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## **Superintendent Longevity and Student Achievement in North Carolina Public Schools**

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### **Abstract**

Researchers examined the relationship between superintendent longevity and district variables on standardized test scores for students in North Carolina. The authors used hierarchical multiple regression to understand if superintendent-specific variables explained variance in student performance over and above district-based variables documented in the research literature. The continuous predictors were the percentage of students who receive free or reduced lunch (FRL), school size, and superintendents' levels of experience. This study illustrates that the issue of whether superintendents affect student achievement is not an all or nothing proposition. While superintendents can influence student achievement, particularly as their in-state experience increases, there are district predictors that must be considered.

### **Key Words**

superintendent, student achievement, superintendent longevity, free and reduced meals

**R**ole expectations for school superintendents have changed since the Buffalo, New York Common School Council appointed the first superintendent in 1837 to ensure the system operated effectively (Carter & Cunningham, 1997). At that time, the position included responsibilities such as “advisor to the board, the leader of reforms, the manager of resources, and the chief communicator to the public” (p. 24). The role was largely managerial in nature throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Thomas & Moran, 1992), with success defined in terms of system efficiency (Andero, 2001).

Reform efforts of the late 1980’s broadened the role of the superintendent to include instructional leadership and student academic achievement (Hoyle, Bjork, Collier, & Glass, 2005; Kowalski, 2013), thereby making the job more challenging (Sharp, Malone, & Walter, 2001).

In addition to improving student achievement and being accountable for students achieving specific results (Bredeson & Kose, 2007), superintendents are expected to address an array of societal issues, including diversification of students and staff, increased governmental mandates, the explosion of technology, and the globalization of society (Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young, & Ellerson, 2011). Ashbaugh (2000) reported this to be a change from “building construction, business management, personnel, and publications to the main business of education—instruction” (p. 9). Along with superintendents being accountable for academic results, the managerial functions for which the position was originally created must still be handled effectively; in fact, school boards often cite managerial deficiencies as a reason for superintendent turnover (Sharpe et al., 2001).

Even as the role evolves, superintendents remain responsible for the success or failure of schools within their districts (Rammer, 2007), a challenge that has been heightened by financial constraints that have led to lawsuits over school funding throughout the country (LaMorte, 2011).

While past measures of success were largely based on the extent to which local communities were pleased with their schools, the introduction of No Child Left Behind shifted success norms to student performance on standardized tests (Rammer, 2007). Chingos, Whitehurst, and Lindquist (2014) noted that superintendents receive tremendous credit when student scores on standardized tests are high and just as much blame when they are not, with this emphasis on test outcomes resulting in some superintendents being forced out of their jobs.

These added stressors have contributed to superintendent turnover, thereby decreasing the length of superintendent tenure. While increased accountability through high stakes testing has heightened pressure on superintendents (Alborano, 2002), the greatest challenge they face is that superintendents are highly visible people charged with negotiating through bitterly competing political interests (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000).

As a result, many school districts find it difficult to retain their superintendents (Kowalksi, 2003; Lamkin, 2006); the typical superintendent has assumed his or her position for three to four years (Chingos et al, 2014). Consequently, the superintendency is increasingly viewed as a temporary position, with boards of education and superintendents expecting a lack of longevity among superintendents (Clark, 2001).

Limited superintendent longevity is consequential for a variety of reasons. First, Kamrath (2015) argued that superintendent turnover created frustration within school districts due to ever-shifting priorities among school leaders, resulting in improvement efforts that are often not sustained. School personnel consistently reported that they wanted to see their superintendent remain in the position longer, believing that leadership stability was helpful for schools' success.

Second, substantiating this belief is Whittle's (2005) research indicating that highly successful corporations had CEO's with much longer tenure than their school superintendent counterparts, suggesting that the same organizational stability that benefitted corporations would benefit schools.

Third, researchers have suggested that leadership stability contributes to organizational success while superintendent turnover creates academic instability and organizational dysfunction (Grady & Bryant, 1989; Marzano & Waters, 2009; Yee & Cuban, 1996).

If district and superintendent success are measured largely by standardized test results, and if districts struggle to keep superintendents long-term, analyzing the relationship between superintendent longevity and the academic achievement of students is a salient issue. Extant research on this matter consists largely of case studies about superintendents who have been perceived to be successful without answering the empirical question about their impact on student achievement (Chingos et al., 2014).

In addition, meta-analyses have found a statistically significant relationship between specific superintendent behaviors and student achievement. For example, student success

improved when superintendents established non-negotiable student performance goals, developed principals as instructional leaders, facilitated staff development, evaluated the instructional program, and monitored student academic success (Marzano & Waters, 2009; Peterson & Barnett, 2005). Support of these contentions was Myers (2011) research, indicating that the length of a superintendent's tenure significantly affected 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading scores in Kansas, with a positive correlation between the total number of years as a superintendent and these test scores.

Meier and O'Toole (2001) also reported that the amount of time a superintendent served in Texas districts in any capacity was positively correlated with student outcomes on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS), a high stakes test used to rate school districts in that state.

However, Alsbury (2008) found that in smaller, rural districts (comprised of less than 500 students), the length of superintendent tenure was negatively correlated with student test scores. More recently, Chingos et al. (2014) found that district and community factors affected achievement much more than superintendent variables.

For example, the relationship between poverty and lower achievement has been well established (Institute for Public Policy and Economic Development, 2016; Levin, 2007), and some research suggests that district size may also impact student outcomes (Howley, 1996; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008). Therefore, Chingos et al (2014) asserted, "The transformative school district superintendent who single-handedly raises student achievement through dint of will, instructional leadership, managerial talent, and political acumen may be a character of fiction rather than life" (p.14).

Due to the inconclusive nature of superintendent-specific variables such as retention in the job and district-specific variables, such as the percentage of students receiving free and reduced lunch on student performance, this study investigated the impact of school superintendent experience on student achievement. To that end, 2016-17 North Carolina Accountability and Testing results for all of the state's 115 school districts were used to demonstrate student achievement.

Specifically, North Carolina annually administers End-of-Grade (EOG) standardized tests in reading and mathematics in grades 3 - 8 and an EOG in science in grades 5 and 8. The state also administers End-of-Course (EOC) standardized tests in English II, Mathematics I, and Biology high school classes. A student EOG or EOC score of "3" or higher on a 5-point scale is deemed "proficient." The percentage of students who meet proficiency is reported for federal, state, and local accountability purposes.

In this study, researchers examined the relationship between superintendent and district predictive variables on student academic achievement in 2016-17. Student academic achievement measures included each district's performance composite score, defined as the number of proficient scores on all EOG and EOC tests divided by the number of all scores from those tests. The performance composite was selected because it reflects all EOG and EOC tests, includes multiple grade levels, and is often used to describe overall district performance.

Other student achievement outcome variables included the percentage of students who scored a "3" or higher on each of the following EOGs: (1) 5<sup>th</sup> grade reading, (2) 5<sup>th</sup> grade mathematics, (3) 5<sup>th</sup> grade science, (4) 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading, (5) 8<sup>th</sup> grade mathematics, (6) 8<sup>th</sup>

grade science. The 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade tests were used because those grade levels typically represent the end of the elementary and middle school grade spans (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2000). Specifically, the researchers sought to answer the following questions:

- What is the relationship between the superintendent's total number of years of experience as a superintendent in any school district and student academic achievement as measured by the district's performance composite score, percent proficient on 5<sup>th</sup> grade reading, mathematics, and science EOG tests, and the percent proficient on 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading, mathematics, and science EOG tests in the 2016-17 school year?
- What is the relationship between the number of years the superintendent has served as the leader of the North Carolina school district and student academic achievement as measured by the district's performance composite score, percent proficient on 5<sup>th</sup> grade reading, mathematics, and science EOG tests, and the percent proficient on 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading, mathematics, and science EOG tests in the 2016-17 school year?
- What is the relationship between the number of years of experience the 2016-17 superintendent had in education prior to becoming a superintendent and student academic achievement as measured by the district's performance composite score, percent proficient on 5<sup>th</sup> grade reading, mathematics, and science EOG tests, and the percent proficient on 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading, mathematics, and science EOG tests in the 2016-17 school year?

- What is the relationship between the percentage of students in the district who qualify for free or reduced meal prices and student academic achievement as measured by the district's performance composite score, percent proficient on 5<sup>th</sup> grade reading, mathematics, and science EOG tests, and the percent proficient on 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading, mathematics, and science EOG tests in the 2016-17 school year?
- What is the relationship between the total student enrollment of a North Carolina school district and student academic achievement as measured by the district's performance composite score, percent proficient on 5<sup>th</sup> grade reading, mathematics, and science EOG tests, and the percent proficient on 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading, mathematics, and science EOG tests in the 2016-17 school year?

Five predictive variables (three dealing directly with the superintendent and two dealing with demographic factors of districts) were recorded for each district. The superintendent-specific predictors used in this study from the 2016-17 school year included:

- each superintendent's total years of experience as a superintendent in any district;
- each superintendent's total years of experience as superintendent in the 2016-17 North Carolina district; and
- each superintendent's total years of experience in education prior to becoming a superintendent.

The predictors used in this study that were related to district demographics were

chosen to help define the districts' financial situation. These included each district's percentage of 2016-17 students eligible for free or reduced lunch and each district's total number of students.

## Methods

The authors used hierarchical multiple regression to understand if the addition of superintendent-specific variables explained variance in student performance—assessed by standardized test scores—over and above district-based variables documented in the research literature. The continuous predictors were the percentage of students who receive free or reduced lunch (FRL), school size, superintendents' level of experience (total years of experience as a superintendent [anywhere in the country], total years of experience as a superintendent in North Carolina, and total years of experience in education prior to having served as a superintendent).

Findings from peer-reviewed journals indicate that school districts with a higher percentage of students eligible for free or reduced lunch (FRL), are also districts that have a lower percentage of students who score at or above "proficient" on North Carolina's standardized test scores (Sass, Hannaway, Xu, Figlio, & Feng, 2012; Southworth, 2010 Sass). Thus, the authors took the percentage of students eligible for FRL, as well as another district-specific variable – school size – to discern the percentage of variance in student success explained by superintendent-specific characteristics.

In total, the authors conducted seven sequential regression analyses, each with a different outcome measure, which was the superintendents' district-level standardized test results. Specifically, the outcome metrics were the percentage of students who scored at the



level of proficient or better for: North Carolina's 5<sup>th</sup> grade Reading EOG, 5<sup>th</sup> grade Math EOG, 5<sup>th</sup> grade Science EOG.

Additional outcomes included the same percentages on the 8<sup>th</sup> grade Reading EOG, 8<sup>th</sup> grade Math EOG, 8<sup>th</sup> grade Science EOG, and the performance composite for all EOG and EOC tests.

## Results

Assumptions for each of the seven Hierarchical Regression equations were met: these data were linear as per an assessment of partial regression plots and a plot of studentized residuals against the predicted values. There was independence of residuals according to Durbin-Watson statistics. Visual inspection of a plot of studentized residuals versus unstandardized predicted values also indicated these data were homoscedastic. Collinearity diagnostics indicate that tolerance values did not exceed 0.1 and correlations between predictors were all below 0.5. In one instance, a studentized deleted residual was greater than  $\pm 3$  standard deviations, suggesting the possibility of a data entry or other error. No such issues were evident; thus these data were retained. Also met, as per the Q-Q Plot, was the assumption of normality.

Not strongly correlated with the outcome variable was the size of the district in which each superintendent worked, and as such, this variable did not add to the predicted variance in student success. As a result, the only district-specific variable retained in the models were the percentage of students eligible for FRL.

### Predictors of 2016-17 NC accountability and testing results performance composite

$R^2$  for the overall model was 53.8% with an adjusted  $R^2$  of 52.1%, a large effect size

according to Cohen (1988). FRL and superintendent-based variables statistically significantly predicted the 2016-17 NC Accountability and Testing results performance composite of standardized test scores over multiple grades,  $F(1, 96) = 40.059, p < .0005$ . Two of the four variables—FRL and the total years of experience as a superintendent in North Carolina superintendents'—added statistically significantly to the prediction,  $p < .05$ .

### Predictors of fifth grade reading, math and science proficiency

**Reading.**  $R^2$  for the overall model was 40.5% with an adjusted  $R^2$  of 38.4%, a medium effect size according to Cohen's guidelines (1988). FRL and superintendent-based variables statistically significantly predicted the standardized test scores for 5<sup>th</sup> grade Reading Proficiency,  $F(4, 110) = 18.753, p < .0005$ . One of the four variables—FRL—added statistically significantly to the prediction,  $p < .05$ .

**Math.**  $R^2$  for the overall model was 27% with an adjusted  $R^2$  of 24.4%, a small to medium effect size (Cohen, 1988). FRL and superintendent-based variables statistically significantly predicted the standardized test scores for 5<sup>th</sup> grade Math Proficiency,  $F(4, 110) = 98.618, p < .0005$ . Again, one of the four variables—FRL—added statistically significantly to the prediction,  $p < .05$ .

**Science.**  $R^2$  for the overall model was 23.3% with an adjusted  $R^2$  of 20.5% and effect size similar to the ones noted above. FRL and superintendent-based variables statistically significantly predicted the performance of 5<sup>th</sup> grade Science Proficiency,  $F(4, 110) = 8.351, p < .0005$ . One of the four variables—FRL—added statistically significantly to the prediction,  $p < .05$ .

### Predictors of eighth grade reading, math and science proficiency

**Reading.**  $R^2$  for the overall model was 48.9% with an adjusted  $R^2$  of 47.1%, a moderate to large effect size (Cohen, 1988). FRL and superintendent-based variables statistically significantly predicted the standardized test scores for 8<sup>th</sup> grade Reading Proficiency,  $F(4, 110) = 26.332, p < .0005$ . Again, one of the four variables—FRL—added statistically significantly to the prediction,  $p < .05$ , however, years of experience as a superintendent in North Carolina was almost statistically significant,  $p = .07$ .

**Math.**  $R^2$  for the overall model was 43.8% with an adjusted  $R^2$  of 41.8%, and, much like above, a moderate to large effect size (Cohen, 1988). FRL and superintendent-based variables statistically significantly predicted the performance of 8<sup>th</sup> grade math proficiency,  $F(4,110) = 21.443, p < .0005$ . One of the four variables—FRL—added statistically significantly to the prediction,  $p < .05$ , however, years of experience as a superintendent, overall, was almost statistically significant,  $p = .09$ .

**Science.**  $R^2$  for the overall model was 44.1% with an adjusted  $R^2$  of 42.1% -- again, a moderate to large effect size (Cohen, 1988). FRL and superintendent-based variables statistically significantly predicted the performance of 8<sup>th</sup> grade science proficiency,  $F(4,110) = 21.702, p < .0005$ . One of the four variables—FRL—added statistically significantly to the prediction,  $p < .05$ , however, years of experience as a superintendent, overall, was almost statistically significant,  $p = .09$  as was years of experience as a superintendent in North Carolina.

### Discussion

The results of this study indicate how explaining variance in student achievement is

not a monolithic pursuit; the degree of variance explained by a model, as well as the statistical significance of superintendent-level predictors differs by outcome measure—in this case, by grade level and by metric. For example, a statistically significant predictor of proficiency on the 2016-17 NC Accountability and Testing results performance composite score, over and above the percentage of students' eligible for FRL, was the district superintendent's experience in North Carolina.

This was not the case for 5<sup>th</sup> grade Reading, Math or Science standardized test scores. Yet, the re-emergence of moderate to strong effect sizes, as per the coefficient of determination or explained variance in the outcome variable, was evident for 8<sup>th</sup> grade Reading, Math and Science standardized test scores. Additionally, superintendent-specific variables such as years of experience as a superintendent as well as years of experience as a superintendent in North Carolina approached statistical significance in predicting student success in 8<sup>th</sup> grade—as per standardized test scores. The only superintendent-specific variable that was reliably non-statistically significant was the amount of experience in education superintendents had prior to assuming their role as superintendent.

These findings were mirrored in another study, which found that the percentage of students eligible for FRL and the superintendents' years of experience as a superintendent in New Jersey were statistically significant predictors of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade scores on the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJ ASK) test in Language arts (Plotts & Gutmore, 2014). However, this North Carolina study contributes to extant research about superintendent longevity and student success by using multiple student achievement outcome measures from multiple grade levels.

Several implications arise.

First, this study supports that superintendents can influence student achievement and that they become more effective in doing so as they gain in-state experience. While FRL remains a significant obstacle, the superintendent's in-state experience can help offset this challenge.

These findings also suggest that policies and practices that encourage superintendent longevity may also support student achievement. Superintendents with more in-state experience are likely to have a thorough understanding of the state's curriculum and testing programs, and according to Meier & O'Toole (2001), the organizational stability and professional relationships needed to provide effective leadership.

Second, this study illustrates that the issue of whether or not superintendents affect student achievement is not an all or nothing proposition. While we concluded that superintendents do have some influence on student achievement, particularly as their in-state experience increases, there are district predictors that must be considered. Attempts to explain variation in achievement must include multiple factors, such as superintendent experience (particularly in-state experience), FRL, multiple grade levels, and various measures of achievement. Our findings

suggest that the notion that superintendents can dramatically affect achievement through heroic measures is overstated. However, our findings also suggest that they are not completely captive to district variables that are largely beyond their control.

There are some limitations to this study that suggest future work. This study used data from one state, thereby limiting the generalizability of findings. While superintendent jobs are similar across states (Kowalski, 2013), the external validity of these findings will depend upon cross-state replications. The use of one year's data, while informative, also suggests the need for replication using additional years' data.

Given the importance of superintendents' longevity in predicting students' success, beyond that which is explained by the percentage of students who qualify for FRL, exploring the leadership behaviors of experienced superintendents is also a worthwhile pursuit for future study.

As Marzano and Waters (2009) have identified broad district-level leadership actions that predict student success, understanding how experienced superintendents operationalize these actions can provide insight to other superintendents about how their behaviors and longevity can positively impact student achievement.

### **Author Biographies**

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## **Improving the Teacher Hiring Process Through the Combination of Teacher Quality and Employee Selection Research**

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### **Abstract**

School administrators must ensure that every child has access to high quality instruction, making it imperative that only the teacher candidates with the greatest probability of success are hired. Most teacher selection practices are neither valid nor reliable and do not accurately predict job performance. Teacher hiring processes and therefore, teacher quality, can be greatly improved if administrators consider the application of recent research regarding the beliefs and behaviors of teachers with high impact on student learning in conjunction with employee selection research from the fields of management and the social sciences. This article provides direction for practitioners to utilize research-based practices to improve teacher hiring processes as well as implications for future research.

### **Key Words**

teacher hiring, teacher quality, structured interview, resume screening, teacher mind frames.

In this era of accountability for student achievement, school leaders are under increasingly intense pressure to ensure that every student receives quality instruction and learns at high levels (Troutman, 2012). In many systems, the realization of this goal requires the implementation of reform initiatives and a change to the status quo.

Given the daunting nature of this responsibility and the complexity of the roles of school leaders, it is imperative that only the teachers who have the greatest probability of success are hired rather than those who will maintain the status quo or perform poorly. Even when principals are given flexibility to fire teachers, they typically opt for years of remediation rather than the hurdles presented by the release process and so the poor performance of a teacher becomes an endless burden to the school and students (Jacob, 2011).

Hiring effective teachers can be a challenging task that is made even more difficult by the fact that most administrators do not have human resources training, and they create very different hiring processes even in very similar schools. In addition, principals tend to hire teachers based on their own interpretation and perceptions of the candidate's competency, character, and chemistry (Bourke, 2012) rather than those candidates who are a close match for the vision of the school (Mertz, 2010).

Although there is a small amount of research regarding the efficacy of specific tools and products to assist with teacher hiring, there is very little literature to guide leaders through the creation and implementation an effective system that includes multiple steps designed to identify the candidates most likely to achieve success. It is possible that the impact of teachers on student learning may be greatly

increased if educational leaders consider the application of teacher quality research in conjunction with employee selection research from the fields of management and the social sciences in order to create a more effective teacher hiring process.

## **The Importance of Re-thinking Teacher Hiring**

### **Impact of teacher quality**

Research over the last thirty years has provided evidence of an undeniable relationship between the beliefs and behaviors of a teacher and the level of student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Hattie, 2009; Marzano, 2003). Of the many factors related to student achievement, receiving instruction from a high-quality teacher is among the most impactful. Teachers have from two to three times the impact of any other school factor including programming, school leader and access to technology (Marzano, 2003; Teachers Matter, 2012).

Kati Haycock (2003), Director of the Education Trust, summed up the importance of high-quality teachers in her testimony before the US House of Representatives Committee on Education and Workforce Subcommittee on 21<sup>st</sup> Century Competitiveness, "Students whose initial achievement levels are comparable have vastly different academic outcomes as a result of the sequence of teachers to which they are assigned. Differences of this magnitude, 50 percentile points, are stunning. They can represent the difference between a remedial label and placement in the accelerated or even gifted track. And the difference between entry into a selective college and a lifetime working at McDonalds."

In response to the decades of research regarding the impact of teachers on student achievement, significant efforts have been made to improve the quality of teachers who



enter the profession through changes to pre-service teaching programs and credentialing systems (Jacob, 2016). In addition, changes in curriculum alignment, evaluation and professional development have also increased the quality of existing teachers (WestEd, 2000).

Despite these important efforts, there has been significantly less attention on the development of effective systems for teacher selection in order to ensure that only the most effective individuals are offered employment as teachers in the first place. Recent research has provided insight into the beliefs and behaviors of effective teachers, but this work is not typically considered as the basis of teacher hiring, especially in districts that use a decentralized hiring process where the creation and implementation of the teacher selection system is delegated to individual school principals. Although it may seem to be common sense to shift the responsibility of hiring to school principals, this decentralization often results in rushed, information poor hiring decisions where candidates feel that they have very little meaningful interaction with school staff (Liu & Johnson, 2006).

Research has also revealed that one of the most important teacher characteristics for principals during the hiring process is fit within the current school culture (Mertz, 2010). By hiring teachers who will easily integrate into the existing culture, principals reduce the likelihood that school reform efforts and changes necessary to improve student outcomes will take hold. Hiring quality is further compromised when decisions are made out of convenience because teachers need to be hired quickly or at the last minute (Liu & Johnson, 2006; Whitworth, Jones, Deering, & Hardy, 2016).

School administrators who suspect that a typical selection system may be flawed and

who would like to implement a more effective process often find themselves without a model to build upon from their colleagues in educational settings. Hiring practices in schools have not evolved at the same rate as hiring practices in other industries and a nationwide survey conducted by the Center for American Progress revealed that teacher selection processes often singularly focus on review of application materials such as resume and transcripts rather than performance-based measures (Konoske-Graf, Partelow, & Benner, 2016).

### **Consequences of Hiring Ineffective Teachers**

Hiring a teacher who proves to be ineffective and must be dismissed or counseled out within a few years creates a monetary and emotional drain on a school and its community. Although the costs to replace a teacher vary from school to school, they are typically very high. Milanowski and Odden (2007) identified the financial costs of turnover into the categories of separation costs, replacement costs, and training costs.

The exact dollar amounts can be difficult to calculate because many of associated expenses are imbedded within department budgets; however, in 2006, the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future conducted a study of the cost of teacher turnover in a variety of school districts and found that the costs of turnover ranged anywhere from \$10,000 per teacher to \$26,500 per teacher (Barnes, Crowe, & Schaefer 2007). This financial burden creates a devastating impact on any school budget, but is especially difficult for a school in a high poverty area with significant teacher turnover.

Teacher turnover also causes emotional stress within a school for staff and academic setbacks for student. Ronfeldt, Loeb, and

Wykoff (2013) found that teacher departure causes overall declines in school morale for both teachers and students of the teachers that leave as well as the students of the teachers that stay. In addition, they reported that student achievement declined when during periods of teacher turnover. Kraft, Marinell, and Shen-Wei Yee (2016) similarly found that improvements in school leadership, academic expectations, teacher relationships, and school safety are all associated with corresponding reductions in teacher turnover.

### Creating a New Impact Through Application of Research

There is ample research from the fields of education, management, psychology and sociology that when considered together, serve as a guide to the creation of a teacher selection system that increases the likelihood of hiring effective teachers. The purpose of a hiring process is to recruit, identify and hire the candidates who will have the highest probability for success and so prior to building the selection process itself, the current body of literature on teacher effectiveness should be considered.

#### Qualities of effective teachers

**Teacher background.** The literature does not provide clear direction to educators regarding the characteristics of an effective teacher in terms of background and elements that can be gleaned from a typical resume.

Studies contradict one another and cite factors such as content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and certification as qualities that correlate with teacher effectiveness (Rice, 2003); however, the only truly predictive element of teacher success consistently supported by research is previous teaching experience (Rockoff, Jacob, Kane, & Staiger, 2011). Chingos and Peterson (2011) found that teacher effectiveness at the elementary and

middle school levels are not improved if a candidate has earned a bachelor's or masters' degree in education, regardless of the university where the degree was earned but that teachers do become more effective after a few years of teaching experience.

Teacher certification has also been studied in relation to teacher effectiveness. In response to the call for Highly Qualified Teachers within No Child Left Behind, Hanna, and Gimbert (2011) examined the effectiveness of teachers who achieved certification through traditional and alternative programs. They found that alternative pathways to teacher certification do not create teachers of lesser quality, but in fact, often successfully bring more individuals from top tier colleges than traditional certification programs.

Based on their findings, they recommended that candidates who earned their certificate through non-traditional programs not be discriminated against when hiring. It is also important to consider that a teaching certificate is not an instrument to measure quality but rather a flat credential to be earned one time and then renewed (Hanna & Gimbert, 2011). Given the lack of consensus about the background characteristics that impact teacher quality, educators need to move beyond these factors when designing teacher selection processes.

**Beliefs and behaviors.** In 2009, John Hattie published *Visible Learning* based on 15 years of research that synthesized over 50,000 studies related to K-12 student achievement. Hattie ranked 138 influences of learning according to their effect size and found that all but a few caused student growth. Hattie reported the average effect size to be .4 and thus labeled it as the "hinge point" (p.17) with practices above this threshold labeled as highly effective. Although Hattie also considered factors related

to the student, home, school and the curricula, the factors related to the teacher and teaching and learning approaches may be useful within the hiring process to identify teachers who are likely to experience success.

A large number of factors were found to increase student learning. Hattie summarized his findings by stating that the key to impact on student achievement was to make teaching and learning visible. Hattie further developed the concept of visible learning and translated the theory for practitioners in 2011 with the publication, *Visible Learning for Teachers: Maximizing Impact on Learning*, in which he described a set mind frames, or patterns of belief, that educators should either possess or develop in order to maximize their impact on student learning. The most critical factor was reported to be teachers who see learning from the perspective of the student and understand how their own beliefs and behaviors impact students (Hattie, 2011).

Alignment of a hiring process to the ten mind frames identified by Hattie & Zierer (2018) may be one possible avenue to provide administrators with a research-based framework that can be used to identify teachers with the greatest likelihood of success:

- Teachers are evaluators of student work and understand their impact.
- Teachers are change agents who feel self-efficacy regarding their work.
- Teachers see assessment as useful feedback to their work.
- Teachers engage in dialogue with students and colleagues rather than monologue.
- Teachers enjoy challenge.
- Teachers engage in positive relationships.
- Teachers focus on learning rather than teaching.

- Teachers see learning as hard work.
- Teachers collaborate to develop collective efficacy (Hattie & Zierer, 2018).

Given the lack of consensus from the research community regarding qualities of effective teachers with the exception of teaching experience, turning the focus to selecting teachers who exhibit the mind frames identified by Hattie and Zierer provides one possible next step for implementation and study.

Despite its popular appeal, the research of John Hattie is not without critics. Specifically, questions have been raised about his methodology and the validity of conclusions reached through the use of meta-analysis. In response to the wide acceptance of Hattie's work, Myburgh (2016) urged educators to look beyond both the scope of the studies and the conclusions drawn to examine the underlying assumptions and methods used to determine effect sizes. Myburgh questions the use of meta-analysis in general and concludes that it is a useful tool only for the development of hypotheses rather than rules for action.

Similarly, Bergeron & Rivard (2017), statisticians from the University of Ottawa, support the use of meta-analysis as a valid methodology, but specifically claim that Hattie's research lacks sophistication and is overly reliant on the calculation of averages and standard deviations, which resulted in average effect sizes that do not make sense. Hattie himself acknowledges the limitations of meta-analysis and has publicly recognized the problematic factors with his methods including the comparison of disparate studies that are of varying quality and were conducted under very different conditions, as well as the inclusion of studies that were designed to describe historical

conditions rather than predict the future (Snook, O'Neill, Clark, O'Neill, & Openshaw, 2009).

Although Hattie's work provides potential for direction in terms of the beliefs and behaviors of successful teachers, it should not be utilized without an understanding of the criticism in current literature and a willingness to consider its empirical validity.

### **Creating a Selection Process Aligned to Desired Teacher Beliefs and Behaviors**

Literature from management and the social sciences can provide direction for educators regarding the elements and structure of an employee selection system that will reliably identify the applicants who have the greatest likelihood of success while employed.

This research can be adapted and applied to the teacher hiring process in order to improve outcomes. Because no one tool is perfect, and the traditional interview alone is unreliable (Buckley, Norris & Wiese, 2000; Deli & Vera, 2003; Hamdani, Valcea, & Buckley, 2014; Macan, 2009) a selection system with multiple steps should be developed and utilized. Management literature provides specific direction to improve selection processes.

Moore (2017) identified three essential elements for an effective process: (1) identification of key qualifications and prior experience necessary for success, (2) a structured interview process aligned to identified skills and abilities essential for success on the job and creation of interview questions and acceptable answers in order to assess whether the candidates possess the identified attributes, and (3) addition of other predictive elements so that decisions are not based solely on paper screening and interviews.

### **Screening**

The identification of key qualifications and prior experience suggested by Moore (2017) can be accomplished through the screening process. Resume or application screening is widely used in to determine applicants to be invited to the next step in the selection process but it is often highly susceptible to bias (Derous, Pepermans, & Ryan, 2017; Derous, Ryan, & Serlie, 2015).

When a limited amount of information is present, judgment is sometimes based on the stereotypes (Derous, Ryan, & Serlie, 2015) or presumptions about the candidate's personality (Burns, Christiansen, Morris, Periard, & Coaster, 2014). Screening is ineffective when the administrators' or teachers' biases about education, type of experience, and other personal qualities influence the decision about who to interview (Smith, 2014).

As previously stated, the only consistent determinant of teacher quality found on a typical resume or application is teaching experience (Rockoff, et al. 2011) and so other factors that are not predictive of teacher success such as test scores, type of degree, grades, selectivity of the institution granting the degree, and participation in a traditional certification program should not be used as screening criteria. Additionally, it is difficult to determine the beliefs and day to day behaviors of a teacher from a paper application; therefore, teacher quality research is difficult to apply to a screening process that relies on resume review.

It would be useful for educators if a predictive screening assessment were developed and proven to be consistently valid and reliable through empirical studies, but until this type of tool exists, it is necessary to default to screening candidates for minimum job qualifications such as certification required by law, teaching experience, submission of all

required application components, and materials free from grammar, punctuation and spelling mistakes (see Table 1). Establishing and utilizing this type of criteria may reduce bias

and allows for multiple reviewers to make similar decisions about which candidates will move on to the next steps in the process.

Table 1

*Screening Considerations*

Screening Consideration	Criteria
Certification required by district or state	Candidate holds or is eligible for certification required.
Experience	Minimum years of teaching experience. Evidence of stable employment over time. Experience with special populations such as special education or English language learners
Relevant professional training	Presence of pre-service or in-service training related to instructional practices utilized in the school.
Attention to detail	Application is complete with all required components present. Application submitted in required manner.
Writing skill	Materials free from grammar, punctuation, and usage errors.

**Structured interview**

Lavashina, Hartwell, Morgeson, & Campion (2014) defined an interview as “a personally interactive process of one or more people asking questions orally to another person and evaluating the answers for the purpose of determining the qualifications of that person in order to make employment decisions” (p. 244). According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the employment interview is the most commonly used tool for the selection of employees in industries and organizations across the United

States (Crosby, 2000). The field of education is no exception and most principals rely on interviews as their primary source of information regarding a candidate (Cannata, Rubin, Goldring, Grissom, Neumerski, Drake, & Schuermann, 2017). Despite its popularity, the traditional interview is among the most unreliable elements of the selection process in any industry (Moore, 2017) and is particularly problematic in education because it offers very limited opportunity to accurately assess a teacher’s pedagogical skills (Engel, 2013).

Studies from as early as 1915 reveal that traditional interviews do not allow for accurate assessments regarding the future success of candidates (Eder, Kacmar, & Ferris, 1989) and even the very early researchers found that interviews were predictive of little more than an applicant's appearance, manners and likability (Buckley, Norris, & Wiese, 2000). Meta-analysis of 80 years of research has identified the correlation between interview performance and job performance at only .38 (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998).

This lack of validity and reliability is a result of a combination of factors including interviewer bias and the impact of first impressions, which are often the primary determinants of the successful applicant (Segrest Purkiss, Perrewe, Gillespie, Mayes & Ferris, 2006). According to Joyce (2008), some interviewer decisions are made within the first 30 seconds of meeting the candidate and these decisions are often based on appearance, confidence, eye contact, enthusiasm, knowledge of the hiring organization, ability to sell one's self, and clear communication rather than responses to questions or ability to perform well in the job.

Traditional interviews are problematic because they provide a very small sample of information from which to make generalizations (Moore, 2017) and many interviewers control the outcome by talking for the majority of the interview, asking questions that are not meaningful, and by conveying their opinions of the candidate's responses through their own verbal and non-verbal responses (Delli & Vera, 2003). When different questions are asked of different candidates, the ability to compare candidates accurately is lost and some candidates gain an unfair advantage (Moore, 2017).

The validity and reliability of the interview process can be greatly improved by

reducing bias and inconsistency through the addition of elements of structure (Moore, 2017). Although there is not consensus in the literature about a common definition of a structured interview, the main themes typically include a set of rules about the creation and delivery of a common set of questions as well as the assessment of candidates' responses (Lavashina et al., 2014).

Adding structure to an interview significantly increases the correlation of interview performance to job performance and the correlation determined through meta-analysis has been found to increase to .52 when elements of structure are added (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998). Interviews that include components such as the identical questions for each candidate and an objective rating scale also provide protection in the event of a legal challenge to a hiring decision (Structured Interviews, 2008).

Through early meta-analysis, Campion, Palmer and Campion (1997) established 18 components of structure with rational or empirical links to increased reliability or validity of interviews. Analysis of more recent literature by Lavashina et al., (2014) has reduced this list to six essential elements:

1. job analysis used to create questions;
2. identical questions asked of each candidate;
3. variety of question formats including situational questions based on past behavior;
4. individual answers rated with a predetermined scale and
5. presence of anchor answers; and
6. trained interviewers.

Combining the research on structured interviews and teacher effectiveness gives educators direction that, if utilized, may significantly improve outcomes by creating

interview questions aligned with the beliefs and the behaviors of high impact teachers.

The US Department of Personnel Management (2008) recommends the use of structured interviews to improve the hiring process and suggests the following steps be followed:

1. determine the competencies to be assessed;
2. create interview questions;
3. create a common rating scale to be utilized for all questions;
4. pilot test the questions; and
5. train and create an interview guide.

### **Determine competencies**

One option to simplify this step of the interview development process may be through the application of Hattie's teacher mind frames, which, despite criticism, are evidence based and have empirical rationale that connect them to teachers with high impact on student learning. The mind frames can be utilized as the basis for the development of interview questions that assess the belief system of a candidate.

In addition, questions can be formulated regarding the skill of candidates to operationalize the beliefs through their behavior and actions. The mind frames may be prioritized depending on what is significant to the school or utilized in their entirety with items considered of equal importance.

### **Creation of interview questions**

Once the competencies have been determined, they are utilized to formulate a set of structured interview questions. Step by step directions for question development can be found

publications including *The Structured Interview: Enhancing Staff Selection* by Pettersen & Durivage (2008) and *Structured Interviews: A Practical Guide* from the United States Office of Personnel Management.

In general, interview questions should be open ended, clear, non-threatening, concise, and directly related to previously identified job competencies (Pettersen & Durivage, 2008). Interview questions should be written as both behavioral questions that are designed to assess the actual past behavior of a candidate as well as situational questions that are designed to assess how a candidate may respond to a hypothetical situation in the future (Structured Interviews, 2008). Recent meta-analysis has shown that interviews that have both situational and behavioral questions have higher validity than those that utilize only one type of question (Lavashina et al., 2014).

As previously suggested, the ten teacher mind frames as identified by Hattie and Zierer (2018) are evidence based and are one option to consider as teacher competencies. These competencies can then be translated into the underlying beliefs that a teacher must hold to possess the competency and the behaviors and skills necessary to operationalize the belief. Once teacher beliefs and behaviors have been identified, interview questions can be drafted. See Table 2 for an example of the conversion of a mind frame into a competency, belief, behavior and interview questions. A set number of questions should be developed for each competency being measured and these questions are then utilized in the same order for every interview with very limited probing and follow up questions from the interviewer (Structured Interviews 101, 2016).

Table 2

*Example: Conversion of a Mind Frame to Structured Interview Questions*

Utilizing mind frames as the basis for structured interview questions
<b>Mind frame:</b> Teachers collaborate to develop collective efficacy
<b>Competency:</b> The teacher collaborates with colleagues by sharing student data and teaching practices
<b>Belief:</b> Collaboration is an essential element of the learning process and includes sharing individual student data
<b>Behavior:</b> The teacher shares student data aligned with a learning target and pedagogical practices
<b>Question related to belief:</b> What is the best use of your time when you collaborate with your colleagues?
<b>Question related to behavior:</b> Describe a process that you have used when you collaborate with your colleagues.

### *Rating Scales*

Another element of the structured interview is a common rating scale that is used to evaluate the candidates' responses to the questions. The rating scale should have at least three proficiency levels with labels such as unsatisfactory, proficient and exemplary and the number of levels and labels should be the same for all questions (Structured Interviews, 2008).

After the levels are established, anchor answers are created for each question at each level. Rating scales that incorporate anchor answers simplify and standardize the judgments

made about candidates' responses to interview questions by providing behavioral, descriptive or evaluative examples to define points on the scale, thus reducing bias and subjectivity (Lavashina et al., 2014).

See Table 3 for an example of anchor answers for a question developed from a mind frame. The process for scoring the interviews must also be determined. Pettersen and Durivage (2008) suggest that points be assigned to each anchor answer and then total points be added up to create a score for each competency area or the interview as a whole.



Table 3

*Example: Anchor answers corresponding to proficiency levels*

Development of anchor answers
<p><b>Question:</b> What is the best use of your time when you collaborate with your colleagues?</p> <p><b>Superior:</b> I facilitate a discussion where teachers share data, share practices, and I lead the development of plans for students who did not perform well</p> <p><b>Proficient:</b> sharing individual student data, sharing pedagogical practices, collaboratively developing plan for students who did not perform well</p> <p><b>Unsatisfactory:</b> share work sheets, materials, ideas.</p>

### Piloting and training

Questions should be piloted prior to use in interviews to ensure clear wording and that the questions elicit a variety of responses similar to the anchor answers developed for each level of proficiency (Structured Interviews, 2008). Interview questions can be piloted with existing teachers or administrators, simulating the conditions of a structured interview to the extent possible. Prior to conducting interviews, the interviewers should be trained and an interview guide should be developed.

The interview guide gives direction to those conducting the structured interview so that the process is implemented with as much consistency as possible. According to the US Department of Personnel Management (2008), the guide should include the competencies being assessed, interview questions with anchor answers at each level of proficiency, the rating scale including anchor answers and scoring instructions.

### Other predictive selection elements

The correlation of a candidate's performance during a selection process to their job

performance can be increased by adding other predictive elements in addition to paper screening and structured interviews. The best predictor of job performance is performance on that same job (Moore, 2017), which points to the possible importance of reference checking.

Unfortunately, very little research has been done on the efficacy of reference checking and the few studies that do exist examine the impact of letters of reference for higher education candidates. These studies show that reference checking by letter can be biased towards those in protected classes and that the length of the letter is sometimes a determinant of hiring (Hedricks, 2016).

Despite the lack of research on the efficacy of reference checks, established process guidelines can create consistency. According to Knight (2016), specific questions should be formulated based on concerns that arose during the interview process, the questions should be open ended and assumptions should not be made about tone or pace of responses.

Another predictive element of success on a job is performance during a probationary period. Despite the obvious benefits of a probationary period, the correlation between performance during that time period and long term job performance is still only .54, which indicates that even a trial period is not a perfect measure of long term job success because people learn, grow and change over time and jobs change over time as well (Moore, 2017).

Limited research exists to support the predictive nature of other components of teacher selection such as sample lessons, written tests, and panel interviews. Similarly, there are a number of teacher screening tools commercially available to educators but there is little research or consensus regarding their effectiveness. A meta-analysis by McDaniel, Schmidt, and Hunter (1988), found that the screening tools available at that time had correlations between .11 and .45 to job performance, but these studies were based on information from only those who were hired and no follow up was done on performance of teachers not hired.

Other commercially developed screening tools have been developed in the intervening years, but little work has been done to document their validity and reliability. Development of a screening tool that accurately predicts teacher performance or is aligned to Hattie's mind frames remains an area for future development and research.

## Conclusion

One of the most important lessons from selection research is that employee performance is very difficult to predict (Highhouse, 2008). No matter the hiring system in place, administrators will continue to occasionally hire an ineffective teacher and there will be highly impactful teachers who are not hired. Despite this fact, the probability of

hiring teachers likely to impact student achievement may be greatly increased when effective screening and interview methods that are supported by research are utilized. In addition, the use of recent research from Hattie's meta-analyses regarding the mind frames of teachers with high impact on student learning are be worthy of action research and empirical study to determine their usefulness as an evidence-based foundation for structured interview question development.

Research on the efficacy of structured interviews is not new and yet, most educators responsible for hiring teachers are either unaware or unwilling to change their hiring processes to add elements of structure. If educators seek valid interviews and legal defensibility, and increased teacher quality, structured interviews are the obvious choice and yet, they are seldom used. In their meta-analysis of literature since 1994 on structured interviews, Lavashina et al. (2014) list the possible barriers to use of structured interviews as, "concerns about applicant preferences for unstructured interviews, interviewer desire for discretion, recruiting impact of structured interviews, decreased job offer acceptance intentions, decreased interviewer compliance with structured interview protocols, and compatibility of structured interview with organizational or national culture" (p 278), although they recommend further research on the validity each of these concerns.

Many schools have a great deal of difficulty filling their open teaching positions (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003) and administrators may hesitate to make changes to a hiring process that they perceive will limit already scarce candidates. In some areas and fields, the supply of quality teachers is actually lower than the number of open positions (Rothstein, 2015).

In addition, principals who hire candidates to fill last minute vacancies may

express concern regarding the time required for a research-based selection process.

There are many implications for future research to determine the impact of combining research from the field of education on teacher quality with research from management and the social sciences on effective employee selection. The following questions should be considered for future research:

- Although the teacher mind frames as defined by Hattie and Zierer (2018) are grounded in research, can empirical data be collected to connect candidate performance in an interview with structured interview questions aligned with teacher mind-frames to job performance and student achievement?
- How can data gathered from structured interviews aligned with teacher mind-frames be utilized in other aspects of teacher development such as coaching and professional development?
- Teaching is a complex endeavor and requires different skills and competencies than other professions. Given this level of complexity and the unique nature of teaching, which of the six elements of structure have most impact on the validity and reliability of teacher interviews?
- Given current and predicted teacher shortages in critical areas, does the use of structured interviews impact a teacher's perception of a school? How to teachers respond to structured

interview processes? Does the use of structured interviews impact the desirability of a school or the acceptance rate of job offers?

- What screening tools can be developed and utilized to accurately determine the beliefs and behaviors of teacher candidates in order to make the screening process more effective than simply weeding out candidates without minimum qualifications?
- What barriers and concerns exist for principals that prevent the use of research-based hiring practices?

Despite the many questions that remain for researchers, there are immediate and practical implications for practitioners. Ensuring that every student learns at high levels is a complex task that requires skillful teachers and a change to the status quo in most schools; therefore, hiring the best possible teachers is an essential component of school reform.

One promising approach to reducing hiring bias and increasing the probability of hiring teachers with the ability to significantly increase student learning is to screen candidates for only the qualities that research has shown to be predictive of success as well as adding elements of structure to interviews. Practitioners can also engage in action-based research in their schools and districts to determine if changing the hiring process by adding research based elements increases their ability to select teachers with high impact on student growth and to meet the demand for high quality teachers in every classroom.

### **Author Biography**

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## **The Case for Balance: Socioeconomic Diversity and Its Impact on Schooling**

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### **Abstract**

This essay outlines the case for keeping schools diverse socioeconomically as an important priority in school choice and school assignment. The author uses the current climate surrounding charter schools and private vouchers to connect to other times in the history of our nation's schools when diversity was threatened, namely the civil rights era and the more current rhetoric surrounding bussing and the return to "neighborhood schools." Using data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress as well as timely research articles and amicus/policy briefs on socioeconomic diversity and the re-segregation of schools, the article hopes to arm any child advocate with the information and rationale behind balance in school assignment, framing the three principal reasons as 1) socioeconomic diversity brings strength, stability, and parent/teacher satisfaction to schools, 2) socioeconomic diversity is cost-effective, and 3) socioeconomic diversity produces greater academic gain at all income levels. The article ends with practical ways that advocates can insure balance is a priority in the school and community.

### **Key Words**

socioeconomic diversity, school assignment, re-segregation

Yes, it's *deja vu*: much like the civil rights era, then the introduction of vouchers, then the discussion of race in student assignment, now with the rise of racially-identifiable charter schools across the country (Bonner, Stancill, & Raynor, 2017; Klein, 2016; Orfield, 2014) we are again at a national crossroads on segregation.

When it comes to diversity these days, the discussion centers around socioeconomic status. In Kentucky, HB 151 threatened earlier this year to dismantle one of the country's most successfully integrated school districts proposing a neighborhood schools' bill that would have re-segregated schools virtually overnight (Arnett, 2017; Quick, 2017).

Fortunately, on this issue, thoughtful stakeholders have over fifty years of data—the most convincing being the newest—that make another case for socioeconomic balance in K-12 schools.

### **Balance Has Been a Satisfaction and a Strength**

It's hard to imagine that any twenty-first century parent would discourage a child from learning early and often how to work within difference. While many studies show that disadvantaged kids achieve more in diverse socioeconomic settings, new research clearly shows that the same goes for the middle class:

The 2015 National Assessment of Educational Progress, for example, supports the idea that all children, regardless of socioeconomic status, see academic gains along with other, harder-to-measure results as a result of integration—including increased expressive language, leadership skills, college attendance, self-confidence, and critical and creative thinking abilities (Kurlaender & Yun, 2007;

Loewenberg, 2017; Marsh, Chaney & Jones, 2012; Mickelson, 2016; NAEP, 2015; Phillips, 2014; Quick, 2017).

As social advocate Anya Kamenetz states, “more millennial parents are recognizing that it's a skill to thrive in diverse environments, and employers are looking for people who can get along with individuals from all different backgrounds” (Kamenetz, 2017; see also Mickelson, 2016; Ramohai, 2013). Siegel-Hawley (2012) adds that a global economy will rely on schools that have promoted cultural competency and soft skills such as “flexibility, innovation, and risk ... [and] diverse schools are optimal settings to do so” (p.1).

McCormick, et al. (2015) likewise study the influence of peer groups in childhood and early adolescence and conclude that student homophily—the tendency to form friendships more easily with peers who share the same characteristics—is a disposition best diversified through schooling, where the “ability to form friendships with peers different from themselves depends largely on how much within-classroom access they have to potential friends who are different from them” (p. 818).

They assert that these types of cross-friendships have also been linked to other strengths in schools and their students, including cooperative interdependence and increased attention to skill development over rote knowledge (2015; see also Barth et al., 2013; Hallinan & Teixeira, 1987; Phillips, K.W., 2014; Spivak, White, Juvonen, & Graham, 2015; Strohmeier, 2012). Wells, Fox, and Cordova-Cobo analyze many of these studies and boil the results down succinctly: “the benefits of school diversity run in all directions ... [and] diversity makes us smarter” (Wells, Fox, & Cordova-Cobo, 2016).

Furthermore, not only with the “why” but the “how” of socioeconomic diversity is working, as more school districts weight diversity in assignment algorithms. A 2010 survey in a school system nationally recognized for its socioeconomic diversity—Wake County, NC—found 94% of parents highly satisfied with their child’s school and assignment (Capitol Broadcasting Company, 2011; Wake County Public Schools, 2011).

The same holds true in Jefferson County, Missouri, where even after “marrying the value of integration to the concept of choice, 90 percent of families receive their first choice school” (Quick, 2017) in a weighted system. Shifting housing preferences in the twenty-first century give us a unique moment to embrace these efforts at socioeconomic integration, as Millennials express a strong preference to live in urban settings.

Administrators taking advantage of this preference and studying the challenges of modern gentrification have a unique opportunity to satisfy the preferences of young families who value diversity and are increasingly moving their housing to diverse neighborhoods (Wells, Fox, & Cordova-Cobo, 2016). In these ways, the link between strong diversity in the schools and a strong system in society in general has already been made nationally and remains a source of satisfaction.

### **Balance Meets the Demands of Cost of Efficiency**

Criticism of diversity cloaked in some rhetoric behind “neighborhood schools” espouses that bussing, teacher incentives in diverse schools, etc., cost more. Researchers and educators, however, now realize that socioeconomic integration is more effective *both* academically and fiscally than extra funding concentrated to high poverty schools. Magnet school systems

across the country provide an abundance of research-verified examples.

Non-magnet, more traditional school assignment models now also show gains. Lowenburg (2017) and others, for example, cites school districts in Maryland where students in high poverty neighborhoods close the achievement gap more quickly when they are randomly assigned to diverse middle class schools with no additional funding. Likewise, the Century Foundation cites more equitable access to resources without additional funding required, as all students enjoy “well-maintained facilities, highly qualified teachers, challenging courses, private and public funding” (Century Foundation, 2016; also see Ayscue, Frankenburg, & Siegel-Hawley, 2017; Jackson, 2009; Massey & Fischer, 2006).

An extensive study by Basile (2012) and another by Chiu and Khoo (2005) support these findings, concluding that integration of schools leads to more efficient and equitable access to all kinds of social and cultural capital; these researchers likewise urge that integration be early in children’s lives, where the effects have been found to be more long-lasting. Kahlenburg and Potter (2014) quantify this effect, citing studies to show that any intervention that increases socioeconomic diversity in a school by at least half would yield three to five times return on that investment.

In addition to concluding that extra funding in high poverty schools is not as effective, these researchers cite equally important economic benefits of better preparing students to work in a global society. Massey and Fischer (2006) have also noted an increase in educational expectations from staff and from students of well-integrated schools in comparison to similar segregated schools, finding academic expectations to be

significantly higher with no real-cost difference between the infrastructures.

### **Anti-Diversity Means Anti-Excellence**

Forty years of research has shown that socioeconomic diversity in schooling produces academic excellence, at both the high end and the low end of the socioeconomic spectrum (Berry & Hirsch, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Johnson, Berg, & Donaldson, 2005; National Center for Education Statistics, 2015; Rothwell, 2012). In addition, an undisputable link between high poverty and low achievement remains, and the schools that have beaten the odds are exceptions-- highly funded, small endeavors that are simply not scalable.

North Carolina Advocates for Children's Services cite more than ten studies to show that "high poverty schools have lower student achievement and more difficulty hiring and retaining quality, experienced teachers ... Students are more likely to be successful when they are in heterogeneous classes in socioeconomically diverse schools in which concentration of poverty is kept as low as possible" (Langberg & Brege, 2010, p. 3; see also Wells et. al., 2009). A 2010 meta-analysis of a large data set involving math outcomes, for example, finds that "students of all races and income levels are more likely to have higher math outcomes when they attend racially and socioeconomically diverse schools" (Loewenberg, Aug 1, 2016; see also Carnoy & Garcia, 2017; Lubienski & Lubienski, 2014; Mickelson, 2016).

This research, along with the NAEP data and other large scale studies, has been described as "consistent and unambiguous" (Loewenburg, 2016 Aug 1). Building on this history, a 2013 metaregression analysis by Mickelson, Battia, and Lambert goes further to assert that the earlier diversity happens in a student's experience, the better. They find that

"the ill effects of the negative association between racial segregation and mathematical outcomes likely compound as students move from elementary through high school" (p. 139). Kirp (2012) echoes this research, finding that "Amid the ceaseless and cacophonous debates about how to close the achievement gap, we've turned away from one tool that has been shown to work: school desegregation" (p.1). Excellent growth in mathematical outcomes across the socioeconomic spectrum, both researchers argue, is associated with diversity.

But test scores alone do not define excellence. Even more compelling cases are seen in a research-verified list of far-ranging and transformative systemic results, including:

- increased, proactive resistance to discrimination (Hurtado & Deangelo, 2012; Siegel-Hawley, 2012; Spivak, White, Juvonen, & Graham, 2015);
- a greater propensity toward completing tasks, higher levels of educational attainment, creativity, and intellectual engagement (Eaton, 2010; Ho, Gol-Guven, & Bagnato, 2012; McCormick et al., 2015; Mikelson, 2016; Phillips, 2014);
- increased student leadership opportunities (Bowman, 2013);
- lower teacher turnover and more effective teacher ratings (Ayscue, Frankenburg, & Siegel-Hawley, 2017; Jackson, 2009; Massey & Fischer, 2006);
- greater capacity for empathy, civic engagement, pluralistic orientations, and global citizenry (Bowman & Denson, 2012; Hurtado & Deangelo, 2012; McCormick et al., 2015; Phillips, 2014); and
- increased overall long-term health in school environment and into adulthood

(Ayscue, Frankenburg, & Siegel-Hawley, 2017; Bowman, 2013; Johnson, 2011; Kugler, 2002; Mickelson, 2016; Siegel-Hawley, 2012).

All of the results above are correlated with socioeconomic diversity in school assignment algorithms (Kamenetz, 2017; Loewenburg, 2016; Potter, 2017). Other “soft-skill” benefits to socioeconomic diversity are equally impressive, again across the spectrum of ability. For example, Fortune 100 companies briefed in Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin (2015) rank as “a business imperative” (Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin, p.11) the ability to work collaboratively across cultures, a common correlation to being schooled in diverse settings.

Wells, Fox, and Cordova-Cobo (2016) echo this finding: “The research legitimizes the intuition of millions of Americans who recognize that, as the nation becomes more racially and ethnically complex, our schools should reflect that diversity and tap into the benefits of these more diverse schools to better educate all our students for the twenty-first century” (p. 4).

Finally, many researchers link academic excellence and socioeconomic diversity to one of the 4 “big C’s” in twenty-first century education: increased capacity for critical thinking.

Study after study reveals that “exposure to diversity enhances critical thinking and problem-solving ability” (Wells, Fox & Cordova-Cobo, 2016) as well as to increased “student satisfaction and motivation, general knowledge, and intellectual self-confidence” (2016, p. 9; see also Gilfoyle, 2015).

It is in the area of increased capacity for critical thinking, perhaps, where the important “how” of how diversity benefits all students is best demonstrated. As Deo (2011) finds, when abstract examples are tied to concrete examples from a diverse set of circumstances and cultural norms, the engagement and open-mindedness of critical conversations between diverse students flourish.

Antonio et. al. (2008) go even further to find that proactive efforts to disrupt cognitive function and implicit or explicit biases stimulate growth: they conclude that even the mere inclusion of difference and divergence in perspective leads to growth in student critical thinking and perspective-taking outcomes (also see Cunningham & Rioux, 2014; Richeson, Trawalter, & Shelton, 2005; Wells, Fox & Cordova-Cobo, 2016).

Diversity promotes learning when classroom time spent in “robust classroom discussions ... heightened dialogue and debate ... multiple lenses ... complex, more flexible thinking ... and the wide-ranging and probing discussions that occur in diverse classrooms [that] help generate creative, high-quality solutions to problems” (Seigel-Hawley, 2012, p. 2; see also Page, 2008). Simply put, diversity forces students to challenge assumptions and imagine possibilities for divergent thinking, creating breakthrough and discovery—excellence found only through the diversity of perspectives.

### **Toward a Policy with Balance: Preparation, Presence, Principle**

Although school boards bear the weight of guaranteeing a sound education for all students through school assignment, advocacy on a micro-level in each school community can demand such soundness. Discussions about race, socioeconomic status, and equity, about

privilege and principle are understandably difficult, but they are critical.

### **Transparency and intention**

A first, essential step for all stakeholders involves transparency and intention from the bottom up. Advocates must both understand and consider the myriad demographic, educational, and political forces that impact diversity in school settings. School leaders must read and think deeply about these issues as they address concerns and decisions that face them each day, decisions that have both intended and unintended consequences on the students they lead.

A good example lies in the fact that, in recent decades, colleges and universities have had a more effective focus on promoting diversity by putting diversity criteria into their accreditation and quality ranking apparatus: if higher ed institutions are not diverse, they simply will not be highly ranked. During these same 25 years, by contrast, k-12 education has focused more on raising achievement and test scores: “this focus on student outcomes almost exclusively as the central measure of equal educational opportunity has, in the long run, led to less emphasis on the educational experiences of students ... and thus, fewer efforts to support integration efforts” (Wells, Fox, & Cordova-Cobo, 2016, p. 6).

If diversity measures were added to the algorithm that decides which schools are equitable, excellent, or both, gains that diversity has enjoyed in higher education settings could be anticipated in k-12 settings as well. If advocates for diversity subscribe to updates from organizations like The National Coalition on School Diversity, or local and state think tanks that pinpoint specific regional concerns, they will know where to go, what questions to ask, and how best to address

inequities as the need for the most current and relevant information arises.

These organizations can also tease out important issues regarding the layered complexities of defining Socioeconomic Status (SES) to determine school assignment algorithms, keeping in mind that accurate SES profiles for the twenty-first century, for example, might include variables such as free and reduced lunch percentage, parental income and educational level, percentage of single parent households, percentage of home ownership, even eligibility for specific government programs (Siegel-Hawley, Frankenburg, & Ayscue, 2017).

Each district (even adjoining districts) may have different variables—so administrators and advocates simply cannot do it on their own or rely on their own paradigms, even localized and sensitized ones. Once school administrators and advocates gather this information and make intentional decisions with it, they can share it widely: information about student assignment should be abundant, clear, and accessible in order for parents to make informed decisions, informed public comment on assignment plans, and informed votes and petitions at the local and national level.

### **Informed presence and voice**

Once this groundwork for advocacy has been laid, school administrators can join parents and child advocates at all levels to practice a next step—informed presence and voice. While school leaders and administrators exhibit many strengths to the public they serve, there can be very few more important in this century than being a consistent, informed advocate for diversity in schooling. What should be a given for one of the most diverse groups of students the United States has ever seen in its history of

public schooling is sadly not present at all in some of the national conversations we face today.

School superintendents and administrators would do well for themselves and their constituents, surely, to be known as an uncompromising presence for diversity, an unflinching advocate for all children. The foundational but fleeting principle of these stakeholders should be to conduct these conversations and policy-shaping sessions with integrity, intentionality, evidence-based decision making, and consensus-seeking.

Administrators also need to articulate early and often the central principle that advocating for all children is advocating for diversity in their school peers and experiences. If we must deal with labels, let's label "good schools" as ones that are defined by socioeconomic diversity and inclusion; from teacher ed programs to first-year teacher evaluations to principals' awards to national superintendents of the year, diversity efforts should be articulated, implemented, incentivized and celebrated.

Like-wise should parents be an uncompromising presence and voice for diversity: like-minded advocates should work together with their differing schedules and priorities to maintain visibility and activism provide an essential gatekeeping force, an army of volunteers who manage to keep issues surrounding diversity in schooling always on the table and part of the conversation affecting school policy. These voices should be heard broadly, on a range of inter-related topics.

In the twenty-first century, for example, Eaton (2010) reminds us that racial housing patterns, shifts in migration, even gentrification in urban settings are all factors in diversity

affecting schooling, so parents and citizens can seize opportunities in choices and in buying patterns and in community conversations and gatherings of all descriptions to think, speak, and act in ways that intentionally insert the value each of us place on socioeconomic diversity. Not only students in schools but also adults in the communities and workplaces should be given equal status, should be encouraged to work toward common goals, and should experience the support of intergroup relationships. We can model our commitment and our values to others and for other generations in the everyday and the particular.

### **Celebration of situated and anecdotal**

A final, crucial piece toward a practical, balanced method to promote diversity in schooling is perhaps a surprising, less obvious one, that of ownership and authentic celebration of the situated and the lived experience in schools that enjoy true diversity.

Important research has been done to suggest that the simple act of focusing on the day-to-day experiences of diverse populations in schools may be the missing link to massive academic gains: when children learn side by side and cooperatively and when those interactions are nurtured to produce "creativity, motivation, deeper learning, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills" (Wells, Fox, & Cordova-Cobo, 2016, p. 15; see also see Bowman & Denson, 2012), all students at all income levels can increase cognitive function along with dispositions of empathy, social justice, inclusion, civic engagement, and leadership in local and global contexts.

Equally in need of celebration is the growing list of intellectual benefits of diversity as backed by research; if parents and advocates celebrate these benefits as passionately as they celebrate academic gains, if they demand more



emphasis on these benefits and less emphasis on testing, for example, we can shift the conversation.

As a qualitative researcher who studies autobiography, narrative, and reflection, I still hear whispers about what is/is not research based on the situated and contextual nature of schooling.

Let me assure anyone with a great story to tell about how diversity was championed in a district, about how children were positively affected in a school that enjoys diversity, how a conversation or Socratic seminar or critical five minutes of conflict was forever shaped by the context of the diverse people in the situation: we have a data point to create.

Hard conversations or layered concepts like diversity are just that—they are hard, they

are layered, they are complex, they are contextual. When viewed in light of 50 years of research—varied, robust, and broad—AND with the realization that simple changes can have large and far-reaching returns in the lives of our students, the case for socioeconomic balance in schooling seems strong and, indeed, fairly obvious.

As obvious and right and sensible as socioeconomic balance in schooling seems, it remains equally as layered and intractable. Even with the cloud of witnesses represented here, making the case may not be easy.

Nevertheless, the goal of equipping and transforming not one, not 100, but ALL children in a district—creating education for the best as the best education for all—must be a primary yardstick.

### **Author Biography**

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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 focuses 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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2. Federal Education Policy and the Future of Public Education
3. Federal, State, and Local Governmental Relationships
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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*.



**Cover page checklist:**

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2. contributor name(s)
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5. department
6. college or university
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8. telephone and fax numbers
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11. six to eight key words that reflect the essence of the submission; and
12. 40-word biographical sketch
13. identify if the submission is to be considered original research, evidence-based practice article, commentary, or book review

**Please** do not submit with headers or footers with page numbers. Rather than use footnotes, it is preferred authors embed footnote content in the body of the article. Articles are to be submitted to the editor by e-mail as an electronic attachment in Microsoft Word, Times New Roman, 12 Font.

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- Author
- Publisher, city, state, year, # of pages, price
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- Reviewer biography
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## 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
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*AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice*

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\*R (Registration required)