective = 6; and Highly Effective = 7. The IASA ( $M = 5.31$ ,  $SD = 1.56$ ) and IASB ( $M = 5.06$ ,  $SD = 1.67$ ) were the only organizations that were rated between Somewhat Effective and Mostly Effective.

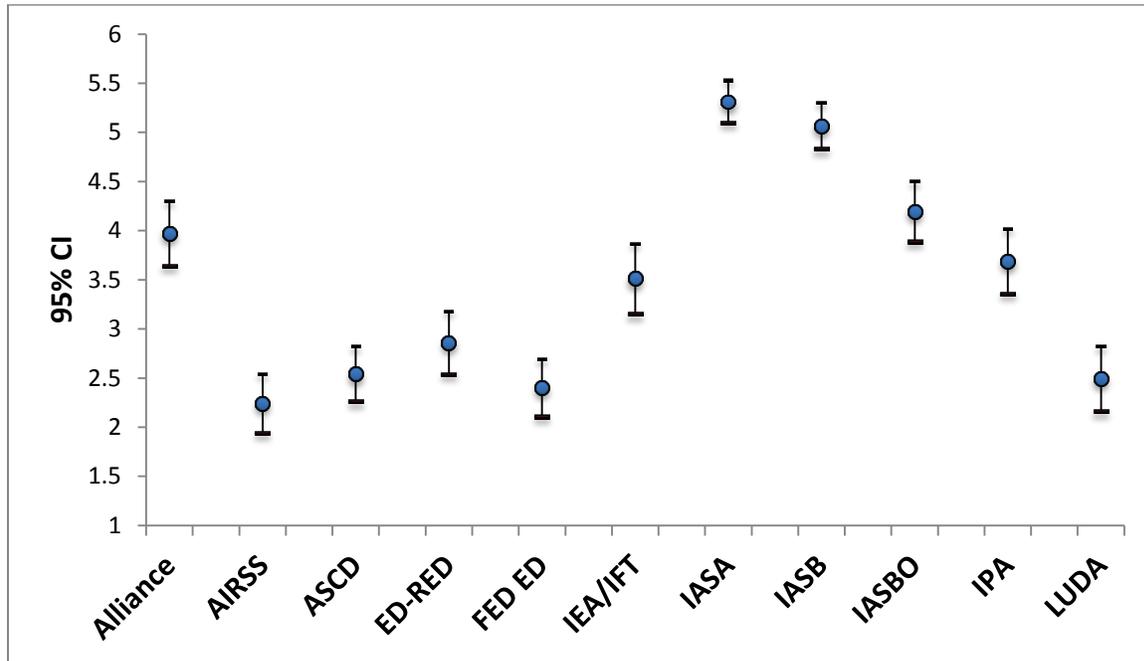
The complete chart of ratings is listed in Table 2, with 95% confidence intervals graphed in Figure 2.

Table 2

## Weighted Average Table of Perceived Effectiveness of Education Organizations

Educational Organization	M	SD	95% CI
Illinois Association of School Administrators	5.31	1.56	5.10-5.53
Illinois Association of School Boards	5.06	1.67	4.83-5.30
Illinois Association of School Business Officials	4.19	2.21	3.89-4.50
Alliance (Illinois Statewide School Management Alliance)	3.97	2.37	3.64-4.30
Illinois Principals' Association	3.69	2.38	3.36-4.02
Illinois Education Association/Illinois Federation of Teachers	3.51	2.58	3.15-3.87
Education Research Develop (ED-RED)	2.86	2.30	2.54-3.18
Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development	2.54	2.02	2.26-2.82
Large Urban District Association	2.49	2.36	2.16-2.82
Federal Representation, Education and Communication	2.40	2.08	2.11-2.69
Association of Illinois Rural and Small Schools	2.24	2.15	1.94-2.54

Figure 2. 95% confidence intervals for perceived success through educational organizations.



A review of the 95% confidence intervals in Figure 2 show clearly a separation of educational organizations perceived to be more helpful to superintendents in efforts to influence state-level educational legislation and policy-making.

IASA and IASB were perceived to be more helpful to superintendents in efforts to be influential in the educational political process than other organizations.

### **Superintendent's interview responses related to organizational affiliations and perceived success in influencing state-level legislation and policy-making**

Superintendents who were interviewed noted the value of professional organization affiliations, particularly the IASA, in their efforts to be influential.

Superintendent A found IASA to be of great value in his efforts:

“I believe that particularly our association and the Triple-I does a phenomenal job of communicating those issues that are out there and giving us access to our various legislators.”

Superintendent B echoed the value of IASA for access:

“The IASA in a smaller way gives us a lot of access down in Springfield. The leadership conference coming up is a great opportunity for us to get down there and talk to our legislators.”

**Overall perceived success in influencing state-level education legislation/policy-making**

Responding superintendents were asked to rate their overall perceptions of their success in being influential in state-level education legislation and policy-making. Responses were rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale: Highly Ineffective = 1; Mostly Ineffective = 2; Somewhat Ineffective = 3; Neutral = 4; Somewhat Effective = 5; Mostly Effective = 6; and Highly Effective = 7.

As mentioned earlier, due to low numbers of responses in some categories, the

categories were combined into three broad categories: Ineffective, Neutral, and Effective.

Superintendents generally rated their effectiveness in influencing state-level education legislation and policy-making as less than effective, with 60.7% of respondents rating their efforts as either ineffective or neutral. Subsequent interviews supported this, indicating that superintendents are uncertain if their efforts are having much, if any effect. Superintendents did report, both in the survey and in subsequent interviews, that they found the IASA and IASB to be more effective organizations through which they work to be influential.

Table 3

Frequency Table of Perceived Success in Influencing State-Level Education Legislation and Policy-Making in Broad Categories

Category	Frequency	Percent
Effective	79	39.3%
Neutral	41	20.4%
Ineffective	81	40.3%

There were two important but unexpected findings regarding superintendent effectiveness from the survey. First, the number of previous administrative roles a superintendent had been employed in was a significant finding, using the chi-square test ( $X$

$= 15.17, p < .05$ ). Superintendents who had held three or more previous administrative positions were 5.64 times more likely than those who had one previous experience to report perceived effectiveness (see Table 4).

Table 4

## Number of Prior Administrative Experiences Versus Perceived Effectiveness

<i>Category</i>	<i>Ineffective</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Effective</i>	<i>Total</i>
One	20	2	3	25
Two	43	22	34	99
Three or More	17	11	22	50

Second, the configuration of the superintendent's district was found to be a significant factor, using the chi-square test, in perceived influence ( $X = 10.64$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Superintendents in high school districts were

1.83 times more likely to report success than those in unit districts, and 2.89 times more likely than those in elementary districts (see Table 5).

Table 5

## School District Configuration Versus Perceived Effectiveness

<i>Category</i>	<i>Ineffective</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Effective</i>	<i>Total</i>
Unit	40	15	39	94
Elementary	37	19	25	81
High School	3	7	13	23
Total	80	41	77	198

### Discussion

Illinois' public school superintendents were charged with a duty to influence state-level education legislation and policy-making (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2011).

With policy-making moving increasingly to the state level, the

superintendent was not discharged of his duty to be involved in that policy-making (Hoyle, Bjork, Collier, & Glass, 2005).

This study suggested there were concrete steps superintendents should take in order to increase their levels of effectiveness in the state house: becoming active in professional

organizations, particularly the IASA and IASB; being employed in a number of administrative positions prior to becoming a superintendent; and understanding the apparent innate power in particular school district configurations.

First, superintendents should become active in professional organizations or other groups that provide access to legislators. Two organizations in particular were perceived to grant greater access to and therefore provided greater influence in superintendents' cause of garnering resources for the students of their districts: the IASA and the IASB. Although the PELS and NELP standards appear to reduce the emphasis in the ISLLC and ELCC standards regarding district level leaders being influential actors in educational legislation and policy-making, the IASA (Illinois Vision 20/20, n.d.a) was encouraging the opposite role by asking superintendent's voices to be heard.

The IASA's admonition was fully in step with those of researchers in the field such as Bjork, Kowalski, and Browne-Ferrigno (2014), who noted in their research that the superintendent's role was largely defined by politics and the political environment.

Second, superintendents should be more active in the number of administrative roles prior to becoming a superintendent. Involvement in multiple administrative roles prior to becoming a superintendent increased one's ability to be influential in state-level education legislation and policy-making.

Illinois public school superintendents who had held three or more prior administrative positions were much more likely to perceive success in being influential as compared to their peers who had been in a lesser number of administrative positions prior to becoming a superintendent.

This implied that superintendents who were more broadly experienced in administrative roles were critical in helping shape state-level educational policy-making.

An additional implication was that educational organizations should recognize a need to focus on superintendents with less broad administrative backgrounds in order to develop their political skills and influence.

Third, Illinois public school superintendents should be aware that the configuration of the district in which they are employed appeared to play a role in the superintendent's ability to influence state-level education legislation and policy-making.

High school district superintendents were more likely to report success than unit district superintendents, and much more likely to do so than elementary district superintendents. This indicates the possibility of a power structure, whether innate or contrived, related to school district configurations.

One possible implication for superintendents was to recognize such a power structure, and encourage superintendents in high school districts to take visibly active leadership roles in efforts to further influence legislators and state-level educational policy-making.

Another possible implication for educational organizations was to recognize these power players in the state and utilize their leadership abilities within these organizations to further leverage affirmative educational policy-making.

## **Conclusions**

The need for superintendents to be influential in state-level education legislation and policy-

making, as resources for school districts and the students of the state of Illinois continue to shrink, appears to be increasing, not only as driven by the ISLLC and ELCC standards, but also by professional organizations such as the Illinois Association of School Administrators.

This study revealed there are methods superintendents can utilize to improve their ability to influence state-level education legislation and policy-making, including being active in professional organizations that advocate for Illinois public schools. The study

indicated a superintendent's professional background, specifically the number of prior administrative roles prior to becoming a superintendent, may play a role in the superintendent's effectiveness in influencing state-level educational legislation and policy-making.

Finally, the study appeared to show that a superintendent's effectiveness in being influential may be subject to the superintendent's school district's configuration.

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## Research Article

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# Secondary School Administrators' Perceptions of Louisiana's Compass System as a Framework for Teacher Evaluation

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## Abstract

Louisiana's relatively new Compass teacher observation and evaluation system is used to evaluate teacher quality or effectiveness in P-12 public schools. Secondary school administrators in one district were interviewed about their perceptions of the system and, especially, an iteration of the Danielson rubric used for teacher evaluation. Findings reveal that administrators' perceptions of the Compass system as an effective framework for teacher evaluations are mixed. While the administrators support some requirements of the system, concerns exist over the system's capability to reflect overall teacher performance. Given that teacher salary and sustained employment are based on results of this system, the stakes are high. This study examines the Compass system and its implementation through the perspective of secondary school administrators. Conclusions identify strengths, challenges, and considerations for the system's implementation.

## Key Words

teacher evaluation system, Louisiana Compass evaluation system, Danielson framework

## Introduction

Teacher quality has been consistently identified as the most important factor affecting student achievement (Looney, 2011; Muijs et al., 2014; Papay, 2012). This finding has spurred a nationwide movement toward the improvement of public school student achievement (Ahn, 2013).

Federally funded incentive programs, such as Race to the Top (RTTT) in 2009, reward states that adopt a more rigorous curriculum and performance-based pay for educators (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

As a result, several states have now implemented accountability measures aligned with teacher evaluation methods, which rate teacher quality and effectiveness (Hinchey, 2010; Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2014; Louisiana Department of Education, n.d.).

Since the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, many researchers noted that there has been a dramatic shift in education toward school accountability (Kupermintz, 2003; Louis, Febey, & Schroeder, 2005; Petersen & Young, 2004; Stumbo & McWalters, 2011; Valli, Croninger, & Walters, 2007).

Educational reform legislation, such as NCLB, sought methods to evaluate professional employees and assess student achievement and growth (Petersen & Young, 2004; Valli et al., 2007). The accountability measures that resulted stressed the importance of student standardized testing results (Kupermintz, 2003; Louis, Febey, & Schroeder, 2005; Petersen & Young, 2004; Stumbo & McWalters, 2011). A few years later, the Obama administration began RTTT, a federally-funded grant

competition, to encourage states to revamp their academic curricula in order to further encourage student growth and achievement (Harris, Ingle, & Rutledge, 2014; Stumbo & McWalters, 2011).

This grant competition awarded funds to states based on each state's adoption of evaluation methods pertaining to school personnel and academic rigor (Stumbo & McWalters, 2011; U.S. Department of Education, 2010; Welsh, 2011).

The two most commonly implemented evaluation systems for evaluating teacher performance and effectiveness include the Value-Added Model (VAM) and a standards-based teacher observation system (Looney, 2011; Muijs et al., 2014; Papay, 2012). Papay (2012) noted that the VAM evaluation method is quantitative and seen as an objective tool that is based on student achievement and growth in standardized tests compared to other students throughout the state.

The standards-based teacher evaluation method, on the other hand, refers to classroom observations that are subjective and can be skewed with the evaluator's biases. Of these two evaluation methods, the latter has been protested heavily amid perceptions of bias (Papay, 2012).

The scrutiny of these evaluation methods stems primarily from the accountability measures associated with their results, which include employment-related decisions such as tenure, pay, and dismissal (Act No. 1, 2012; Papay, 2012). Since the stakes are high for teachers, questions emerge concerning the validity of these teacher effectiveness and accountability measuring tools, especially in regards to the more

subjective teacher observation evaluation (Darling-Hammond, Amrein-Beardsley, Haertel, & Rothstein, 2012).

In Louisiana, Act No. 54, which requires all educators to be formally observed and evaluated annually, was enacted into law in 2010 (Act No. 54, 2010). It called for teachers' annual evaluations to be scored and averaged with student academic achievement and growth on standardized tests in order to measure each teacher's effectiveness (Act No. 54, 2010; Stumbo & McWalters, 2011; Welsh, 2011). Act No. 54 specified that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) define measures of effectiveness and assigned respective values to those (Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2014).

According to Papay (2012), teacher observation methods normally involve observations by expert evaluators to assess teacher performance and behavior relative to specific standards.

Whereas the VAM is quantitative and is viewed as objective, the teacher observation evaluations rely on classroom observations, which are subjective and may be perceived as bias by teachers.

Thus, teacher observation evaluations and their components have been heavily scrutinized and protested (Papay, 2012; Stumbo & McWalters, 2011).

Despite wide scrutiny, the Louisiana legislature passed Act No. 1, permitting all employment-related decisions to be based on performance, effectiveness, and qualifications (Act No. 1, 2012). Since this Act allows subjective methods to be factored into teacher salary and tenure decisions, questions have been raised concerning the effectiveness of the teacher observation evaluation system as an

effective method for determining teacher salary and tenure (Papay, 2012; Stumbo & McWalters, 2011).

Previous studies have determined that there is support from teachers and principals regarding teacher evaluation methods (Bulbul, Tunc, Ozdem, & Inandi, 2013; Champ, 2013; Danielson & McGreal, 2000; Vernaza, 2012). However, there have also been concerns regarding the validity and reliability of these methods (Papay, 2012; Vernaza, 2012). Regardless of such concerns, like Louisiana, several states have adopted accountability measures that allow employment-related decisions to be based on performance and rated effectiveness (Petersen & Young, 2004).

This qualitative phenomenological study explored Louisiana public school leaders' perceptions of Louisiana's Compass teacher observation evaluation system as a framework for assessing teacher performance and determining teacher effectiveness.

The investigation examined those perceptions in terms of: (1) leaders' abilities to implement the Compass evaluation system accurately, (2) quality of the Compass evaluation system, and (3) influence of the Compass evaluation system on teacher performance.

## **Methodology**

### **Design**

The research design for this study was qualitative with a phenomenological narrative approach in order to answer the question: What perceptions do public school administrators have of the Compass teacher feedback, support, and evaluation system as a method for assessing teacher performance?

Creswell (2013) noted that the purpose of a phenomenological study is to describe

commonalities behind individuals shared experiences. Ultimately, the goal in a phenomenological study is to develop a composite description of the meaning and essences of the experiences from all individuals (Moustakas, 1994).

In order to capture detailed accounts of the participants' experiences, it is important for the researcher to conduct face-to-face interviews with each participant (Creswell, 2013). In this study, interviews allowed for the documentation of school leaders' descriptions of their lived experiences with Louisiana's Compass teacher observation evaluation system, and those interviews yielded findings that are unique to the context of Louisiana's model and are not necessarily generalizable to all teacher observation evaluation systems.

However, these narrative descriptions will aid in future efforts to further examine the Louisiana Compass system and, hopefully, systems used in similar contexts.

### Setting

To protect confidentiality, the pseudonym ABC District was used for the school district in southwest Louisiana selected for this study. This district is the fifth largest in Louisiana and was chosen for this study due to its balance of rural and urban schools; that includes 34 elementary schools, 12 middle schools, and 11 high schools.

Within these schools, the ABC District educates approximately 31,980 students with 13 percent of these students categorized under Special Education and 64 percent of students identified as economically disadvantaged. Throughout ABC, administrators have implemented the Compass teacher support and evaluation system since 2012 with the ultimate goal of raising student achievement (Louisiana Department of Education, 2015).

### Participants

As part of the Compass teacher observation evaluation system, administrators must formally evaluate teacher performance in the classroom using the Danielson rubric (Act No. 54, 2010).

Therefore, all administrators who participated in this study were selected from schools within the ABC district, had at least two years of experience as an administrator, and had previously conducted at least one Compass teacher observation evaluation during the duration of a school year.

This criterion was used in the selection process because Compass is relatively new, having only been implemented in Louisiana public schools since 2012 (Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2014).

Additionally, experience and understanding of the role as an administrator is also paramount to this study. The participant selection for this study depended on the purposive sampling of administrators.

Ten participants who met the study's criteria were interviewed regarding their administrative experiences with the Compass teacher observation evaluation system. Of these 10 participants, two were female, and eight were male. Additionally, 50% were principals, and 50% assistant principals at their respective schools.

However, six of the administrators worked at a high school in ABC, while four were administrators at middle schools. Notably, four of these participants were administrators at rural schools, whereas six were administrators at urban schools. These participants had between two and 29 years of experience as administrators, with an average of 9.6 years of experience. The ethnicities of the

participants included African-American, Hispanic, and Caucasian.

### **Data collection**

Data for this study were obtained through individualized, face-to-face interviews. Dates, times, and locations of the interviews were at the discretion of the participants. The interviews ranged from approximately 30 to 60 minutes in duration. Interview guided protocol questions were developed as an outline to gain information about the perspectives of these participants as well as to gain information about the factors that might contribute to their perceptions.

The interview guided protocol questions served as a method to encourage participants to share their personal stories concerning their experiences with the teacher observation evaluation system. Furthermore, the guided protocol was created based on the literature of the teacher observation evaluation method and the research questions. Each interview followed the same outline of questions.

### **Data analysis**

Creswell's (2013) recommendations for qualitative research data analysis, which involve arranging and structuring the data, coding the data, and finally representing the data, were followed. Interview transcriptions were prepared from the participants' remarks. Recordings were transcribed carefully.

Transcriptions were examined for patterns, primarily common key terms and phrases. Recurring key terms and phrases were noted during transcript analysis. Those terms and phrases were examined repeatedly to condense duplicative or otherwise synonymous terms or phrases. Once complete, the results were deemed themes and labeled according to the common characteristics or meanings among the terms and phrases.

Member checking, thick descriptions, and acknowledgement of potential researcher bias were employed to ensure trustworthiness of the data.

### **Discussion of Themes**

Three major themes emerged from the data. Each relates specifically to Louisiana's Compass system, and the nuances found for each are discussed.

#### **Implementation of Compass system**

Participants provided explanations of their perceptions of the purpose of the Compass teacher observation and evaluation system, provided descriptions of their training and preparation, identified strengths and weaknesses associated with the training, discussed their ability to mentor and provide feedback to teachers, and described their perception of the teachers' reception to this guidance.

Based on the data, implementation of the teacher observation and evaluation system varies from school to school based on individual administrators' approaches and personal beliefs concerning the pre-conference, observation, post-conference, and purpose of the Compass system as a whole.

These findings are consistent with Papay (2012) regarding the subjectivity associated with teacher observation systems. However, in addition to the subjectivity of the observation, biases were found in the expectations given during the pre-conference and administrative approach to post-conference feedback. This further supports Papay, as well as Benedict, Thomas, Kimerling, and Leko (2013) who identified biases and inaccuracies found within every component of an evaluation system. These and the impact of these factors on the reliability and validity of the evaluation tool's results must be recognized and

considered when making decisions about teacher quality.

Additionally, administrators expressed confusion regarding the expectations concerning their roles and delivery of expectations for classroom teachers. This conclusion is consistent with Danielson and McGreal (2000); Sartain, Stoelinga, and Brown (2011); and Sloan (2006) who described the impact teacher observation and evaluation systems have school-wide.

Specifically, Sloan described policy change impacting classroom practices and further identified inconsistent practices in each classroom due to individual translation of state policy requirements.

### **Quality of Compass system**

Participants were asked to describe the strengths and weaknesses associated with each component of the teacher observation and evaluation system. Participants also provided their insights on the impact the teacher observation and evaluation system had on teacher performance and student achievement.

Hill and Grossman (2013) described states adopting a comprehensive instrument that clearly defines expectations and standards for teachers. Furthermore, these researchers emphasized that such teacher observation instruments must be flexible to all subject and content specific classes and encourage practices that are useful, effective, and promote student growth and achievement (Hill & Grossman, 2013).

However, findings from the current study indicated that the state of Louisiana adopted certain components in the Danielson rubric instead of adopting the complete rubric. Participants identified the negative impact this

has on the scoring system for teachers as well as the inability to apply this rubric to teacher performance in all subject areas and grade levels. Moreover, participants described teachers changing their classroom practices in order to achieve a high rating on the abbreviated rubric.

Participants expressed concern over the inaccurate portrayal of these classroom observations due to teachers putting on a dog and pony show.

Darling-Hammond (2012) emphasized that it is imperative for evaluators to be able to distinguish teacher quality and teaching quality.

The findings from the interviews indicated that administrators began the teacher evaluation process of teacher quality and teaching quality in the pre-conference. Participants identified that they became aware of the multi-faceted structure of the classroom during this conference. They would have been unaware otherwise.

However, some participants acknowledged that this positive aspect is sometimes limited based on constraints on administrators' time. Participants admitted that the conferencing is not always done with integrity and fidelity but that it is most beneficial to both administrators and teachers and can make administrators more effective observers during the teacher evaluations.

### **Influence of Compass system on teacher performance**

Participants described the effects the observation and evaluation process had on teacher performance, student achievement, and school improvement practices; they also described the impact recommendations given to teachers had on teaching practices.

According to Jaquith, Mindich, Wei, and Darling-Hammond (2011), individual schools have more recently taken responsibility to promote a culture of inquiry among their educators and support collaboration among teachers to improve their skills and stay current with their teaching practices.

Additionally, Danielson (2011) specified that these professional development opportunities can simply include professional conversations between colleagues. When educators are able to collaborate on evaluation results, the evaluation results are better received and therefore more useful to teacher growth (Hinchey, 2010).

Similarly, participants described the teacher observation and evaluation system as guiding professional development, such as Professional Learning Communities and faculty in-services. Participants also indicated that these professional development opportunities address aspects of the observation and components within the rubric teachers struggle with in order to promote success.

Despite best efforts, participants still acknowledge that participants seem to implement more drastic changes to their teaching strategies during observations. Nevertheless, administrators admit that they are seeing small positive changes in teaching strategies throughout their staff on a daily basis due to encouragement from Professional Learning Communities and faculty in-services that focus on best teaching practices promoted through the Compass teacher observation and evaluation system's components and resources.

Additionally, Benedict et al. reported that teachers find more meaningful insight when discussing evaluation expectations. These discussions are likely to yield implementation of best teaching practices associated with the

expectations (Danielson, 2011; Hinchey, 2010). Interviews supported these findings.

Administrators offered that they could only do so much toward mentoring and providing opportunities for teacher growth; therefore, teachers would benefit from constructive conversations with peers about the evaluation expectations and results. They believed they were not solely responsible for teacher development and concluded that teachers must have the intrinsic motivation to grow and change with best teaching methods in order to succeed in the observation evaluations.

## Conclusions

This study investigated public school administrators' perceptions regarding Louisiana's Compass teacher observation and evaluation system as a method for assessing teacher performance.

Results show that administrators' perceived requisite pre- and post-conferences are the most important and influential aspects associated with the teacher observation and evaluation system. Participants identified that these conferences promotes the continuation of teacher growth and development. They perceived the conferences to be more valuable than the observation evaluation itself, which is consistent with findings by Danielson (2011), Gartia (2013), Jaquith et al. (2011), and Papay (2012).

In addition to these strengths, administrators identified problems with the observation task, the rubric, and their abilities to implement each component of the Compass framework due to time constraints associated with administrative positions; this finding is consistent with Benedict et al.'s (2013) findings regarding administrators' work and the time they have to complete that work. Moreover, and consistent with Danielson (2007) and Harris et

al. (2014), administrators noticed inconsistencies between the observation evaluations and the accuracy of these observations in comparison with daily teacher performance.

Most notably, teachers routinely doing good work and fostering academic success among students in manners appropriate for their students may not have scored favorably during evaluations because they did not adhere to specific practices prescribed on the observation rubric.

### Implications for practice

This study clarified that administrators understand and acknowledge the value of the pre- and post-conferences; however, the findings highlight administrators' perceived limitations associated with their roles in the teacher observation and evaluation system. Similarly, Benedict et al. (2013) and the findings of this study suggest that when administrators are knowledgeable about the expectations and requirements of an observation and evaluation system, improved teaching practices and professional collaboration and growth are promoted.

Additionally, when administrators have a positive attitude and are willing to provide resources, they foster success and positivity throughout their faculty (Roberson & Roberson, 2009).

With that, implications for practice include the following:

1. In addition to leading Professional Learning Communities, train teacher leaders or instructional coaches to perform teacher observations and evaluations in order to lessen the burden on administrators. This could increase the quality of teacher

observation and evaluation process and its components (Danielson, 2011).

2. Provide professional development for administrators that define all components and verbiage on the Danielson rubric in order to make the tool and how the tool is used more objective and consistent across the district, which is a recommended matter for superintendents to consider and which is supported by Danielson (2011), Darling-Hammond (2012), and Hill and Grossman (2013). Moreover, superintendents are encouraged to utilize a Professional Learning Community model where administrators engage in a community of practice with their peers to provide peer support for those professionals conducting evaluations comparable to the support suggested for those professionals being evaluated.
3. Lessen accountability associated with the observation and individual teacher scoring. Instead, transition the current accountability framework that may yield erroneous results of a teacher's overall, long-term quality to a formative teacher growth and development framework as proposed by Sartain et al. (2011).
4. Adopt a thorough or complete rubric for the teacher observation and evaluation process that is applicable to all grade levels and subject areas (Hill & Grossman, 2013).

The Louisiana Compass teacher observation and evaluation system is still

young, and, based on our findings, its implementation is somewhat fragmented. Administrators feel that their roles within the system are still unclear and that the system overall does not portray all teachers' overall performance accurately. This yields a process sometimes regarded as punitive rather than

formative. Because administrators are still becoming familiar with the system and methods for implementing it successfully in their schools, further research is warranted and could provide the State-level decision-makers with valuable feedback "from the field" as the Compass system's use continues.

### **Author Biographies**

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## *Defying Standardization: Creating Curriculum for an Uncertain Future*

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**P**ublic schools across the United States are faced with seismic challenges. The needs of our students have out-paced the reform agenda, and there is a clearly identifiable gap between policy-driven reform and the daily practices needed to ensure all students thrive. Every leader and learner has felt the impact of standardization. In the local and national news and in social media, the issue of school failure is front and center, and the answer of standardization and accountability has become commonplace.

In his most recent book, *Defying Standardization Creating Curriculum for an Uncertain Future*, Christopher Tienken outlines from multiple views how standardization became the overarching mandate for public schools and provides an alternate view of how teachers and leaders can build curriculum that is recommitted to a democratic life. He carefully unpacks the assumptions and drivers that underlie a false belief in standardization as the holy grail of school reform.

### **How did we get here and what is the cost?**

The book includes a comprehensive review of the key documents, historical references, and

political messages that drive the prevailing beliefs, mandates, and practices that result in standardization as the solution to improving schools. Tienken outlines the negative impact this perilous journey is having on equity, equality, and access, and the promise of public education in a democratic society. He shows how public opinion, driven by the unfounded rhetoric of *A Nation at Risk*, *Goals 2000*, and *No Child Left Behind*, oversimplifies the issues and drives all solutions towards a one-size fits all education.

The author unpacks the misuse of international data and the comparison of student performance and summarizes the danger of selecting certain data to prove a point and to drive an agenda. He also provides a competing data set that tells a different story about the success of learning in schools that includes measures of creativity and innovation.

The misuse of data and the creation of an illusion of failure have created external pressure on the education system.

That pressure has systematically influenced the work of researchers, leaders, and educators and muted their voices.

Tienken reveals the critical impact of policies that are the result of blame and punishment and the sacrifices made when education is limited to a forced choice between subject-centered curriculum and student-centered curriculum.

Understanding how public schools have accepted without substantive evidence that standardization is a necessary evil for improving schools is only one part of the commentary. Tienken also outlines the cost to our children and how curriculum and learning are impacted.

### **What is another option?**

Tienken suggests an alternative. What does curriculum look like if the ideals of democracy prevail? He repositions the conversation from a different entry point.

Instead of focusing on a one-size-fits all education where students are easily compared, and the curricular outcomes become micromanaged for every child, he promotes and describes a different curricular paradigm founded on a progressive-experimentalist philosophy. This paradigm provides a way of navigating student-centered curriculum with a focus on the processes and the agency of the learner.

Grounding the work in cognitive research and Deweyan theories, Tienken reminds us that student learning must recognize the talents and interests of the learner. The learning process requires the student to actively construct new knowledge and understandings in a meaningful way, given an authentic context.

Tienken builds a comprehensive argument that we are at a critical juncture and must choose a different path for the future of our children, their families, and our communities. Coupling our understanding of

the progressive-experimentalist philosophy with the skills and dispositions needed for the future and the true purpose of schools to develop members of a global community, it is clearly apparent that an “unstandardized” curricular paradigm is required. The demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century require a rapid departure from the current policies and a redirection of school reform toward student-centered instruction.

The author provides a curriculum planning model and references the principles that guide “unstandardizing” the system.

He opens the window to a sample of authentic curriculum designs that situates the learning and the learner in an authentic context. Skills and dispositions like creativity, courage, and critical thinking become the hallmarks of our expectations and the foci of our redesign. Tienken clearly unpacks how we got into to the cycle of standardization and outlines a solution for reconceptualizing our purpose and programs.

### **What are the Challenges for School Leaders?**

Our challenge as school leaders will be operationalizing the changes outlined, especially given the need for expediency. We have lost years of teacher development and community partnerships.

The messages, narrative, and beliefs around the purpose of public schools will need to be redeveloped so that the expectations of student-centered curriculum will be valued.

Multiple pathways exist to develop learning opportunities that engage students, but without building a new reality and common understandings of the purpose of public schools, it will be impossible to chart a new direction.

Tienken's book sets a clear direction, but we will need a community of thinkers working together to operationalize the ideals and practices needed for all children to

experience a public education where they develop behaviors, knowledge, and skills to thrive in this ever-changing and complex world.

### **Reviewer Biography**

Brenda Myers is superintendent of the Valhalla Union Free School District. She has thirty-three years of experience in public schools and served as superintendent of the Groton Central School District and the deputy superintendent of Broome-Tioga BOCES. She has also taught primary school in England, grades 3-6, K-12 literacy and high school social studies. Myers is known for her work across New York State in the areas of leadership development, instructional theory, and assessment design. E-mail: [bmyers@valhallaschools.org](mailto:bmyers@valhallaschools.org)

*Defying Standardization: Creating Curriculum for an Uncertain Future* is written by Christopher H. Tienken, former editor of the *AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice*. It is published by Roman & Littlefield Publishers, Lanham, MD, 2016, 195 pages, softcover, \$26.

## Mission and Scope, Copyright, Privacy, Ethics, Upcoming Themes, Author Guidelines, Submissions, Publication Rates & Publication Timeline

The *AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice* is a refereed, blind-reviewed, quarterly journal with a focus on research and evidence-based practice that advance the profession of education administration.

### Mission and Scope

The **mission** of the Journal is to provide peer-reviewed, user-friendly, and methodologically sound research that practicing school and district administrations can use to take action and that higher education faculty can use to prepare future school and district administrators. The Journal publishes accepted manuscripts in the following categories: (1) Evidence-based Practice, (2) Original Research, (3) Research-informed Commentary, and (4) Book Reviews.

The **scope** for submissions focus on the intersection of five factors of school and district administration: (a) administrators, (b) teachers, (c) students, (d) subject matter, and (e) settings. The Journal encourages submissions that focus on the intersection of factors a-e. The Journal discourages submissions that focus only on personal reflections and opinions.

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Below are themes and areas of interest for publication cycles.

1. Governance, Funding, and Control of Public Education
2. Federal Education Policy and the Future of Public Education
3. Federal, State, and Local Governmental Relationships
4. Teacher Quality (e.g., hiring, assessment, evaluation, development, and compensation of teachers)
5. School Administrator Quality (e.g., hiring, preparation, assessment, evaluation, development, and compensation of principals and other school administrators)
6. Data and Information Systems (for both summative and formative evaluative purposes)
7. Charter Schools and Other Alternatives to Public Schools
8. Turning Around Low-Performing Schools and Districts
9. Large scale assessment policy and programs
10. Curriculum and instruction
11. School reform policies
12. Financial Issues

## Submissions

**Length of manuscripts should be as follows:** Research and evidence-based practice articles between 2,800 and 4,800 words; commentaries between 1,600 and 3,800 words; book and media reviews between 400 and 800 words. Articles, commentaries, book and media reviews, citations and references are to follow the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, latest edition. Permission to use previously copyrighted materials is the responsibility of the author, not the *AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice*.

Potential contributors should include in a cover sheet that contains (a) the title of the article, (b) contributor's name, (c) terminal degree, (d) academic rank, (e) department and affiliation (for inclusion on the title page and in the author note), (f) address, (g) telephone and fax numbers, and (h) e-mail address. Authors must also provide a 120-word abstract that conforms to APA style and a 40-word

biographical sketch. The contributor must indicate whether the submission is to be considered original research, evidence-based practice article, commentary, or book or media review. The type of submission must be indicated on the cover sheet in order to be considered. Articles are to be submitted to the editor by e-mail as an electronic attachment in Microsoft Word.

### Acceptance Rates

The *AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice* maintains a record of acceptance rates for each of the quarterly issues published annually. The percentage of acceptance rates since 2010 is as follows:

2011: 16%

2012: 22%

2013: 15%

2014: 20%

2015: 22%

### Book Review Guidelines

Book review guidelines should adhere to the author guidelines as found above. The format of the book review is to include the following:

- Full title of book
- Author
- City, state: publisher, year; page; price
- Name and affiliation of reviewer
- Contact information for reviewer: address, country, zip or postal code, e-mail address, telephone and fax
- Date of submission

### Publication Timeline

Issue	Deadline to Submit Articles	Notification to Authors of Editorial Review Board Decisions	To AASA for Formatting and Editing	Issue Available on AASA website
Spring	October 1	January 1	February 15	April 1
Summer	February 1	April 1	May 15	July 1
Fall	May 1	July 1	August 15	October 1
Winter	August 1	October 1	November 15	January 15

### Additional Information

Contributors will be notified of editorial board decisions within eight weeks of receipt of papers at the editorial office. Articles to be returned must be accompanied by a postage-paid, self-addressed envelope.

The *AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice* reserves the right to make minor editorial changes without seeking approval from contributors.

Materials published in the *AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice* do not constitute endorsement of the content or conclusions presented.

The Journal is listed in Cabell's Directory of Publishing Opportunities. Articles are also archived in the ERIC collection. The Journal is available on the Internet and considered an open access document.

## **Editor**

### **Kenneth Mitchell, EdD**

*AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice*

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- ✓ **Upcoming AASA Events**

AASA Legislative Advocacy Conference, July 10-12, 2017, Hyatt Regency on Capitol Hill, Washington, DC

Early Childhood Learning Summit, Oct. 23-24, InterContinental Hotel, Miami, Fla.

AASA's National Conference on Education, Feb. 15-17, 2018, Nashville, Tenn.