

# AASA JOURNAL OF SCHOLARSHIP & PRACTICE



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## Table of Contents

<b>Board of Editors</b> .....	2
<b>Sponsorship and Appreciation</b> .....	3
<b>Editorial</b>	
Reflections on Being a Well-informed Leader in 2022 .....	4
<i>by Ken Mitchell, EdD</i>	
<b>Research Article</b>	
Leaders Are Readers: What Journals Do Public School Superintendents Read? .....	8
<i>by Matt Townsley, EdD and Benterah C. Morton, PhD</i>	
<b>Commentary</b>	
Future Ready Schools -NJ Collective Impact Success Story .....	26
<i>by James Lipuma and Cristo Leon</i>	
<b>Research Article</b>	
Politics, Polarization, and Politicization of Social Emotional Learning and School Boards .....	41
<i>by Rachel Roegman, EdD; Kevin Tan, PhD; Patrick Rice, PhD; Jenna Mahoney, MSW</i>	
<b>Mission and Scope, Copyright, Privacy, Ethics, Upcoming Themes, Author Guidelines &amp; Publication Timeline</b> .....	54
<b>AASA Resources and Events</b> .....	58

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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.

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## Reflections on Being a Well-informed Leader in 2022

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Summer 2022

The *AASA Journal of Scholarship & Practice* has striven to combine the voices of practitioners, some of whom are budding researchers, often at the end stage of their doctoral studies, with the research of seasoned institutional scholars who have established research relationships with school districts across the country.

As our team of volunteer reviewers and editors receive manuscripts, once it is determined that they meet AASA standards—we have a 17% acceptance rate—we organize the articles by themes relevant to today’s practitioners. On occasion we receive pieces with significant ideas or revelations that do not fit into the identified themes for the year. Rather than contriving a connection, we sometimes find a place for them in our summer issues, which have focused on general reflections about leadership and learning, assuming that for district leaders this is a time of respite—not reprieve—from the intensity, complexity, and chaos of the regular school year.

It is hoped that our Summer 2022 volume will spark such reflection but on the importance of staying current and becoming better-informed about best practice, and for using such evidence and knowledge to navigate a morass of politically rooted disinformation about how and how well America’s public schools are educating children.

### Professional Curiosity

When I interview candidates for our doctoral program or when I interviewed applicants for teaching or leadership positions, I posed questions related to their professional curiosity:

- What makes you curious about how to improve student learning?
- How are you pursuing your questions related to that curiosity?
- What are you reading and tell us how you stay current with your professional knowledge?
- How do you determine the credibility of the sources you read?

The answers are revealing. Too many practitioners seem to rely solely on their pre-service training and district-provided professional development. The autodidactic professional seems to be rare. And while intuition and experience are valuable, there are limitations to how well we can interpret situations without broader understanding informed by substantive and credible evidence.

The summer volume includes a study that examines the professional reading habits of 233 superintendents. The researchers break down the types of professional literature that busy superintendents in this sample have indicated they are reading. What I found most interesting is the low percentage of research-based literature cited by respondents. Only 8% referred to the *American Educational Research Journal* with most superintendents in this study relying on the normative or anecdotal literature for their professional learning.

The theme for the American Educational Research Association (AERA) annual conference in the spring of 2023, “Interrogating Consequential Education in Pursuit of Truth,” calls for an evidence-based approach to leading educational institutions. In his letter to members, President H. Richard Milner, IV, poses the following:

What is “truth” and who decides? From what evidence, if any, do people construct their positions about truth as they make decisions concerning education? Education research is too often absent, underrepresented, misinterpreted, under-nuanced, and decontextualized in broader, societal, and public conversations about educational issues in pursuit of truth. From what research and evidence do people consult when making decisions about banning and censoring books and curriculum materials? How do people interpret education research when making policy judgements about Critical Race Theory and its potential effects? From what data repositories do people engage in making a case for what history is and is not taught in schools? When education research is considered, the implications and outcomes for marginalized communities can be harmful or beneficial. In pursuit of truth, education research needs to be (a) designed to matter in public policy and practice and, concurrently, (b) interrogated to ensure equitable processes and results.

### **Truth and Untruth**

Today, how we develop and implement policy is being scrutinized in a contentious climate. Public schools had once commanded a status of exceptionalism – politically independent and locally controlled. This is changing. Throughout the nation public schools are being overtaken by an orchestrated ideological agenda in pursuit of, among other things, neo-liberal market-based reforms promoting for-profit privatization and deregulation, and strong opposition to a secular approach to curriculum and instruction. In the guise of seeking enhanced quality, these agendas threaten to weaken education by politicizing content and pedagogical approaches, including ways in which schools support the social and emotional needs of students.

If we do not lead with evidence, we lose our professional authority to defend best practice. We expose our students and staff to the political vagaries of a mob motivated by fraudulent claims about that which we have taught or not taught to accomplish their goals. If we do not lead with evidence about how well schools have performed to contrast myths designed to diminish confidence in public schools, we risk losing a foundational and common democratic institution. In 2022 we have begun to see this happening at the school board level.

The Summer 2022 volume includes a study by a team of researchers who explored how local school boards have become battlegrounds for our nation’s culture wars. In their piece, “Politics, Polarization, and Politicization of Social Emotional Learning and School Boards,” Roegman, Tan,

Rice, and Mahoney examine the pressures on school boards to respond to parents who are calling for a narrowed curriculum, one limited to traditional and non-critical content and exempt from any instructional programming designed to address student's social and emotional development.

These demands come when educators and boards are seeing evidence that the socio-emotional and mental health needs of students were exacerbated by the pandemic. The researchers in this study found, "At the same time, an equally growing number of parents and community members are asking for schools to do more to address children's mental health and support their SEL in school considering the COVID-19 pandemic. Reviewing several studies of children and adolescents at various times during the pandemic, Hamilton and Gross (2021) report that likely one-third of the nation's P-12 students "experienced negative impacts on their mental or social-emotional health during the pandemic" (p. 6).

How we succeed in handling these conflicting demands will impact students, perhaps over their lifetimes. How we stay current through our roles as active scholars will influence how well we will be positioned to interrogate what we know to best serve our communities. Even during times when authority and expertise are being challenged, leading without evidence makes our school systems vulnerable to fallacies advanced by well-sourced and well-designed political agencies.

Seeking truth and knowing it when we find it, by distinguishing it from what others try to hide from us, is the first step. Owning it and having the courage to state it then becomes our responsibility as leaders. In Orwell's, *1984*, which has been banned in some school districts, Winston, the novel's protagonist, reflects, "Being in a minority, even a minority of one, did not make you mad. There was truth and there was untruth, and if you clung to the truth even against the whole world, you were not mad" (Orwell, 1949).

Educating with evidence that is deep, current, and responsive to disinformation or misinterpretation positions school leaders to own and rely upon the truth. From there, truth should be able to stand on its own, but not unless we pursue it, again and again.

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## Leaders Are Readers: What Journals Do Public School Superintendents Read?

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### Abstract

This study involving 233 participants from ten states sought to identify the types of educational journals practicing superintendents read. The findings indicate that the majority of superintendents are reading publications provided by professional and trade organizations rather than peer-reviewed journals. Across all subgroups, *Educational Leadership*, *School Administrator*, *Education Week*, and *The American School Board Journal* were the four most frequently read periodicals. The majority of superintendents are reading publications provided by professional and trade organizations rather than peer-reviewed journals.

### Key Words

superintendents, educational leadership, educational administration, journals, faculty, magazines

One of the many roles of the K-12 school superintendent is instructional leader. In this role the consummate educator is expected to epitomize the educational slogan, *leaders are readers*.

Amid all the responsibilities of school superintendents, do they really have time to read? If so, what are they reading? In 2005, Anderson et al. posed the question, “How can busy school administrators stay abreast of issues in their field?” (p. 1). Their inquiry acknowledged the complex schedules of practicing school leaders and the impact those schedules have on individual professional development.

Since that time the roles of school administrators has become more complex, further complicating the time they have to engage in purposeful development activities (Walker et al., 2021) including keeping up with and reading what is being published in professional and peer-reviewed journals.

While there is a wealth of research seeking to explore aspects of the role of scholarly research in the lives of school leaders (Anderson et al., 2005; Borgemenke & Brown, 2013; Wang & Bowers, 2016), very limited studies focus on the most senior educator in the district, the superintendent.

Therefore, additional research is needed to understand the publications practicing school leaders are reading. Exploring this topic informs the field of educational leadership in several ways. First, it informs leadership preparation programs by suggesting reading sources to utilize in coursework (see Borgemenke & Brown, 2013; Mayo et al. 2006). Further, it guides educational leadership scholars in identifying which journals reach large populations of

practitioners (see Wang & Bowers, 2016; Richardson & McLeod, 2009).

This research builds upon current scholarship to fill the gap in the literature exploring the role scholarly research plays in the life of K-12 superintendents. Specifically, the purpose of this descriptive study was to understand the professional publications practicing public school superintendents read, and to understand how these publications align with where educational leadership faculty tend to publish their studies.

## Literature Review

Several studies since Anderson et al. (2005) have sought to understand the role scholarly research plays in the professional lives of educational leadership personnel. While many of the studies focused on the professorial side of educational leadership (Borgemenke & Brown, 2013; Mayo et al., 2006; Oplatka, 2009; Richardson & McLeod, 2009), others explored aspects of journals published for educational leaders (Aypay et al., 2010; Cherkowski et al., 2012; Moore & Stewart, 2015; Wang & Bowers, 2016); however, very few focused on the K-12 side of the educational leadership spectrum (Anderson et al., 2005; Penuel et al., 2018; Zirkel, 2007).

The void in current literature focusing on what educational leadership scholarship school superintendents are reading can be seen as a disconnect between educational leadership scholars and educational leadership practitioners. Bridging the gap between these two entities of educational leadership has the potential to positively impact the educational outcomes across diverse aspects of education.

This study was informed by scholarship exploring aspects of scholarly research in relation to the field of educational leadership.

To make sense of this scholarship, key aspects will be presented across two categories: educational leadership professoriate, and educational leadership practitioners.

### **Educational leadership professoriate**

Journal articles in the educational leadership professoriate category explore connections between scholarship and those that produce it, educational leadership researchers.

Borgemenke and Brown (2013) examined whose research was being cited by educational leadership scholarship producers. In doing so, they examined nearly 300 articles published between 2006 and 2010 in the *International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation (IJELP)*. The findings identified 10 authors (1 organization, 9 individuals) cited most frequently over a 5-year period.

Of the nine individuals cited as educational leadership experts in this study, only two (2) were reported to have school administration experience. Borgemenke and Brown (2013) concluded that there is a knowledge base in the field of education leadership being accessed by ‘users’ through *IJELP*. The authors did not specify the professional roles of the ‘users.’ However, they did note the importance of being aware of the width of a journal’s distribution and readership.

Mayo et al., (2006) explored which journals educational leadership professors were reading. The findings reported seven top-ranked educational leadership periodicals (*Educational Administration Quarterly [EAQ]*, *American Educational Research Journal [AERJ]*, *Educational Leadership*, *Phi Delta Kappan (PDK)*, *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis [EEPA]*, *Journal of School Leadership [JSL]*, & *Educational Researcher*). In a later study Richardson & McLeod (2009)

examined *EAQ* and *JSL* to identify which journals were cited in the articles published within these two respective journals from 2000 to 2007. Their study found that researchers publishing in *EAQ* and *JSL* referenced journals inconsistent with those reportedly read by educational leadership professors. Both studies (Mayo et al., 2006; Richardson & McLeod, 2009) identified scholarly journals and practitioner journals in the top-ranked journals read by educational leadership professors.

Some of the scholarship examining educational leadership professors focused more on aspects of the journals in which they were published instead of the scholars themselves (Aypay et al., 2010; Cherkowski et al., 2012; Moore & Stewart, 2015; Wang & Bowers, 2016). Of these Wang & Bowers (2016) is most notable to this study. As Wang and Bowers (2016) mapped educational administration research, a sub-field of the discipline of education, they found that the field interacts readily with other sub-fields of education, other disciplines, and research internationally. Further, their citation network analysis illuminated ways in which knowledge of the field is exchanged and disseminated.

A key takeaway from the above cited studies is that knowledge across the field of educational leadership is frequently created through publication in journals (Borgemenke & Brown, 2013; Wang & Bowers, 2016). Therefore, the dissemination of this knowledge (i.e., journal distribution and readership) are vital to building capacity and expanding the field (Borgemenke & Brown, 2013; Wang & Bowers, 2016). For this reason, we question what educational leaders read to inform their practice.

### **Educational leadership practitioners**

There are very few published studies exploring what educational leadership practitioners read

to inform their practice (Anderson et al., 2005; Penuel et al. 2018; Zirkel, 2007). Anderson et al. (2005), the impetus for this article, described the journals that educational leaders read. The study, over fifteen years ago, considered the journals award-winning school leaders and educational leadership professors read. The study surveyed 60 participants from the following two groups: (1) K-12 principals of Blue Ribbons Schools for the 2001-2002 school year and (2) chairs of university educational administration departments.

The results of the study identified *Educational Leadership* (93% of the respondents), *NASSP Bulletin* (67% of the respondents), *American Educational Research Journal* (60% of the respondents), *School Administrator* (60% of the respondents), and *The American School Board Journal* (42% of the respondents) as the top five journals cited by respondents. Anderson et al. (2005) surveyed a mix of practicing K-12 principals and education faculty; therefore, it is not surprising that a mix of practitioner and peer-reviewed publications were most widely read. This survey did not distinguish between the publications practitioners and academics read and was limited to a specific group of K-12 principals.

Zirkel (2007) took a different approach than Anderson et al., (2005) and highlights potential disconnects between educational leadership researchers and educational leadership practitioners. In doing so, Zirkel compares which periodicals are read by the two groups and further, how they are rated for quality. The findings note that the two groups, scholars and practitioners, do not read the same periodicals, which further suggests these choices may be associated with affiliation to specific professional organizations (see also Mayo et al., 2006).

Penuel et al., (2018) did not make comparisons between scholars and practitioners. Instead, their research explored K-12 district leaders' use of research, what they found useful and which task they reported using research to complete. Their findings note that district leaders tend to seek out and utilize “scholarship that is largely conceptual or prescriptive, written by those both in and outside of the academy, published in books, and covering a wide range of topics” (Penuel et al., 2018, 549). While the result of this research is helpful, it does not directly address the specific role of district superintendent. Similarly, Anderson et al.’s (2005) investigation did not specifically involve public school superintendents; however, it serves as the best identified source of comparison for this study.

Exploring extant research since 2005 examining the roles of scholarship in the lives of school leaders it has become apparent that little is known about similar relationships and the consummate educator in the school district.

The question remains, are district level leaders really readers? While it is easy to assume that school superintendents do read scholarly works to influence their decision making, it is not clear if their influences are rooted in peer-reviewed articles or practitioner- based articles. This study seeks to respond to these general questions by asking superintendents directly what they read.

The research questions were:

1. What are the types of publications practicing public school superintendents read?
2. How do the publications practicing public school superintendents read compare with the literature describing the field of educational leadership?

Exploring these questions provides a glimpse into the impact scholarly journals have on district superintendents as the top decision maker for all things education.

## Methods

The population of this study consists of all superintendents in the contiguous 48 United States of America. In order to obtain a representative sample of superintendents, the states were divided into five regions: Pacific, Rocky Mountain, Southwest, Midwest, Southeast, and Northeast.

Two states were selected from each region: California and Washington (Pacific); Montana and Nevada (Rocky Mountain); Oklahoma and Texas (Southwest); Iowa and Minnesota (Midwest); Arkansas and North Carolina (Southeast); and New Jersey and Rhode Island (Northeast). All public school superintendents in these states were sent a survey to understand the professional publications they read, based upon a list of 29 possible journals.

## Survey

For this exploratory descriptive study, the researchers developed a twelve question survey which asked participants to share demographic information including highest degree obtained, year of earning their highest degree, year earning their leadership credential, years as a K-12 administrator, years in current role, gender, and race. In addition, participants were asked to indicate up to five journals in the area of educational

administration/leadership that they most frequently read. In order to cast the widest possible net, the researchers first included all journals listed more than once from within several different sources.

First, we looked at the top 25 journals cited in each of *EAQ* and *JSL* from 2000 to 2007 as noted in Richardson & McLeod (2009) in order to ensure we considered the journals most widely cited by educational leadership faculty. Next, in order to ensure our list was up to date, we consulted the top 20 educational administration journals according to Google Scholar on February 2, 2020.

Finally, we consulted the only available known report of journals practicing school leaders read (Anderson et al. 2005). In addition to journals listed more than once within Richardson and McLeod (2009) two lists and Google Scholar's list, we included any journal that was solely listed in the Anderson et al. (2005) survey for comparison purposes. The only journal we did not include from the Anderson et al. (2005) list was *School Foodservice and Nutrition*, because it no longer appears to be published.

Table 1 provides a list of the 29 journals included in the survey. In addition to selecting from the provided list, participants were also able to write in the name(s) of up to three journal(s) for choices not listed. To answer this study's research questions, only the questions regarding highest degree obtained, gender, race, and journals read were used in the data analysis.

**Table 1***List of Educational Leadership Journals Included in Survey*

Journals	Cited in
Administrative Science Quarterly	EAQ, JSL
American Educational Research Journal (AERJ)	EAQ, JSL, Anderson
American School Board Journal (ASBJ)	JSL, Anderson
Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning	Anderson
Education and Urban Society	EAQ, JSL, ELJ
Education Week	EAQ, JSL
Educational Administration Quarterly (EAQ)	EAQ, JSL, ELJ
Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis	EAQ, JSL
Educational Leadership	EAQ, JSL, ELJ, Anderson
Educational Policy	EAQ, ELJ
Educational Researcher	EAQ, JSL
Elementary School Journal	EAQ, JSL
Harvard Educational Review (HER)	EAQ, JSL, Anderson
International Journal of Leadership in Education	JSL, ELJ
Journal of Applied Psychology	EAQ, JSL
Journal of Educational Administration (JEA)	EAQ, JSL, ELJ
Journal of Personnel Evaluation in Education	EAQ, JSL
Journal of School Leadership (JSL)	EAQ, JSL, ELJ
NASSP Bulletin	JSL, Anderson
National Forum of Educational Administration and Supervision	Anderson
Phi Delta Kappan (PDK)	EAQ, JSL, ELJ
Review of Educational Research	EAQ, JSL
School Administrator (AASA)	JSL, Anderson
School Effectiveness and School Improvement	EAQ, JSL, ELJ
Teachers College Record	EAQ, JSL
Techniques: Connecting Education and Careers	Anderson
The Learning Professional (Formerly: Journal of Staff Development)	Anderson
Trusteeship	Anderson
Urban Education	EAQ, JSL

*Note.* EAQ = journals cited within EAQ as noted in Richardson & McLeod (2009), JSL = journals cited with JSL as noted in Richardson & McLeod (2009), ELJ = journals within top 20 educational leadership journals according to Google Scholar on February 2, 2020, Anderson = journals noted in Anderson et al. (2005).

### Data collection and analysis

The research team obtained a total of 4882 superintendent email addresses from the respective state department of education web sites. Superintendents in these ten states were sent an institutional research board approved query inviting them to participate in the study.

A reminder e-mail was sent to all participants at two week and four week increments throughout February, March and April 2021. Of these email addresses, 82 of them were duplicates and 167 of them were no

valid longer valid leaving 4633 potential superintendent participants.

A total of 253 participants started the survey; however, upon review, 233 surveys (5.0% usable response rate) were fully completed following the data collection period. Given the context of this investigation, one limitation may be that those that do not regularly read journals at all are underrepresented in this data set. Table 2 describes the gender and highest degree obtained of the participants.

**Table 2**

*Gender and Highest Degree Obtained of Superintendents*

Degree	Female	Male	Total
Masters	12	52	64
Specialist	9	55	64
Doctorate	41	64	105
Total	62	171	233

Because some participants wrote in the names of journals that were actually noted in the list, the research team re-tabulated and

verified the results after exporting them from the electronic survey platform.

## Results

The 233 superintendents participating in this investigation read a total of 66 unique journals. The number of occurrences for any particular journal ranged from 0 to 173.

Table 3 presents the distribution of the top 10 journals in descending order, starting with the journals most often read by all superintendents.

Tables 4, 5, 6, and 7 present the distribution of the top 10 journals read by male superintendents, female superintendents,

superintendents with a doctorate degree, and superintendents with a masters or specialist degree, respectively.

In each of these tables, the percentages add up to more than 100%, because participants could select *up to* five journals. *Educational Leadership*, *School Administrator*, *Education Week*, and *ASBJ* were read most often, although in different order depending upon the subgroup. *NASSP Bulletin* was the fifth most frequently read publication overall and among each of the different demographics.

**Table 3***Journals Read by All Superintendents (n=233)*

Journal	Number (Percentage) of Participants Reading Each Journal
Educational Leadership	173 (74.3%)
School Administrator	150 (64.4%)
Education Week	120 (51.5%)
ASBJ	66 (28.3%)
NASSP Bulletin	48 (20.6%)
HER	23 (9.9%)
JEA	23 (9.9%)
PDK	20 (8.6%)
AERJ	19 (8.2%)
District Administration	12 (5.2%)
The Learning Professional (Formerly: Journal of Staff Development)	11 (4.7%)
Other journals combined (n=55)	93 (39.9%)
I do not frequently read educational leadership journals	35 (15.0%)

**Table 4***Journals Read by Male Superintendents (n=171)*

Journal	Number (Percentage) of Participants Reading Each Journal
Educational Leadership	121 (70.8%)
School Administrator	112 (65.5%)
Education Week	81 (47.4%)
ASBJ	51 (29.8%)
NASSP Bulletin	38 (22.2%)
JEA	17 (9.9%)
HER	13 (7.6%)
PDK	13 (7.6%)
AERJ	11 (6.4%)
District Administration	8 (4.7%)
JSL	5 (2.9%)
Other journals combined (n=44)	60 (35.1%)
I do not frequently read educational leadership journals	30 (17.5%)

**Table 5***Journals Read by Female Superintendents (n=62)*

Journal	Number (Percentage) of Participants Reading Each Journal
Educational Leadership	51 (82.2%)
Education Week	39 (62.9%)
School Administrator	38 (61.3%)
ASBJ	15 (24.2%)
NASSP Bulletin	10 (16.1%)
HER	9 (14.5%)
AERJ	7 (11.3%)
The Learning Professional (Formerly: Journal of Staff Development)	7 (11.3%)
EAQ	6 (9.7%)
JEA	6 (9.7%)
PDK	6 (9.7%)
Other journals combined (n=23)	29 (46.8%)
I do not frequently read educational leadership journals	5 (8.1%)

**Table 6***Journals Read by Superintendents with a Doctorate Degree (n=105)*

Journal	Number (Percentage) of Participants Reading Each Journal
Educational Leadership	84 (80%)
School Administrator	70 (66.7%)
Education Week	64 (60.1%)
ASBJ	33 (31.4%)
NASSP Bulletin	19 (18.1%)
HER	15 (17.1%)
JEA	15 (14.3%)
AERJ	12 (11.4%)
PDK	12 (11.4%)
JEA	6 (5.7%)
PDK	6 (5.7%)
Other journals combined (n=29)	45 (42.9%)
I do not frequently read educational leadership journals	8 (7.6%)

**Table 7***Journals Read by Superintendents with Masters or Specialist Degree (n=128)*

Journal	Number (Percentage) of Participants Reading Each Journal
Educational Leadership	89 (69.5%)
School Administrator	80 (62.5%)
Education Week	56 (43.8%)
ASBJ	33 (25.8%)
NASSP Bulletin	29 (22.7%)
District Administration	9 (7.0%)
HER	8 (6.3%)
JEA	8 (6.3%)
PDK	8 (6.3%)
AERJ	7 (5.5%)
School Effectiveness and School Improvement	3 (2.3%)
The Learning Professional (Formerly: Journal of Staff Development)	3 (2.3%)
School CEO	3 (2.3%)
Other journals combined (n=32)	36 (28.15)
I do not frequently read educational leadership journals	15 (11.7%)

## Discussion

*Educational Leadership*, *School Administrator*, and *Education Week*, and *The American School Board Journal* were the top four publications read by all superintendents, male superintendents, female superintendents, superintendents with a doctoral degree, and superintendents with a masters or specialist degree; however, the order varied slightly among the groups.

While all demographics of superintendents in this study indicated they most often read *Educational Leadership*, one more female superintendent said she read *Education Week* when compared to *School Administrator*.

All four of these publications are editorial reviewed and except for *Education Week*, affiliated with a professional organization that superintendents may choose to join. *Educational Leadership* is a monthly member benefit of ASCD, *School Administrator* is a monthly member benefit of AASA, and *The American School Board Journal* is bi-monthly member benefit of the National School Board Association.

In addition, there were no notable differences in the top five publications read by superintendents with a doctorate degree when compared to those with a masters or specialist degree.

As Fusarelli (2008) noted, educational leaders are “are often so busy engaging in crisis management, administrivia, and the daily operations of schooling that they have little time to devote to thoughtful, reflective, research-based strategic planning and improvement” (p. 367) that these practitioner-oriented and professional organization endorsed publications may be viewed as the

most accessible for busy superintendents. This theme may also be supported by the 15% of superintendents who said they do not frequently read educational leadership journals.

The literature provides several potential reasons for this phenomenon including but not limited to a lack of accessibility due to busy schedules (Anderson et al, 2005; Penuel et al., 2018; Walker et al., 2021), focusing on journals published by disciplines that intimately interact with educational leadership (i.e., urban education, teacher education, content specific disciplines, international foci, etc.) (Mayo et al., 2006; Wang & Bowers, 2016), and the usefulness of book-bound research that provides frameworks and practical applications (Penuel et al., 2018) to be applied in real-time.

The impetus for our study was to expand upon the Anderson et al. (2005) report conducted over fifteen years ago. When comparing this list from 2005 with the results of the current study, *Educational Leadership* remains as the most frequently read publication.

In addition, superintendents prefer to read *School Administrator*, *NASSP Bulletin*, and *The American School Board Journal*, which were frequently read by the participants in Anderson et. al (2005). *AERJ* was not as frequently mentioned in the current study, perhaps because the participants in Anderson et al. (2005) included educational leadership faculty who may be more likely to read peer-reviewed journals. Yet, *NASSP Bulletin*, a peer-reviewed journal aimed at informing practice and decisions of middle and high school administrators was read with relative frequency across both studies.

*Education Week*, while read by approximately half of the superintendents in the current study, was not on the list of twelve journals provided to participants in Anderson et al. (2005). Based upon this comparison, practicing school superintendents continue to read practitioner-oriented journals (i.e. *Educational Leadership*, *School Administrator*, and *The American School Board Journal*) and the peer-reviewed *NASSP Bulletin*. Further, the results from this study align with the assertions from Penuel et al. (2018) that school leaders tend to read publications that are largely conceptual or prescriptive.

The knowledge base of the educational leadership field is growing. Richardson and McLeod (2009) provided a list of journals educational leadership professors should publish in, in order to get noticed by the top journals in the discipline, yet when comparing the results of the current study, educational leadership professors cite peer-reviewed journals such as *EAQ* and *JSL* the most.

*NASSP Bulletin*, *School Administrator*, and *Educational Leadership* also made the top 25 list of publications cited by educational leadership professors; however, they were cited less than 20% as often as the top peer-reviewed journals. This disparity suggests a disconnect between the journals prominent educational leadership faculty are publishing their scholarship and the journals practicing public school superintendents are reading. Confirming an assertion made by Zirkel (2007), the results of our study suggest that educational leadership professors and superintendents may not be reading, or at least in the case of professors, citing, the same periodicals.

The results of this study have implications for superintendents and educational leadership professors who wish to

influence practicing district leaders and expand the knowledge base of the field. Due to access and time constraints, public school superintendents may benefit from subscribing to services such as *The Marshall Memo* (Marshall, 2021), designed to provide a practitioner-friendly, weekly summary of important ideas and research articles in K-12 education. Schneider (2014) notes that research by education faculty often fails to penetrate the world of classroom practice, potentially due to educators' capacity to engage with educational scholarship.

The results of the current study also suggest that educational leadership professors may benefit from disseminating new ideas in publications such as *Educational Leadership* and *School Administrator* to accelerate their readership among public school superintendents. Future research should seek to understand the reasons why practicing public school superintendents choose to read these publications and how to overcome barriers for those who indicated they do not frequently read educational leadership journals.

## Conclusion

Public school superintendents participating in this study most frequently read *Educational Leadership*, *School Administrator*, *Education Week*, and *The American School Board Journal*. It was found that the majority of superintendents are reading publications provided by professional and trade organizations rather than peer-reviewed journals.

Therefore, public school superintendents are obtaining their knowledge from primarily editor-reviewed, practitioner-oriented reviewed sources. While this may not be surprising to district leaders, this study gives some guidance to educational researchers as they select a potential outlet for their

writing. If the primary goal of educational scholarship is to influence practice, to grow the knowledge in the field of educational leadership, and bridge the gap between

scholars and practitioners, then publications should be prioritized where practitioners indicate they are most frequently reading.

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## Future Ready Schools—NJ Collective Impact Success Story

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### Abstract

This paper comments on the development of Future Ready Schools—New Jersey a state-sponsored, voluntary, school-level program and its shift to digital schools. Through collective impact and the NSF collaboration framework, the program engaged hundreds of educational stakeholders, to develop a comprehensive system around educational technology and future readiness towards personalized learning for all students in the state. James Lipuma as principal investigator of this program utilized Interdisciplinary Participatory Strategic Planning to build the network and community of practice necessary to create the elements of the certification program. This paper presents the resulting certification program indicator rubrics built upon the National Future Ready Framework. The resulting system includes commitments from “district and school” leaders, collaborative teams charged with gathering and assessing evidence, and peer-reviewed by experts in three themes: Leadership, Education/Classroom Practice, and Technology Support and Services. The indicators are both best practices and rubrics for self-assessment and planning by superintendents, technology coordinators, and educators. The common elements identified across all this work were a clear shared vision with details in planning documents, a collection of indicators that outlined the goals and metrics, as well as a commitment to working collaboratively to ensure that the voice of stakeholders was heard as the work moved forward. Finally, the article presents the move to digital schools in the state of New Jersey and a commentary on the key outcomes that can allow any school administrator to benefit from the materials produced.

### Key Words

future readiness, digital schools, collaboration, interdisciplinary, strategic planning, educational technology, educational leadership

## Introduction

The state of New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE, 2020) identified the need to improve the application of educational technology to prepare for the future of education. This included technology infrastructure, educational training, and support for the effective use of technology in all aspects of K-12 education in the state. In response to “The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC)” (NJDOE, 2014).

In preparation for the PARCC exams, the NJDOE increased access to the internet and devices in schools as part of the preparation for testing as well as training related to the emerging use of technology-mediated instruction that was growing in all aspects of educational practices.

As a home-rule state, New Jersey has 584 operating districts not including charter/renaissance schools (2018-2019) according to the “New Jersey Public Schools Fact Sheet” (NJDOE, 2021) serving nearly 1.5 million students in grades Pre-K to 12. Rather than mandate changes or provide professional development on specific areas as a means to assist “adoption of practice,” NJDOE identified the national Future Ready Schools Framework (AEE, 2021) as a starting point to create a comprehensive picture.

Future Ready Schools is a result of “ConnectED” (The White House, 2013) announced by President Barack Obama in 2013. The program was designed to enrich K-12 education for every student in America by empowering teachers with the best digital technology, and the training to make the most of technological resources through

individualized learning and “rich, digital content” (Maskevich, 2017).

The NJDOE sought to create a voluntary certification program that was based on the national Future-ready framework. This certification program was modeled after the successful Sustainable-Jersey for Schools (SJS) programs (SJS, 2021). The goal was to assist schools to “recognize best practices” (Maskevich, 2017) and pockets of excellence that can be expanded and shared to allow the entire school to be moving in the same positive direction.

The NJDOE formed a partnership with the New Jersey School Boards Associations (NJSBA) and New Jersey Institute of Technology (NJIT) and provided the initial seed funding for the development and piloting of FRS-NJ with additional funding from “Juniper Foundation” (Juniper, 2021).

This paper will begin with a background to the Future Ready Schools New Jersey program (FRS-NJ) along with the pilot that is the subject of the commentary. Next, the paper describes the themes and indicators of digital schools that were produced by the interdisciplinary working groups.

Then it explains the benefits of that work for school administrators with an extended discussion of stakeholder engagement in the co-design of the indicators for digital learning. Finally, the article presents the move to digital schools in the state of New Jersey and a commentary on the key outcomes.

## Background

The author, James Lipuma, was given the grant to organize and build the FRS-NJ program and

coordinate the team of partners involved in the process. The work needed to recruit and build a community of practice to attain the goal of the school-level program. The members of the community of educational professionals led by district superintendents would be the ones to identify and clarify the elements of future readiness appropriate for the state in conjunction with the many stakeholders engaged with school systems including students, parents, teachers, media specialists, IT supervisors, school and district administrators, government officials, and corporate and private foundation representative.

As the organizer, NJIT served as the backbone organization in the collective impact efforts making Lipuma's team responsible for the management of the stakeholders and administrators and other governmental representatives recruited to complete the work. New Jersey groups including the Association of School Administrators (NJASA), Education Association (NJEA), Principal and Supervisors Association (NJPSA), Parent Teacher Association (NJPTA), Association of School Business Officials (NJASBO) and Association of School Librarians (NJASL) joined the coalition of educational organizations led by the NJDOE and NJSBA.

The design and development work led to an initial rollout in 2017. This was followed by 3-years of pilot testing and refinement by the over 500 stakeholders as part of the committees led by school administrators and other educational professionals. At this same time, the national FRs program was developing additional tools and materials for school leers to be used across America. The work in NJ promoted the development of a more robust national district leader program.

“FRS District Leaders also collaborate with the community they serve and maintain a laser-like focus on long-term financial, pedagogical, and political sustainability. Ultimately, FRS District Leaders systematically plan and work to enact policies that ensure instructional practices maximize student learning outcomes” (FRS, 2021).

By the end of the 3-year pilot program, FRS-NJ had been shown to be an effective program that had wide interest. Nearly 500 schools in 150 districts had participated in some way in the programs with over 400 earning some type of certification at the varying levels. At that time, NJ faced the shift to online schooling that accompanied the spread of the coronavirus. Since the pilot had been completed, a more permanent structure was needed that did not overlap with the national framework or infringe on their intellectual property. To that end, the indicators developed by FRS-NJ were adapted to work with the existing SJS program.

“A transition committee led by school superintendents and educators experienced in both FRS-NJ and Sustainable Jersey helped create 12 new Sustainable Jersey Digital Schools actions ... To assist schools familiar with the FRS-NJ indicators, a crosswalk between the new actions and the former FRS-NJ Indicators is available” (Sustainable Jersey, 2021).

This transition allowed the program to continue to be funded under the auspices of the sustainable Jersey program. SJS was originally established by a grant from the NJSBA as a municipal program and worked with the same

groups as FRS-NJ. In this way, the work of the program could continue and even reach more people with their actions. Moreover, this transition served as a case for other districts who may want to use the core principles of future readiness but adjust and integrate them into local or regional programs that already exist.

### **FRS-NJ Pilot Project**

Lipuma was funded to manage the design and development pilot for the FRS-NJ project. The major obstacle was to transform the diverse collection of nearly 200 indicators that existed in the national framework into ones that made sense at the school level in NJ. The national FRS framework was built upon research-based best practices and provided a collection of areas for superintendents to consider when planning with their executive teams. The framework aimed to help districts prepare for personalized student learning through areas of study termed gears. The NJDOE sought to attain technology readiness in all school districts by providing them with the necessary materials and support tailored to their local needs.

By reviewing materials and surveying educators regarding their opinions related to digital readiness, Lipuma worked with the partners on the leadership team to create a clear vision and mission that could lead to a practical system for the NJ program. The program would promote all public education to be ready for the future needs of schools concerning technology and online-personalized learning. It was based on three simple questions as the impetus for schools to understand their own culture and community as well as engage their stakeholders at all levels:

1. Where are we now?
2. Where do we want to go?

3. How can we plan a path and gather the needed resources (material, human, social, political, etc.) to get there?

An existing high-level framework and a set of guiding questions would not be enough to produce a pilot and recruit superintendents, mayors, educators, and other stakeholders to buy into it. Recruiting influencers to participate would allow us to invite the vital stakeholders to the table and convince them to engage in the collaborative process to co-design the system.

This participation was vital since each community would need to invest the time and effort to conduct the self-study, prepare the evidence and be open to the reviews based on the indicators our committees developed. By gathering the support of all the educational associations and having a clear plan led by NJIT who was not pushing any agenda, the group came together to do the work of collaboratively designing the program and improving and optimizing it over time.

### **The FRS-NJ program**

The program developed three phases for engagement: district commitment, school commitment, and school certification. A key aspect of the success of the program was tied to the different levels of collaboration the program sought to foster within the school and district. This is described by the three phases and serves as a good example of steps that can be used for any school engagement initiative. These simple commitments led to a stronger sense of community and a clearer understanding of different parts of the process for all involved.

Moreover, by connecting various levels of the school's stakeholders and clarifying plans and processes, everyone reported a stronger commitment and sense of purpose as

well as satisfaction with the results of the process. Those schools that simply assigned the process to a single person to fill out did not attain certification.

The District Commitment Phase ensures that school districts are dedicated to supporting their school's efforts and that these efforts are collaborative. Once a district is committed, schools in the district can declare their participation and apply for certification.

The district's Future Ready team should be inclusive and collaborative, and consist of members including at least one board member, the superintendent, the technology director or other IT personnel, a librarian/media specialist, a student representative, and other dedicated leaders and educators.

The district then conducts a self-assessment to establish an understanding of where they stand concerning the Future Ready Framework and submits a pre-application to FRS-NJ to declare their commitment. District commitment can be declared at any time on a rolling basis.

The School Participation Phase features the establishment of the school-level Future Ready team and the official declaration of a school's participation in the certification program. The *School Certification* Phase enables individual schools to apply for certification by taking actions that lead to success through the Future Ready Schools - New Jersey Indicators of Future Readiness

(AEE, 2021). Each indicator is designed by a task force of NJ educators, leaders, and stakeholders to provide a framework for schools' efforts to best prepare their students for success in college, career, and citizenship, connects educators with potential resources to do so, and provides the recognition due for success through certification.

There were two unexpected and significant results for the pilot program related to the description of the phases. The first was related to the level of involvement and sharing that came out of the teams. This was even more evident as districts reported the increased effectiveness and appreciation by educators related to shared planning time and greater collaboration and cooperation tied to the process.

Another significant finding related to the higher level of involvement in community activities by stakeholders as a result of the inclusion of more voices in the process. Improved communication and open discussions were reported by many of the teams as part of other processes.

After three years of the piloting of the system, the participation grew to encompass a significant number of districts and schools across the state. In addition, other aligned sets of indicators were created by affiliate groups like the Media specialists, Pre-service teacher preparation, and educational technology professionals. Figure 1 below shows the numbers of relevant participation for the three years of the pilot program.

**Figure 1***Numbers of Relevant Participation Per Year*

Year	Committed Districts	Participating Schools	Volunteers
2017	32	68	100
2018	94	265	250
2019	137	443	500

**Themes and Indicators**

To help organize the work of the task forces and group similar items together, the program created three areas called themes.

The Leadership theme embodied those aspects that involved planning, budgeting, and oversight. The development was led and informed by superintendents, board of education members, members of the state leadership organizations, and other stakeholders.

The Education and Classroom Practice theme embodied items related to teacher professional development, student instruction, use of space and time, and other related areas connected to the practice of education. Finally,

the Technology Support and Services theme embodied the educational technology and infrastructure needed to accomplish the goals of the program along with the necessary training and certifications connected to the integral role technology plays in the modern schoolroom.

Perhaps the most important outcome of the project was the collection of priority indicators. Through the three years of development during the pilots, these were given levels of priority and clear descriptions along with the explanations and examples of evidence of them in practice and aligned with best practices in the creation of “value propositions” (Osterwalder et al., 2014; Porter & Kramer, 2011; Wenger et al., 2011).

These indicators below were broken out among the three themes as described above:

### **Leadership Theme Indicators**

- A Culture of Innovation, Collaboration, and Empowerment
- Board-Approved Future Ready Plan
- District Virtual Identity
- Sustaining a Digital Learning Environment
- Communication Plan, Guidelines, Outreach, and Reflection
- Established Budgeting Process for Digital Learning
- Measuring Success Using Data
- Community Joint Activity Planning
- Review and Revision
- Systems Information Diagram and/or Table
- A Shared Vision for Digital Learning & Citizenship
- Culture of Capacity Building
- Professional Learning to Support Integrated Instruction
- Connected Leaders
- Local and Global Outreach
- Student Access to Technology Beyond the School Day

### **Education and Classroom Practice Theme Indicators**

- Coaching and Mentoring
- Authentic Learning
- Digital Assessment
- Digital Citizenship
- Digital Learning Tools and Content
- Student-Driven, Self-Directed Learning
- Communicating and Celebrating 21st Century Learning
- Computer Science
- Personal Learning Network
- Professional Learning Plan
- Flexible Instruction Process
- Student Choice
- Extended Learning Outside the School Day
- Blended Learning
- Ongoing Reflection and Refinement
- Student Personalized Learning Plans

## Technology Support and Services Theme Indicators

- Access Point Signal Saturation
- Data Governance
- Data Security and Privacy
- Intranet/Internet Network Availability
- Operational Best Practices
- Adequate Support and Services for Digital Learning
- Data-Informed Decision-Making Process
- Inventory Management Solution
- Process for Adequate and Responsive Technical Support
- Proper Decommissioning
- Servers
- Staff Awareness
- Lifespan and Refresh Cycle Planning
- Process for Effectively and Efficiently Vetting New Infrastructure Technology
- Process for Effectively and Efficiently Vetting New Instructional Technology
- Equitable Access

These priority indicators serve as both a guide for what the research shows as best practices as well as a starting point for each district to customize their work to their community needs. Several superintendents have reported the benefits of the indicator framework for initiating and focusing discussions during planning. Beyond these level one indicators, the program also had items as level two and three priorities to help distinguish their significance.

In addition, having the indicators vetted by NJSBA and NJDOE allowed the school and district administrators and the members of their team to have better support when asking for improvements or developing technology plans. Additionally, districts reported that the common planning time for education led to positive attitudes and more effective curricular

implementation of the district lanes as the digital school teams had a voice in the direction of strategic planning and an understanding of the many related issues that were being faced across all levels.

### Benefits for Superintendents

There are several key benefits for superintendents and other administrators in connecting and engaging in the discussions around the use of technology to improve education in their community.

Overall, the FRS-NJ program provided a framework for reflection and analysis as well as a means of being recognized for the hard work being done. In addition, it creates a community of practice where administrators could learn from one another while assisting each other to improve their districts. Beyond

just clarifying the framework for tackling technology issues, the themes showed how the various components were connected and interrelated. Moreover, these aspects of effective education facilitated with technology tie back to the need for good planning at all levels with participation from a wide range of stakeholders. The themes help demonstrate that technology is only part of an integrated collaborative team solution.

Finally, the community of practice created by the task forces and the ongoing recognition program created visibility for districts that led to interest and support by their local mayors and school boards as they saw the value of the work being done and improvement being made. Together they could create a plan and gather needed resources to move to a state of future readiness as part of their digital schools

The early adopters of the program saw the value of the “Collective Impact Framework” used to engage partners and stakeholders while ensuring the vision and mission of the program remained true to its original charge (Easterling, 2013; Kania & Kramer, 2011; Weaver & Cabaj, 2016).

Collective impact resources can assist all superintendents who wish to lead a collection of diverse stakeholders to form a wide range of sectors who wish to come together to work on an effort like this. This work relies on community participation that solicits input from stakeholders to develop a shared agenda, mutually reinforcing actions, shared metrics, and continuous communication to serve as a “backbone organization” (DuBow et al., 2018) coordinating and promoting shared actions and aligned efforts (Prange et al., 2016; Wolff, 2016).

Two significant results for district administrators relate to the improvements in both the national and local programs during and after Covid. The national framework for FRS is continually developing resources for district leaders to help implement the framework. Meanwhile, the state programs are also adding and refining their program as well.

For example, a fourth theme is being developed related to student voice and school climate and culture. Whether you want to utilize the national framework or customize it to your local circumstances the work done provides a set of milestones and resources for superintendents and their teams.

These resources can assist any state or local program to have a template for identifying the key actions desired and a means for translating the national framework and resources into one that works on their regional and local levels.

Finally, the key idea is to have a system that meets the needs of each school so that the climate and culture can grow. Future readiness is not an end to be sought but a process of improvement towards a digital school that utilized technology to differentiate instruction and support effective education for all students.

In the end, a major factor in the success of FRS-NJ and its transition to digital schools was a clear framework for planning and collaboration (Cummings & Worley, 2007). Since the process required the districts and schools to form teams that brought stakeholders from many disciplines and backgrounds together, an effective framework for conducting the process, and generating a clear plan was essential for the success of

districts as they moved forward with the process of developing their future-ready school.

### **Benefits of interdisciplinary participatory planning**

Many district administration teams were essential to our success by providing insights, championing the value of the program, and helping us avoid problems or potential conflicts and obstacles.

One example of this is the district administrative team from Morris Plains school system who was an early adopter and speaker at many events. They shared their process and helped other districts by answering questions and providing support.

“From the start of the Future Ready initiative to now, the program has really strengthened our organization, increased awareness within our community and bridged a network of resources that we can tap into that will only benefit us even further” (Jenkins, 2018).

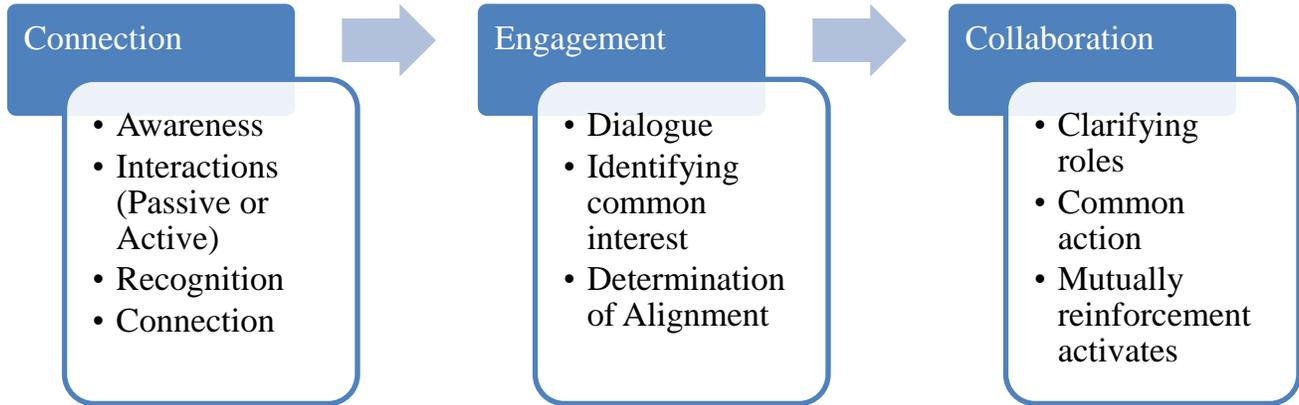
Establishing and building a partnership based on collaboration and “mutual benefit” was facilitated with three interconnected steps: connection, engagement, and collaboration (Lipuma, 2019). At the largest scale, the connection phase starts by bringing awareness of our program and leads to interactions either

actively or passively with the community.

As interaction increases, awareness moves to recognition and eventually to a connection. Building on the connection phase, the next stage is engagement, which begins with initiating a dialog. Then you establish a rapport to identify “shared interest” and common ground.

Finally, they will determine an alignment of the “Who, What and How” (Lipuma & Leon, 2019) to develop a match for their level of engagement. Depending on the degree of engagement you can have simple partnerships and common events or move towards true collaboration.

The first step to effective collaboration is for the actors to clarify their roles both as individuals and leaders of an organization, identifying common action, purpose, and vision. As your degree of interaction increases the type and level of collaborative work becomes clear. Whether you are acting as an individual or the leader of an organization your mutually reinforcing activities yielded by your engagement with your collaborative partners can result in a variety of situations. Public-private partnerships, grant collaborations, shared services, training, and many other types of collaboration can be the result of this deeper extension of our engagement facilitating the discussion of complex issues and systems (Kenia & Kramer, 2013) as shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1***Types of Collaboration***Commentary on Key Outcomes**

The system was co-created over three years with volunteers from all stakeholders to establish a certification program that provided both guidance and feedback during the process as well as recognition across the state based upon submitted evidence of attainment. It was clearly stated that the program was not meant to be comprehensive nor complete in the first year. Over time, the indicators and procedures were refined while the number of participating schools and districts grew.

The effective collaboration was only possible through the commitment and support of educational organizations and over 1,000 volunteers from all sectors of educational involvement. Essential to this was the commitments from a variety of state education organizations:

The development of the system took three iterations. Through these three rounds of

the certification program, great progress was made, and the work was only possible through the collaboration with educational organizations listed above, the schools, and most of all the volunteers across the state who made the work possible. As a “totally voluntary” program, the chairs and co-chairs of our committees gave of their time and expertise to make the metrics of success clear and relevant to those who use them to prepare their submissions. Moreover, it is the shared vision and collective impact of those involved which make the program not just successful but an exemplar and template for others.

**Conclusion**

In the current educational environment across America, the prevalence of educational technology has taken center stage. However, each state has different ways of managing education and implementing reform. If each superintendent can work collaboratively with his or her staff and stakeholders, then

education can be delivered more effectively utilizing technology to enhance all aspects of the educational system.

Each situation is distinct and so the exact path to successful student learning differs in every location. Nonetheless, the common lessons of collective impact and IPSP were helpful for the wide range of stakeholders to come together, design, and develop the needed resources to develop NJ's program.

Whether the program elements are used as a starting point or adopted for use elsewhere, the work to design and develop this by creating a coalition of interested parties was meaningful. Rather than see the state efforts as a push for compliance or the certification as a prescription of a single outcome sought, gathering the district leaders, and documenting their work with the wide range of stakeholders was an essential step to making the program acceptable and successful.

In the end, 150 districts and nearly 500 schools consulted the indicators and worked to

gain certification. Moreover, those districts that were early adopters committed to sharing their work and helping others delineate their own desired outcomes from the process.

Whether drawing on the national framework to inform your decisions or examining the essential questions and priority indicators of NJ's program, each superintendent will lead the planning process.

Using tools to engage representatives from various disciplines and find collaborators and partners to providing input will make the overall process more successful and lead to a state of continual improvement that can respond to the new challenges that might be posted as we progress into the future. By utilizing these frameworks any district can move towards digital schooling. The common elements identified across all this work were a clear shared vision with details in planning documents, a collection of indicators that outlined the goals and metrics, as well as a commitment to working collaboratively to ensure that the voice of stakeholders was heard as the work moved forward.

### **Author Biographies**

Legally blind since nine, James Lipuma appreciates the need for positive change and works to promote broader participation for women and under-represented minorities in science technology, engineering and mathematics as part of STEMforsuccess.org and other STEM literacy projects he leads. Most recently, he completed a collaborative co-design project with ten New Jersey districts and 100 educators and administrators among other partners to design tools for teachers and other digital supports related to STEM to assist with online instruction tied to the ongoing issues of Covid-19. E-mail: lipuma@njit.edu

Cristo Leon's experiences have included over 13 years in directive positions. They include managing logistics, facilitating organizational development training, designing business innovation plans and implementing digital change programs for organizations. E-mail: leonc@njit.edu

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## Politics, Polarization, and Politicization of Social Emotional Learning and School Boards

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study is to analyze Illinois school board members' perspectives on SEL, educational equity, and responses to the global COVID-19 pandemic. Survey responses were collected from 61 Illinois school board members in the summer of 2021. The survey included open-ended questions regarding administrator's opinions about different aspects of education related to social emotional learning (SEL), mental health, equity, and the pandemic. Overall, findings showed that responding to the pandemic and addressing educational equity are both divisive issues identified by school board members. In addition to being contentious, some school board members do not think that addressing inequities is a necessary function of their board or district. SEL is less divisive, but some participants held relatively narrow ideas of how schools should address SEL. Importantly, these patterns occurred across district type—rural, urban, or suburban; majority minority or majority white; and poverty rates. In understanding how school board members are thinking about these issues, we are better prepared to support P-12 administrators in working with their school boards and community to advance policies and initiatives that can support students' SEL and mental health needs, regardless of the beliefs of segments of their communities.

### Key Words

School boards, social emotional learning, COVID-19 pandemic, educational equity

## Introduction

National headlines suggest that school boards across the country are becoming reactionary, with proposals and policies aimed at curtailing an assumed spread of “liberal” values into P-12 schooling (e.g., Duggan, 2021; Kingkade & Hixenbaugh, 2021; Saul, 2021). These are fueled by parents and community members who seem to be calling for a narrow school curriculum focused on the core academic subjects from a traditional and non-critical perspective.

While attacking Critical Race Theory and arguing against the teaching of racism in US history are common subjects of attack, suicide prevention, social emotional learning (SEL), and mental health initiatives are also reported to be under attack. A 2021 NBC news article, for example, reported on parents who believe the best approach to support children’s mental health is to “involve parents if there’s an issue” (Kingkade & Hixenbaugh, 2021, p. 25).

At the same time, an equally growing number of parents and community members are asking for schools to do more to address children’s mental health and support their SEL in school considering the COVID-19 pandemic. Reviewing several studies of children and adolescents at various times during the pandemic, Hamilton and Gross (2021) report that likely one-third of the nation’s P-12 students “experienced negative impacts on their mental or social-emotional health during the pandemic” (p. 6).

Minoritized students, including students of color, low-income students, and students with disabilities, as well as those who attended remote school for longer periods of time, were more likely to have experienced

these impacts. National headlines, thus, simultaneously show movement in favor of increased attention to SEL in schools (e.g. Flynn, 2021; Mook, 2021; Prothero, 2021).

As parents and community groups raise concerns in favor of, or against, their districts’ use of SEL curriculum, the school board is often the target of their concerns. School board members, as locally elected public officials, set policy for district schools and has the authority to approve or deny additions, revisions, or deletions to what children learn in school in accordance with state law.

The purpose of this study is to analyze Illinois school board members’ perspectives on SEL, educational equity, and responses to the global COVID-19 pandemic. In understanding how school board members are thinking about these issues, we are better prepared to support P-12 administrators in working with their school boards and community to advance policies and initiatives that can support students’ SEL and mental health needs, regardless of the beliefs of segments of their communities.

## History of School Boards in the United States

The current system of school board governance dates back 200 years, when local citizens decided that the administration of towns and schools in Massachusetts should be separate (Danzberger, 1994).

Influential citizens led a successful movement in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to break the ties between school districts, political parties, and officials from local and state government to steer politics away from the governance of schools (Kirst, 1994).

The modern-day design of school districts, composed of a small school board and a superintendent to oversee their day-to-day operations, originated in the early twentieth century based upon the corporate structure at the time (Land, 2002).

Local school boards are intended to provide the link to the community so that constituents' voices are heard; board members are held accountable through the election process. School boards ideally allow parents and community members a place to provide input about educational issues, thus keeping educational decisions as close as possible to those most affected by those decisions (Shannon, 1990).

Despite the democratic ideals exemplified in school boards, and though the work of school boards has until recently been relatively unseen by the public at large, school boards have historically served the interests of local political elites (Anderson & Cohen, 2018; Lutz & Gresson, 1980).

The COVID-19 pandemic, however, brought politics to the forefront and placed school boards in the center of fierce political battles. Frustrated parents in support of, or against, remote learning, and in support of, or against, mask-wearing, put pressure on board members in vast numbers.

The political firestorm became so intense that state school board associations including Illinois voted to leave the National School Board Association (NSBA) due to a letter the NSBA sent President Biden (Epstein, J., 2021).

The letter addressed concerns about increasing threats and acts of violence and intimidation towards board members concerning the wearing of school masks.

Regardless of the topic, "local school boards play the central role in driving and guiding the process to establish a vision" (Bracey & Resnick, 1998, p. 16), and nothing is more political than what children learn in schools.

## Methods

To analyze Illinois school board members' perspectives on SEL and mental health, we relied on survey methods, with closed- and open-ended questions. This enabled us to reach school board members across the state and explore their understandings of SEL.

## Survey

Survey responses were collected via an online survey sent to over 500 school administrators in Illinois in the summer of 2021. The survey included open-ended questions regarding administrator's opinions about different aspects of education. Open and close ended questions were utilized to gather demographic information from respondents.

## Participants

This study consisted of 63 participants who all self-identified as school board members in Illinois. Of the 63 board members, four identified as African American (6%), one identified as Asian (1.5%), 50 identified as White (79%), four identified as another race (6%), and four did not specify (6%). There were 33 females (52%), 19 males (30%), one participant that identified as another gender (1.5%), and 10 participants did not specify (16). Participants were asked about the location of their school districts; three were urban (5%), 29 were suburban (46%), seven were small towns or cities (11%), 15 were rural (24%) and 9 did not specify (14%).

The majority of participants were from a public school (56; 89%), with seven respondents not specifying if they were board members at public or private school districts

(11%). The mean number of years that participants had served in their position was 5.7, with 32 being the highest number of years, and 0.3 years being the lowest number. The mean number of years that participants had been in education was 12.7 years, with the highest number of years being 40 and the lowest number of years being one.

There were 20 participants from schools that are not considered low income (32%), 23 participants from districts considered low income (37%), and 20 respondents chose not to specify (32%). There were 34 participants who were from schools with less than 50% minority student enrollment (54%), 12 participants from schools with 50% or more minority student enrollment (19%), and 17 participants did not specify the percentage of minority student enrollment (27%).

### Analysis

Data from survey participants were first analyzed thematically to develop themes for coding purposes. One author completed this thematic analysis and then created a code book based on participants' responses. Codes were created by each question, for clarity of coding.

Next the codebook was utilized to code all survey responses by two researchers. After this first round of coding, the two researchers discussed their coding with each other and resolved any differences that occurred in the coding process. We then analyzed responses across survey questions related to politics, polarization, and politicization of the work of school boards.

### Limitations

The 63 participants in this study reflect a non-representative sample of school board members across over 800 school districts in Illinois; as such, the findings are not intended to be generalizable across the state. In addition, the open-ended nature of the survey questions allowed respondents to address part of the prompt, but not the entire prompt and no opportunity for follow-up questions or clarifications existed.

### Findings

Overall, findings showed that responding to the pandemic and addressing educational equity are both divisive issues identified by school board members. In addition to being contentious, some school board members do not think that addressing inequities is a necessary function of their board or district. SEL is less divisive, but some participants held relatively narrow ideas of how schools should address SEL. Importantly, these patterns occurred across district type—rural, urban, or suburban; majority minority or majority white; and poverty rates.

School board members identified nine different issues that they anticipated for the 2021-2022 school year. These are summarized in Table 1. The top three major themes identified by school board members were: issues related to COVID-19 such as masks and vaccines (61%), academic concerns about students (43%), and about students' social-emotional health (41%). We now look across survey responses to examine school board members' perspectives on SEL, educational equity, and responses to the global COVID-19 pandemic.

**Table 1***Major Issues and Challenges for 2021-2022 School Year*

<b>Major Issues and Challenges</b>	<b>% of Respondents who Spoke about This Issue</b>	<b>Illustrative Quote</b>
Issues related to COVID-19 (masks and vaccines)	61%	How do we protect our students, staff and families if masks are a choice?
Academic concerns about students	43%	Helping students recover the academic losses caused by the disruption of in-person learning.
Concerns about students' social-emotional health	41%	Social and emotional needs will need to be met, and mechanisms to identify issues developed.
Developing, implementing, and monitoring efficient school routines	29%	I believe learning the new set of expectations and norms will be the biggest challenge students face.
Issues of race, diversity, equity, and inclusion	17%	The states' irrational COVID mandates. Students need to be taught it doesn't matter the color of your skin.
Financial concerns about low-income students	11%	I think any socioeconomic problems and social-emotional problems probably worsened during the pandemic, so I'm worried about students whose families were already experiencing economic hardship or other trauma being available for learning.
Concerns about students' physical health	11%	Keeping kids well.
Concerns about staff's social-emotional health	10%	Teachers will feel enormous pressure to "catch kids up."
Concerns about families' social-emotional health	8%	I think parents worry about their child's safety and their child's mental health.

### Addressing social-emotional learning

Board members were overall positive about SEL programming in their districts. Participants put forth a view of SEL programming as a whole-school endeavor: *SEL is taught in the classrooms by teachers and should be reinforced by the social workers and reinforced with families.*” Multiple stakeholders must be involved in successful school- and district-based SEL efforts.

In terms of specific understandings of what SEL programming means, the most common response put forth a view of programming that helps students feel safe, supported, confident, and cared for (14% of participants).

One wrote, for example, that *“SEL is helpful for ensuring students have confidence.”* Four participants shared a view of SEL programming that assists with students’ mental health. One wrote, *“without good mental health in our students they will not have the ability to learn or have positive social interactions.”* An additional two participants understand SEL as addressing the whole child: *“SEL gives children the chance to understand their own place in the world and how they influence the world around them.”*

A minority of respondents, 12 board members (19%), shared relatively negative views of SEL. They thought that schools should not offer SEL programming and that students’ social-emotional challenges were a product of children’s poor home lives. Illustrating a deficit view of parents and the perceived harm of SEL programming, one wrote,

*“I would like the education system to stop pushing political agendas. It is a parents’ responsibility, not schools, to help children develop self-control, relationship skills*

*based on the family values. Social emotional learning is a way to brainwash children/students with the current trends of individual social workers, it again is the parents’ freedom to build up or set their values/mores [morals]/norms for the attitudes, values, and beliefs for their children that God gave them.”*

These board members felt that *“parents need to step up”* because *“the home situation is at the root of difficulty.”*

### Addressing educational equity

About two-thirds of school board members spoke specifically to the idea of equity when responding to the question about SEL as a lever for equity and excellence. The majority spoke positively about the importance of schools addressing inequities.

While one said that equity was an issue that was important but had not yet been a focus of the school board, most shared specific ways that their boards and districts were thinking about and moving toward equity, such as *“teaching and modeling acceptance and awareness,”* looking at *“climate and culture,”* and *“implementing culturally responsive teaching.”*

Five school members spoke about how SEL is a lever or support for equity, such as the school board member who wrote, *“SEL is a way for school community to frame equity and excellence conversations.”* Another noted, *“since there has been a spotlight on SEL, we are finally getting resources and support needed to address the equity issues in education.”*

Importantly, two participants noted that issues of equity were divisive, presenting the school board with the need to bring stakeholders together. In response to concerns

about the teaching of Critical Race Theory (CRT), one school board member said that this issue has “*pitted students against each other*” and “*led to a lot of conflict between the board and community and families within the community.*”

The second participant also noted concerns around CRT: “*the work around equity is becoming a divisive issue as many are pointing to ‘CRT’ as a negative, hate-based theory. We must navigate through the noise to ensure all are being treated fairly.*” Both participants were from majority white, suburban districts, one that was low-income and one that was high-income.

One-fifth of participants reported that equity was not an issue for a range of reasons. Two, for example, said that their district did not “*see color,*” and two said that addressing equity involve “*helping an individual student be successful.*”

An additional six participants felt their districts was already equitable because they offered “*students of ALL backgrounds...the same opportunities to learn & develop their knowledge...I think our district does a wonderful job with equity and promoting excellent education, because we have amazing teachers,*” as noted a school board member from a majority white, middle-income suburban district.

Another succinctly wrote, “*learning is already ‘equitable.’*” These participants were from majority white and majority minority districts.

Almost half of the participants who felt that equity was not an issue, five school board members, offered a stronger critique of equity as part of a larger political agenda that does not fit in schools.

For example, one school board member, from a majority minority, low-income urban district, wrote:

*“I think the biggest we problem we face is the fight against the latest Marxist push by the teachers’ unions. Keep your political BS out of our schools. Period. ‘Social Justice’ isn’t justice, and there is no place for it in our publicly funded schools.”*

Four argued specifically that “*critical race does not need to be in school curriculum,*” with one also adding that sexual education should not be taught in schools. One school member, who supported some work around equity, was clear that CRT was different from other equity work. In response to the question about greatest issues facing the district, they wrote, “*mak[ing] sure Culturally Responsive Teaching is not Critical Race Theory.*”

### **Responding to the pandemic**

School board members completed this survey before the 2021-2022 school year, at a time when adult vaccines became available and positive cases of COVID-19 were declining.

During this period, removing mask mandates in Illinois was being considered, and there was hope that the new school year would be a return to normalcy—data were collected prior to the Delta variant and increase in restrictions that followed.

Unsurprisingly, school board members shared concerns around the challenges of returning to normalcy and ensuring buildings are physically safe spaces. Four board members noted the confusing messages and shifting state policies, with one noting the “*lack of clear guidance from the state regarding mask requirements.*”

However, the most shared concern was around the polarization in their communities in response to the pandemic (i.e., *How do we protect our students, staff and families if masks are a choice?*). School board members reported that they had to determine their district policy around returning to school in the fall of 2021 and that this policy was “*highly debated.*”

Board members shared that they had to balance “*meeting the safety guidelines set by the CDC/county health departments...and some parents’ expectations that they get to make that decision [to wear a mask] for their kids...then the kids acting out against policies.*”

Some school board members noted that families in their communities were divided about the best way forward, while others succinctly wrote that the greatest issue for the school year would be “*to mask or not to mask.*”

In addition to the awareness of polarization around responses to the pandemic, school board members also expressed strong views against state-mandated responses. A school board member wrote, “*[state] COVID restrictions...violate parents’ rights to make decisions*”; another referred to state restrictions as putting children “*on the front lines of a battle they are not mentally ready to fight and that is sad.*”

These four participants’ responses showed more emotion in word choice, such as “*irrational*” and “*bullying,*” than other responses; these responses suggest that rather than acknowledging the polarizing nature of pandemic responses or working to address the ensuing divisiveness, they saw their perspective as correct.

## Discussion

Our survey of school board members across diverse district contexts revealed that the national concerns regarding divisiveness exist in districts and communities in Illinois.

Responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and addressing educational equity were identified as two polarizing issues although less divisiveness was reported around the role of SEL in schools.

Our participants’ description of what SEL entailed suggest that the divisiveness exist because of the differing understanding of what SEL is, its role in schools, and its intersection with CRT. Several participants had a positive view of SEL, but others believed that SEL should not be taught in the schools. Only a minority saw SEL as a means of installing a political agenda.

The challenges presented to school boards are many. School boards in today’s context must address the political and social divisiveness within their communities. It has become increasingly challenging with different parent and teacher groups advocating different positions.

School boards must also address divisiveness within their own members. Alt-right groups like the Proud Boys have begun picketing school board meetings across the United States (Frenkel, 2021), creating hostile and frightening situations for those who disagree with their views about masks, vaccines, and curriculum.

Managing this turbulent political climate requires school board members to now acquire the skills to engage diverse stakeholder groups. While this divisiveness may have been brought to light by the pandemic, struggles for

defining the curriculum, addressing educational inequities, and advancing the academic and SEL of children have all existed since the beginning of schooling.

### **Evolving role of the school board**

Contemporary events have raised questions on the roles and functions of school boards. Prior to the pandemic and the reckoning for racial justice, school board meetings served as opportunities for the public to provide feedback on district budget, capital investment, and on plans to improve curriculum (Land, 2022).

But in recent times, we have seen an increasing trend of school board meetings turning into sites of heated arguments and ugly brawls (Cottle, 2021). School boards must now take on more than just review their district's curriculum, programming matters, personnel, and building maintenance issues. Board members are now forced to cultivate the skills to engage, appease, and advocate for the diverse voices and opinions within their communities.

The recent social climate has undoubtedly changed the role of school boards. School boards must now manage political actions and quell segments of the community who hijack board meetings to advance political agendas. This movement poses new challenges to the roles of today's school boards in steering politics away from the governance of schools.

### **School boards and managing the pandemic**

The pandemic has created a management and governance crisis for school boards (Hess, 2020; Miller, 2020). As indicated by our respondents, the ever-changing public health guidelines around the pandemic proved to be a challenge for school boards. School boards establish the direction and goals for student learning while managing the superintendent

and administration's plans to meet those goals (Miller, 2020). Nevertheless, the pandemic has left many board members confused and frustrated by the ever-changing state mandates on top of managing segments of their community who believe that masking should be a personal choice (Wong, 2021).

District plans established before and during the pandemic need to be re-evaluated and timelines re-established (Hess, 2020). Not only should board members acknowledge the polarizing nature of mask mandates, but they must also address the ensuring divisiveness, especially among segments of the community which saw their perspective to be correct.

Swiftness, flexibility, and transparency in responding to and managing the pandemic are some of the critical traits for school boards to effectively manage the pandemic (Hess, 2020; Miller, 2020; Wong, 2021).

### **Academic concerns and equity**

Leading for equity in this climate requires school and district leaders to have a strong vision for change as well as the ability to bring together stakeholders with opposing beliefs.

School boards need to work together across roles to ensure all students have access to an equitable education in ways that supports their academic and social-emotional development. While some board members in our study saw the need to promote equity within their district, others were notably uncertain on the directions and strategies that school boards should take.

Concerns and misperceptions around CRT were highlighted by several respondents who acknowledged that issues involving the promoting of equity were divisive. Several board members highlighted the need for more resources, support, and training on their roles

to address equity. Our study's findings are not surprising and are consistent with the extant literature highlighting that today's school boards are not equipped with the relevant skills and training to lead with equity.

Despite the commitment by the National School Boards Association to promote educational equity (NSBA, 2019), more work is needed to support school boards to lead with equity in this contemporary climate.

### **Addressing SEL**

In this time when more attention is needed to address young people's social and emotional skills, we have seen escalating attacks on SEL that school boards must navigate.

Findings from our study indicate that most school board members support SEL; only a relatively small percentage of our sample expressing concerns on teaching SEL in its buildings.

This pushback on SEL creates a governance crisis for board members who support SEL. While we are not aware of any

specific incidences among our participants, it has been reported in the media that school officials who advocated for SEL and the promotion of diversity, equity, and inclusion have been subjected to harassment and violence (Lindsay, 2021).

It is unfortunate that SEL has become controversial, which makes it even more challenging for school boards to prioritize the teaching of fundamental social and emotional regulation skills that are necessary for young people's success in an increasingly globalized society.

### **Conclusions**

The phrase "all politics is local" is commonly used in U.S. politics. School boards keep the public in public schools and have the potential to serve as a catalyst to ensure various stakeholder voices (Boyle & Burns, 2012).

Differing opinions about the purposes of education have always and will continue to exist. The key is to ensure that school boards are equipped to balance competing values as they work to ensure all students have equitable educational experiences in terms of academics and SEL.

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## 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 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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## Ethics

The *AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice* uses a double-blind peer-review process to maintain scientific integrity of its published materials. Peer-reviewed articles are one hallmark of the scientific method and the *AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice* believes in the importance of maintaining the integrity of the scientific process in order to bring high quality literature to the education leadership community. We expect our authors to follow the same ethical guidelines. We refer readers to the latest edition of the APA Style Guide to review the ethical expectations for publication in a scholarly journal.

## Themes and Topics of Interest

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*.

### Cover page checklist:

1. title of the article:  
identify if the submission is original research, evidence-based practice, commentary, or book review
2. contributor name(s)
3. terminal degree
4. academic rank
5. department
6. college or university
7. city, state
8. telephone and fax numbers
9. e-mail address
10. 120-word abstract that conforms to APA style
11. six to eight key words that reflect the essence of the submission
12. 40-word biographical sketch

**Please** do not submit page numbers in headers or footers. Rather than use footnotes, it is preferred authors embed footnote content in the body of the article. **In 2019, APA guidelines were changed so that one space is required after the period at the end of a sentence.** Articles are to be submitted to the editor by e-mail as an electronic attachment in Microsoft Word, Times New Roman, 12 Font.

### Acceptance Rates

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

2012: 22%	2017: 20%
2013: 15%	2018: 19%
2014: 20%	2019: 19%
2015: 22%	2020: 18%
2016: 19%	2021: 17%

### 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
- Publisher, city, state, year, # of pages, price
- Name and affiliation of reviewer
- Contact information for reviewer: address, city, state, zip code, e-mail address, telephone and fax
- Reviewer biography
- 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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## AASA Resources

### ➔ New and Revised Resources

#### ➤ AASA Launches ‘Live Well. Lead Well.’ Campaign: Initiative to Focus on Mental, Physical & Emotional Health of School System Leaders

“We at AASA recognize that school system leaders need our support now more than ever before,” said Daniel A. Domenech, executive director. For more information about the *Live Well. Lead Well.* campaign, visit the AASA website:

[www.connect.aasa.org/livewellleadwell](http://www.connect.aasa.org/livewellleadwell)

#### ➤ AASA Learning 2025 Learner-Centered, Equity-Focused, Future-Driven Education Initiative Underway

Comprised of school system leaders and business and non-profit leaders, AASA’s Learning 2025 Commission was chaired by Daniel A. Domenech, executive director of AASA and Bill Daggett, founder of the International Center on Leadership for Education and the Successful Practices Network. A network of educational systems now comprises a Learning 2025 National Network of Demonstrations Systems, whose chief objective is to prepare all students safely and equitably for a workplace and society for the future. For additional information about **Learning 2025 Network for Student-Centered, Equity-Focused Education**, visit the AASA website [www.aasa.org/content.aspx?id=45826](http://www.aasa.org/content.aspx?id=45826) or contact Mort Sherman at [msherman@aasa.org](mailto:msherman@aasa.org), Valerie Truesdale at [vtruesdale@aasa.org](mailto:vtruesdale@aasa.org) or Debbie Magee, program director, at [dmagee@aasa.org](mailto:dmagee@aasa.org).

#### ➤ AASA’s Leadership Network the School Superintendents Association’s professional learning arm, drives educational leaders’ success, innovation and growth, focused on student-centered, equity-focused, forward-reaching education. Passionate and committed to continuous improvement, over 100 Leadership Network faculty connect educational leaders to the

LN offers over 30 programs (online and in person) to support Superintendent and other Educational Leaders with professional learning and networking in communities of practice.



PREPARE	CERTIFY	CONNECT & LEARN	INNOVATE	REDESIGN NETWORK
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aspiring Superintendents Academy® Programs:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- National</li> <li>- Blended</li> <li>- Female Leaders</li> <li>- Latino/a</li> <li>- Urban</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Collaborative State or Regional Aspiring Superintendents Academies (MS, MT, MN)</li> <li>• National Aspiring Principal Academy</li> <li>• National Instructional Leader Academy (launch January 2022 with AVID)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AASA National Superintendent Certification Program®               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- East</li> <li>- West</li> <li>- Midwest</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Urban Superintendents Academy-Howard University + USC</li> <li>• National Principal Supervisor Academy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Large Countywide Suburban District Collaborative</li> <li>• Eastern States Consortium</li> <li>• National Women's Leadership Consortium</li> <li>• Women in School Leadership Forums</li> <li>• States Communities of Practice Initiative</li> <li>• Certification Program Graduates (new for 2022)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Numerous Cohorts               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Early Learning Cohort</li> <li>- Equity in Action</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Innovative Districts Empowering All Learners</li> <li>• Radical Family Engagement</li> <li>• Redefining Ready!</li> <li>• STEM Leadership Consortia</li> <li>• Social and Emotional Learning Cohort</li> <li>• Transformational Leadership Cohort</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning 2025 Network of Demonstration Systems enhancing Student-Centered, Equity-Focused, Future-Driven Education-17 districts engaged so far. AASA's Learning 2025 Summit scheduled for June 2022 in Washington DC</li> </ul>

leadership development, relationships and partnerships needed to ensure individual growth and collective impact. A snapshot of over 30 academies, cohorts and consortia is represented in the graphic below. To assist in navigating through the pandemic, AASA has produced and archived over 100 webinars since March 2020 on *Leading for Equity* and *What Works* at [aasa.org/AASA-LeadershipNetwork-webinars.aspx](http://aasa.org/AASA-LeadershipNetwork-webinars.aspx). Contact Mort Sherman at [msherman@aasa.org](mailto:msherman@aasa.org) or Valerie Truesdale at [vtruesdale@aasa.org](mailto:vtruesdale@aasa.org) to explore professional learning and engagement.

- **School District Spending of American Rescue Plan Funding**, an AASA survey of hundreds of district leaders across the U.S. in July (2021) about their plans to utilize American Rescue Plan (ARP) and other federal COVID-19 relief funding to address the pandemic-related student learning recovery. Results: [www.aasa.org/uploadedFiles/ARP-Survey-Findings-090121.pdf](http://www.aasa.org/uploadedFiles/ARP-Survey-Findings-090121.pdf)
- **Resources on leading through COVID**  
COVID Guidance, Strategies, and Resources.  
[www.aasacentral.org/covidguidance/](http://www.aasacentral.org/covidguidance/)
- **AASA Releases 2021-22 Superintendent Salary Study**  
[www.aasa.org/content.aspx?id=45378](http://www.aasa.org/content.aspx?id=45378)
- **Official Online Industry Suppliers for Educators**  
[aasa.inloop.com/en/buyersguide](http://aasa.inloop.com/en/buyersguide)
- **AASA Main and Advocacy App**  
Both apps are designed for school superintendents, central office staff, principals, teachers, policymakers, business and community leaders, parents and more. The Advocacy app enables advocates of public education to connect, network, communicate with other members, access, and share important information directly from their devices.  
[www.aasa.org/app.aspx](http://www.aasa.org/app.aspx)
- **Superintendent's Career Center**  
[aasa-jobs.careerwebsite.com/](http://aasa-jobs.careerwebsite.com/)
- **2020 Decennial Study of the American Superintendent**  
[www.aasacentral.org/book/the-american-superintendent-2020-decennial-study](http://www.aasacentral.org/book/the-american-superintendent-2020-decennial-study)  
The study is for sale and available at [www.aasacentral.org/aasa-books](http://www.aasacentral.org/aasa-books)

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## **Upcoming AASA Events**

**AASA 2023 National Conference on Education, Feb. 16-18, 2023, San Antonio, TX**